

Laura's Faculty Senate report for the Board of Trustees (December 2021):

Chair Roberts, Chancellor Brown, and members of the Board, I had a statement in mind yesterday, but I scrapped most of it after attending yesterday's discussion of interest about our amazing EMS program (to whom I owe so much) and after listening to the reports during the **Administration, Governance, and Trusteeship Committee**, chaired by Kathy Greeley. I have very much enjoyed the chance to attend these meetings, to learn more about the institution where I have worked since 2005 (and that my father attended in the 1950s) and about the role of the Board in its advocacy for and sincere interest in the life and well-being of Western Carolina.

During yesterday's 3.30 meeting chaired by Mrs. Greeley, Dean BaShaun Smith noted that students in crisis often come to faculty first, before they speak to any other university personnel about trauma that they may have experienced or violence that has been committed against them. I appreciated that recognition; just yesterday, a colleague in a different department reached out to me asking for advice for how to help a student who had confided in her that they are currently homeless. Along with staff, faculty are very much a frontline force with regard to student needs that extend well beyond our classrooms and our job descriptions. And that's because our students know that in addition to our wanting them to learn and thrive and think independently under our instruction, we also care deeply about them as people. I also appreciated Mr. Brawley's impassioned recognition that personal interaction in such cases is so important. Often faculty are the face of that interaction.

Some years ago, the Faculty Senate established a Student Support Fund to help students in emergency situations that could not be addressed or alleviated via other funding sources (either financial aid or other on-campus funds). The fund was created precisely because students come to faculty. This year, Faculty Senate has established a standing committee, which will be co-chaired by the Chair of Faculty Senate and the Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Success, to help oversee, maintain, and fundraise for this endeavor because we want to make sure that this fund thrives and is available to students in need.

I want to recognize the work of Kadie Otto (past-chair) and my colleague and fellow senator Sean Mulholland, and everyone else who was involved in producing the data that was presented to you in terms of the salary issues that WCU faculty face. I know that you heard us and that you advocated for us – and we all appreciate it. I thanked Mr. Brawley yesterday when he asked me for my thoughts on the budget.

University employees are beyond happy that the state has given us a raise. BUT (sorry ya'll), this is a great start. But as my economist colleague Sean let me know, over the next two years, this 5% increase will be lower than inflation. So, the hole we are in – all WCU employees, not just faculty -- will just get deeper more slowly. That said (and here's the positive!) the Faculty Senate established a standing committee on Faculty Salaries, co-chaired by the Chair of the Faculty and the Provost, and the administration is acting on the committee's recommendation to get all faculty to 50% of CUPA (or market value). At our meeting on Wednesday, Provost Starnes said that those adjustments will be addressed in January or February. In the entire time I've been at WCU, I have felt that faculty voice has been heard, respected, and essential to informing the

trajectory of the university. And I feel that that is very much the case right now with regard to issues about salary.

And even as this is not an issue that impacts us at present – and that I hope won't impact us – I want to address legislative actions against tenure in our neighboring states: Georgia and South Carolina. I am so glad that this board and the state of North Carolina have respected the institution of tenure for university faculty. I know that tenure is a fraught concept, but please don't tune out on me. Tenure is a big part of what allows academic institutions to be accredited. It allows us to remain competitive. If over the past 10 years, NC has experienced a so-called brain drain as amazing faculty go to other states where they might get better salaries, we are now in a position to recruit exceptional faculty from states that have decided to undermine university tenure.

Finally, I was in a meeting with all of the UNC system faculty chair last evening, and the suggestion was made to invite Boards to attend Faculty Senate meetings. I want to extend that invitation to you, should you be interested in attending. We've met remotely this semester, but we've been livestreaming our meetings – and we've had the best community attendance I've ever seen. Even if we go back to meeting face to face next semester, we will continue this practice of livestreaming, and I will make sure to extend to you the invitation to watch us work. Again, I am enjoying getting to know you this year, and I sincerely appreciate the work that you do for WCU.

## Full Report

Below are my Faculty Senate Chair reports for the three meetings that we held during the fall semester. I will summarize key details during your December meeting. I include links to materials, whenever relevant, and I look forward to seeing you soon.

Best,  
Laura

### **September report:**

Some of our agenda items:

1. As always, stagnant wages, quality of life issues (child-care)
2. Pathway for promotion and raises for non-tenure track faculty
3. Implementing a new SAI/SPL (student perception of learning) instrument
4. Looking at and potentially revising our tenure process
5. Navigating the pandemic and the administration's expectations for faculty (remaining face-to-face, having the option to go online or hybrid).
  - a. Concerns about students refusing to wear masks in classrooms
  - b. Concerns about not having the option to change class modalities.
6. Looking at and potentially restructuring Faculty Senate committees

Things we've pushed for and/or accomplished thus far:

1. Last year, we discussed creating some social media presence for Faculty Senate. I've now created a [FS Facebook](#) page and [Instagram](#) feed (which I'm still trying to figure out because I am old... ☺).
2. Faculty were unhappy with the Oct. 1 start date for proof of vaccination/mandatory testing, and we expressed our concerns to the administration. We are glad that that date has now been moved to Sept. 1.
3. There has also been frustration with communication on various issues (see below for notes from the faculty conversation on 8/20 for more on the specifics). We have worked with the administration on strategies for better messaging, and they have been receptive.

