

Chancellor's Report
27 January 2016

Happy New Year and welcome back to Spring Semester 2016! I trust your holidays offered you, among many other things, the rest and renewal necessary to charge headlong into another semester of engagement with the students who are the focus of our work.

Bond Initiative/Natural Science Building

It probably will not surprise you that I am spending a sizable portion of my time in the first few months of this year campaigning for the passage of the \$2B bond package which will fund a desperately needed \$110M new natural science building for WCU. As anyone who teaches in our current natural science building will tell you, our current facility is inadequate in terms of both quality and quantity of space. While our biology, chemistry, and physics faculty are doing a first-class job in teaching our students, the facility represents late-1970's technology and pedagogical environments. The proposed new facility is absolutely imperative if we are to prepare our students adequately for 21st century careers.

In addition, though, we are **out** of space. All students in some of our fastest growing majors – nursing, other health science disciplines, engineering, forensic science, etc. – take biology, chemistry, and physics as part of their curricula. When the current facility was built in the late 1970's, WCU had 15 nursing majors; today, we have well over 400 undergraduate nursing majors, 100-150 pre-nursing majors, and 100-150 graduate nursing majors. In the late 1970's, WCU had no programs in engineering and engineering technology; today, WCU has nearly 600 students majoring in engineering and technology programs. And biology, chemistry, and physics have hundreds of majors of their own while serving the liberal studies needs of the entire undergraduate student population. We are out of space. Yet, the need for nursing, other health care, engineering, and technology professionals in the region of NC we are charged with serving only increases. If we are to meet our charge, we must grow the number of professionals we graduate in these key disciplines which are so vital to economic and community development in Western North Carolina, and we cannot do that without a facility which can accommodate larger numbers of students.

The bond package goes before the voters of North Carolina on the March 15 ballot, and I cannot urge you strongly enough to vote for its passage. While Western Carolina University will certainly benefit from the new natural science building, this bond package is not about our university and its enrollment; rather, it is about meeting the economic and community development needs of the region we serve.

President Margaret Spellings Visit

UNC President-Elect Margaret Spellings plans to visit every campus in the System between her first day on the job, March 1, and the end of the semester. She has asked, if possible, that these visits coincide with meetings of the institutions' Boards of Trustees. Our only Board of Trustees meeting during that time period is at the end of her second week on the job, and she will be visiting us then. We will therefore be among her earliest campus visits.

I know that David McCord in Faculty Senate and Pam Degraffenreid in Staff Senate plan to speak with faculty and staff in more detail about President Spellings' visit, but I do want to underscore how important her visit will be. Certainly, it offers us opportunities to underscore the important role we play

in serving this part of the state and to showcase points of pride. It also offers us an opportunity to share our concerns and our challenges. I encourage those of you who will spend time with her to be open and frank – tell her what you love about what we are doing and tell her your concerns. That is what she is looking to glean.

Chancellor 360 Review

The UNC System's prescribed process for chancellor evaluations calls for a thorough review after a chancellor's fourth year in the position and then every four years thereafter. I completed my fourth year last June and am thus on the cusp of my first 360 review which will take place over the next several months. Having not ever been through this type of review before, I do not really know the process very well. I do know that some faculty, staff, and students will be interviewed about my work as part of the process; others will receive a survey to complete; and all who want to offer input will be invited to do so via email. You will receive further information about the review in the coming weeks. For now, let me urge you to participate in the process; I always find such evaluative processes informative and helpful as I seek to be the best leader I can be, but this process will only be informative and helpful to the extent that people offer their feedback.

Center for the Study of Free Enterprise

Finally, I think it is important to acknowledge that we have been through a bit of a rough patch in the last couple of months, one centered around the establishment of the Center for the Study of Free Enterprise.

Two weeks ago, I attended a conference, the keynote speaker for which was former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice who, speaking from experience, admonished us that, when we are criticized, we should reflect on the criticism and undertake self-examination. Well, I have been reflecting on the late fall's debate over the establishment of the Center, wondering how I might have helped in the process, and I've realized that it would have helped if, when I wrote my email to the campus to announce my endorsement of the recommendation to establish the Center, I had provided insights into my review and rationale. And so, I thought it might be helpful to offer those to you today.

When in mid-to-late November I received from the Provost Council the recommendation in favor of establishing the Center, I spent time with the document entitled the "Faculty Senate Position Statement on the Proposed Center for the Study of Free Enterprise", dated October 28, 2015. While the statement did not garner a unanimous vote, it did draw very strong support from this body, and I thus paid particular attention to the concerns expressed by the Faculty Senate. I did so in conjunction with the November 9, 2015, charter for establishing the Center, a revision of the original document, drafted in response to faculty concerns. So, allow me to briefly review my thinking about the concerns raised in your document:

- Financial costs to WCU. I think we would all agree that the original proposed draft budget (there is not an actual budget until a gift is made) was pretty complicated. The revised draft budget makes clear that the only associated costs to the university for the Center are three faculty positions which are already funded. There is no new university money going to the Center.

- Need. While the Faculty Senate's statement correctly notes that scholarly activities related to the role of free enterprise in a flourishing society are already occurring on our campus, the Center as envisioned would incorporate a number of new activities with a clear focus on applied economics research in alignment with WCU's economic development strategic priorities, all of which is detailed in the November 9 revised document. So, I do not see the Center's work, as proposed, to be redundant, but rather to be an expansion or extension of current activities.
- Academic freedom. No one is more adamant about academic freedom than I am, and the revised Center proposal reinforces commitment to academic freedom. The question before us in the fall was the distinct issue of whether or not to establish the Center; nevertheless, much of the concern from faculty regarding academic freedom appears to focus on the potential source of funding. Academic freedom is a non-negotiable from Western Carolina University's point of view, and the Koch Foundation agrees. I am certain that this will not be an issue, and WCU's Policy 104 ensures my confidence.
- Peer review. The Faculty Senate expressed concern about the absence of peer review. I do not see a reason for concern. All faculty associated with the Center undergo regular peer review through WCU's collegial review processes. Scholarly output is subject to peer review through the processes associated with publication and conference presentation acceptance. And, of course, pursuant to Board of Governors Policy 400.5, the Center will undergo a comprehensive review every five years, a process which includes faculty.
- Reputational cost. While I certainly accept that this is a concern for some, if we do this right, if we ensure academic freedom, and if the Center evolves as planned as a force for economic development in our region, I do not think we have anything to worry about in this regard.

I recognize and appreciate that you may not agree with my perspective, and I want you to know that that's OK. But I did want to share with you my thinking on this matter.

One final note: when I reflect on the process itself, I do, in hindsight, think we should have allowed more time for discussion and comment, an approach which might have allayed concerns that we were rushing toward a predetermined outcome, which was certainly not the case.

As always, I appreciate what you do for our university and for our students, something which does not change in those moments when we have differing perspectives and opinions.

Yours,
David Belcher
Chancellor