Two results:

- a. A more comprehensive daily news update on WCU, UNC system, and higher education news.
  - b. The solicitation of faculty questions and concerns to be addressed weekly in the Campus Update
4. We are working with the administration to make our travel policies (with regard to reimbursement and third-party lodging like Airbnb) more aligned with those of other universities in the UNC system. The policies are currently being updated – to allow faculty to use P-cards to pay for expenses with university funds upfront and to cover third-party lodging.

Finally, Faculty Senate co-sponsored Staff Senate's Open Forum on Monday, September 27<sup>th</sup> from 3:00-5:00p. Panelists included the Chancellor, Dr. Wargo, Dr. Starnes, Mr. Byers, and Dr. Causby. The rest of the Executive Council was available as well.

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Topics discussed at the Faculty Senate Conversation Fall 2021 (the conversation takes place 2x/year, at the beginning of fall and spring semesters and is an opportunity for Faculty Senate leadership to meet with faculty to gather their concerns and questions to help shape the FS agenda):

Communication - we'll be getting daily updates.

What is status of SAI's and potential replacement instrument?

- Discussed in Planning Team with Cheryl Waters-Tormey, and she's taken up the mantle. She's already sent out first steps to the committee

Library had unfortunate incidences, getting NO communication – such as with traffic/parking blocking off, and not getting anything from outside of Academic Affairs. Not sure what ways to get the Library included from these entities when it applies to them. A flash point for emotions and frustration. Timing and communication. Definitely issues when communication should be coming from Facilities.

- A lot of frustration with communication; Laura's meetings with Chancellor and Provost; she specifically mentioned the Library
- Working on a list of things we want to hear more about
- Want to start issuing a Q&A every week on things we think we should hear about
- Particularly a problem with Facilities, maybe even communicate directly with Joe Walker

Not doing social distancing in the classroom, if someone comes up positive, what will be done e.g. contact tracing, thresholding

- Laura is told that it's constantly evolving, and she doesn't know
- Assume we'll keep the dashboard. Will they notify us in any way if a student of ours is positive?

Most worried about Dining Halls

- Worried and looking into it; seems to conflict with mask mandate. Is there an exception (to the mask policy) in the dining hall? If so, where are outdoor tents?
- I walked through Brown this week and yes, everyone was crowded together and basically unmasked.

Who is Ellis mentioned in the notes handed out?

- Joshua Ellis of the UNC System Offices
- Suggested by Vicki as an example for timely news items

What about salaries?

- Regarding the Budget, the House and Senate are in conference currently
- EHRA workers initially left out of the Budget, but now in but at a lower percent increase

Was there a potential for a bonus from the State?

- Believe it's still \$1500

Need to get Meredith Whitfield keeping everyone informed (our lobbyist)

- Try to get her to speak to Senate

Student vaccination numbers

- Richard showed Laura, about 3,000 [reporting their status]; it's faculty who are falling behind

With regard to the get-vaccinated-or-get-tested policy, the Aug. 18 Campus Update doesn't say anything about weekly testing; it only mentions "get tested regularly." How frequently will unvaccinated people be tested?

- We don't know an answer

Are students aware of federal crime to give fake vaccine cards?

- Unknown if this is something that has been announced to them
- There are people who are looking at our cards ("putting eyes on them"); One person's first vaccination date was not filled in on their card and they had to have a 45 minute follow up clearing up problem

Is the University in contact with the Hospitals in the region? Is there consideration that there are limited beds at Harris

- We were last year, but that was a different semester

A lot of groups of students are going through first floor Stillwell, on track to Library, and a lot of them don't have masks on!! (Part of Orientation or Tours run by the University)

- Didn't feel we had problems with students as much last year not wearing masks
- Richard said he's getting calls in equal parts to move online completely and the unconstitutionality of forcing students to wear masks
- Worry that faculty will have to become the police in this, but think we're in a different time than last year
- Recent seven-day average over 5,000 per day, and a year ago it was 1,000 per day. The Delta variant is far more contagious; classrooms are completely full of desks

Person speaking has a background in public health and feels like a very strong statement from Faculty Senate by Monday or shortly after is warranted. Consumer version of higher ed: students are customers and we're here to serve them, and we're running this consumer model. If we wait to test until October 1, until vaccination status can be confirmed, we should be remote or hybrid until then -- at least in terms of public health. But by October 1<sup>st</sup>, belief we'll be in biggest crisis. The only treatment for COVID is prevention. Plenty of data indicates this. Public health safety should not be secondary to this. We've done online for a year and we can do another month.

- Can see what Faculty Senate wants to say about this as a statement
- In terms of flexibility/freedom to change modality of teaching at the moment. Not all faculty can do this. The HHS Dean has said you can't change the modality. The same statement from COB.

Other comments:

- Could use some bigger consequence on not having vaccination, on top of regular testing
- Have students pay for their own testing
- Make parking dependent on vaccination status

Speaker has multimillion grants but has been told they can't ask for support positions. Complaints about HR. Guidance changes, slow on the uptake. People applying for TTF positions are not treated well.

- Comments were hard to hear at times. Laura asked the speaker to send an email about these comments.

Is the tenure clock pause still available this year?

- We'll need to take that up this year in Senate.
- Laura would be in favor of doing something on the Tenure clock. She is in favor of erring on the side of empathy and care

Just found out the number of physics minors dropped to ¼ of the number four years ago (mainly they are the engineering majors). Have heard it's hard for them (engineering) to hire tenure track faculty. Salary is part of it. That's spilling into other programs too. At some point we need to convey to administration, BoT, UNC System. Need to successfully complete searches to keep programs viable.

- Retention and recruitment of faculty is very difficult when not able to pay people fairly

Aside from raises, parking is one place (not having to pay full price) changes can be made to improve the quality of life. What other quality of life issues are there?

- Scholarly Leave should be regularly available for everyone, not just two a year. Feel that would go so far in terms of morale.
- Must address salary compression
- Addressing expectations related to DCRDs, it seems expectations tend to rise (the need to do better than the person who earned tenure the previous year)
- A lot of little things we're required to do could be removed (being tested on fire extinguishers)
- More affordable health insurance especially for spouse
- State health plan still excludes trans health care, with pending litigation
- Time drain associated with assessment
- Has there even ever been a faculty/staff childcare task force?
- Add child care to that, in 2008 it was on our agenda
- Did the Chancellor address child care in opening comments?
  - In Kadie's previous conversations with the Chancellor, the Chancellor laid out the amount of work and the length of the process to get child care going;
- Ask for monthly meeting with Cory Cosby of HR as all of these issue are HR issues

- Because we're a state system, he'd often say that "it's a state-wide decision, and we have very little autonomy"
- Sounds like it's a Faculty Assembly discussion; comment that the Faculty Assembly didn't seem to be productive in one opinion.
- HR won't light a fire to get anything done; they'll never go out and ask for it, not wait for someone else in the system to take up issues

Tell Laura what to do for everyone.

- What Kadie learned from the Chancellor: WCU has been fiscally ultra conservative, and some comments seem to indicate it's filtered into HR; go to the Chancellor and say it's time to change our strategy, to speak up more; have the courage to go about speaking and negotiating with the state they didn't in the pasta
- We as faculty need to stand our ground and take bold collective actions; no one wanted to strike when it was mentioned in an earlier year; if we continue to take it, they will continue to dish it out
- We are the nicest faculty and it doesn't serve us well
- If you want to get a little more active, someone looked into a space for a faculty "protest" with someone in facilities; 2 minutes later the Provost called them to ask if they were staging a protest.
- Reminding us that it is a criminal offense for state employees to go on strike
- Last year someone wanted to get the press really involved in terms of our salaries, and they were told not to do that. They did end up sending a letter to a couple of people, but the Provost talked them out of it in a large scale.
- Light passenger rail to Asheville? 😊
- Transportation back and forth to Cullowhee and Asheville is something Laura can raise again.

A positive comment, our travel policies are really out of, date and they are revising policy to include using use of department T cards to pay for travel expenses up front, use of AirBnB in travel.

### **October report:**

1. Faculty Senate is looking at WCU's climate change strategies/initiatives
  - a. Jake Greear (political science) brought a resolution to me addressing WCU's climate change initiatives and calling on WCU to do the following:
    1. In accordance with Governor Roy Cooper's Executive Order 80, achieve 40% reduction in carbon emissions by 2025.
    2. Achieve carbon-neutral University operations at WCU by 2040.
    3. Divest from fossil fuels.
    4. Develop internal incentives and/or policies to promote video-conferencing and regional conferences to mitigate academic air travel.

We discussed the resolution at Faculty Senate Planning Team and decided that the first step was to find out what WCU is already doing. We would also like Staff Senate and SGA on board for a joint resolution on this issue, as this is an issue that impacts all of us,

not just faculty. I've reached out to the student group Divest UNCA, which spearheaded UNCA's divestment initiative and led to UNCA being the first UNC system school to divest from fossil fuels to speak with them, and we've scheduled a meeting with Lauren Bishop, Chief Sustainability Officer, David King, Energy Manager (Facilities Management), Mike Byers, Deidre Hopkins, Rebecca Hart, and Jake.

WCU's endowment is managed by the UNC Management Company (which also manages the endowments for all UNC system schools). According to the fund's report from last year, 4.5% of total assets were in Energy and Natural Resources, with a strategic target of 6%. We very much want to put forth a resolution (attached) asking for WCU's commitment to real action climate change.

2. We continue to follow the budget (or course) and push for WCU to address how our administration might supplement whatever pittance the legislature gives us. We know the following:
  - a. The reversion will be less than the \$4 million that was anticipated as our decrease in enrollment was less than initial predictions. The Chancellor and Provost have discussed merit-based raises in addition to whatever the state decides to give us. Would love Staff Senate's input on that idea.
3. [Faculty Senate Student Support Fund](#) and the role it could play in enrollment/retention Will present a resolution to establish a small standing committee to maintain continuity from one semester to the next (and look at what other universities are doing). I met with Brian Railsback, who was the FS chair when the fund was established and Jeff Lawson, who now oversees it.
4. Concerns about Covid/protocols that I'm hearing from faculty  
The UNC system mandated a 1989 measles booster on campuses that were in location where the surge was happening.  
At our next meeting, [FS will put forth a resolution asking the administration to mandate vaccination for students, faculty, and staff](#). We don't mean this resolution to be adversarial, but rather to give our Chancellor ammo to advocate for stricter protocols.

### **November report:**

Faculty Senate Planning Team met on Wednesday, November 3. Key items for our meeting on Wednesday, November 10 are below.

In addition to our usual external reports, we will also have two additional reports:

1. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Initiatives Report: Ricardo Nazario-Colon
2. Addressing Food Insecurities on Campus: Katie Pincura

We have three resolutions that will come to the floor:

1. Resolution: Creation of a Student Support Fund Oversight Committee – Laura Wright
2. Resolution: Climate Change Resolution – Jake Grear (postponed until January)
3. Resolution: Statement on Purpose and Use of CourseEval -- FAC

We will also determine the mode of Faculty Senate meetings for Spring 2022.

On Tuesday, November 2, the Standing Committee on Faculty Salaries met for the first time this academic year. This first meeting was fairly informal in terms of working to further the recommendations made by the Committee last year:

- The Committee recommends a phased and multilayered approach to raise faculty salaries to the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile of the respective CUPA salary range by CIP code over a five-year period. The actions below will be reviewed annually to evaluate the viability of increasing the CUPA percentile toward a goal of 75%.
  - Set the salary of new positions at the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile of the CUPA salary range by CIP Code for the 2021-22 academic year, and increase this salary base by 5 percentiles over the next five years.
  - Set the salary of replacement positions at the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile of the CUPA salary range by CIP Code for the 2021-22 academic year, and increase this salary base by 5 percentiles over the next five years.
  - Develop a plan to address compression and inversion issues among current faculty with the goal to raise salaries to the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile of the CUPA salary range by CIP Code over five years.

We continue to follow the budget (or course) and push for WCU to address how our administration might supplement whatever pittance the legislature gives us, whenever they give it to us.

Two other issues of concern that were raised at planning team:

1. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/11/05/new-federal-covid-19-vaccination-rule-affects-colleges>

“The Biden administration on Thursday unveiled the details of [a new rule](#) requiring employers with 100 or more employees to mandate employees either be vaccinated against COVID-19 or undergo weekly testing.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration rule requires employees be fully vaccinated by Jan. 4 in order to avoid COVID-19 testing requirements. It also requires employers to ensure that unvaccinated employees wear face masks in the workplace.

The OSHA rule promises to further expand the number of colleges subject to a federal vaccine mandate -- albeit a soft mandate in this case, with a testing alternative. Steven Bloom, assistant vice president for government relations at the American Council on Education, said the OSHA rule would apply to all private colleges with 100 or more employees as well as to public colleges in [the 26 states and two territories](#) where government workers are under OSHA’s jurisdiction.”

2. <https://quirky-cray-af5aca.netlify.app/long-form/uncs-mild-mannered-change-agent/>

“Over the course of our reporting, which spanned the late summer and fall, the senate’s top Republican, Phil Berger, confirmed *The Assembly*’s reporting on the potential for a significant reorganization of the state’s higher-education landscape that would merge the university and community college systems under the leadership of one person—Hans.

This profile is based on more than 30 interviews with UNC System senior staff, board members, chancellors, faculty, and political leadership, including Governor Roy Cooper, Speaker Tim Moore, and Senate Leader Berger.”