

Wake Forest University Senate 2004-2005
Minutes: Presentation by President-Elect Nathan Hatch
March 16, 2005

The University Senate held a called meeting of the 2004-2005 year in the Benson Center.
The following were present:

Administration: Debbie Best, Bill Gordon, Bill Leonard, Lou Morrell, Gordon
Melson

College: Robert Browne, Eric Carlson, Andrew Ettin, Hank Kennedy, Dilip
Kondepudi, Jill McMillan, Gloria Muday, Paul Ribisl, Harry Titus, David
Weinstein

Graduate School: Dale Dagenbach, Susan Torti

Calloway School of Business and Accountancy: Yvonne Hinson

Babcock School of Management: Scott Schafer, Jeff Smith

Divinity School: Neal Walls

Library: Lynn Sutton

Staff: Dana Hutchens, Gloria Stickney

Visitors: President-Elect Nathan Hatch, Wayne Smith (Trustee)

Gloria Muday introduced President-Elect Nathan O. Hatch and thanked him for his willingness to share his thoughts and ideas with the Senate. She indicated that Dr. Hatch would be happy to answer questions after his presentation, with a focus on his overall thoughts on campus life and governance, but that detailed policy questions should await his arrival on campus full-time.

President Hatch spoke to the Senate members present regarding "Questions He Is Asking About Wake Forest". A summary prepared by President Hatch regarding his comments follows:

I want to thank the faculty and the administration for their warm and generous welcome to Wake Forest. I am very much in the mode of a learner and appreciate the opportunity to meet many in this community to begin to discern key challenges and opportunities.

The challenge that you and I face together is to dream boldly about the next decade and to fulfill the great promise that is ahead. Abraham Lincoln, in his famous "House Divided" speech, once gave this advice to help think strategically about the future: "If we could know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do, and how to do it."

This afternoon let me attempt to explain what I hope to do in the months before I begin full-time service here on July 1. My goal, with your assistance, is to locate the coordinates of where Wake Forest is today and where it is tending. If we gain a clearer sense of our position and momentum, we can plan better about what to do and how to do it.

Let me share with you some of the key questions that I ask myself as I begin this journey of discovery, a journey that will certainly not be complete by July 1 and will of necessity involve substantial interaction with faculty, key administrators, and campus leaders, along with students, Trustees, friends of the University, and leaders of other colleges and universities.

These are some of the questions that I bring. (These are divided into five areas.)

1. Where is Wake Forest today? What are its strengths, its liabilities? Where are we better than our reputation; where are reputation and reality aligned; and where might our reputation slightly outstrip the reality of what students and faculty actually experience?

Are we willing to admit where we have problems? In the words of Max De Pree, "do we have a nose for stale air?" The biggest danger of any successful organization is to coast on success, to be lulled into complacency by valid accomplishment, what Hedrick Smith calls being "mired in the mindset of success." Are we poised and hungry for the next opportunity? What are our greatest opportunities and are we prepared to seize them?

What are the biggest changes in the University in the last decade, and are they likely to continue? What new changes or obstacles, fiscal or otherwise, are likely to emerge?

In a time of fiscal constraint, what tough choices have to be made, and what are the core shared values that will govern our actions?

Are we a culture willing to hire people better than ourselves, and to recruit those best suited for the values of this place? Do we know who our best people are and what it takes to nurture and retain them?

2. A second set of questions surround our core mission of teaching, learning, and research. What are Wake Forest's centers of academic excellence, our real signatures? How do we build upon them? Where can the tremendous tradition of teaching and learning here be taken to the next level?

What is the culture of faculty and administration at Wake Forest? How is it changing? Are there fault lines, or shifting of tectonic plates that one can detect? How are new people acclimated to the culture of this place? How does this culture balance high expectation, differentiating between excellent and average performance, and the sustaining of viable community and mutual trust?

3. Where are our students and what do they need for a holistic education? What are the pressure points for them as they work through the various reasons for attending a university such as Wake Forest? They face a complicated mix: professional ambition; the quest for attaining self-knowledge, becoming liberally educated, and developing a philosophy of life;

service and moral formation; and making friends and enjoying an exciting college experience. Given these pressures, how can a liberal arts education best engage those who come to Wake Forest?

4. When and how should we as a University embark on a strategic plan? How do we think and plan inspirationally? How do we set about organizing such a plan with appropriate participation, all the while sustaining the ability and flexibility to move in certain directions and not in others? How do we make Wake Forest an even more compelling option for discerning students—be they undergraduate, graduate, or professional students? What are our strategic advantages and how best do we communicate them? How do we develop “compelling priorities” that actually become magnets for new levels of financial support?

5. How do I organize the senior administration of Wake Forest, to best use my talents and those of the gifted senior officers of the University? Where should I focus my energies in the first year, in the first three years, and over the next five years?

The challenge of a place like Wake Forest is to hold together in creative tension values that often seen at odds. We want to sustain excellent teaching and research. We want diversity and continuity with the past. Wake Forest values its North Carolina roots and its identity as a national university; we are an institution that prizes academic freedom and diversity of thought, and we want to be faithful to a distinct religious and moral tradition. We want nationally ranked athletic programs and students athletes who represent the values of the institution.

In conclusion, I think it is fair to offer to you, my colleagues, a few thoughts about myself. Who is this person moving to Wake Forest and asking these questions about this university? What is he like? What are his instincts and dispositions?

I am a person committed not only to very high academic standards but also to an academic culture that is collegial and irenic. Wake Forest should compare and benchmark itself against the best universities, and it should be willing to admit where progress is needed. We cannot improve without admitting where we are, or without finding a way to change and adjust. At the same time, a culture of high expectation needs to be premised on mutual support and strong encouragement.

Four assumptions have guided my approach to administration.

1. To improve, a university must be venturesome and opportunistic. We cannot rely on past successes, however significant. I fear the danger of complacency.

2. I am committed to faculty development. One cannot renew an institution. It is only people who can be renewed. The faculty of Wake Forest are its most valuable asset. It is by their creativity that richer learning environments can be created. It is only by their writing that knowledge will be reshaped. And it is only by their example that students will fall in love with learning and be inspired to explore in the classroom and beyond. I am committed to fostering an environment in which faculty can flourish as teachers, scholars, and mentors.

3. *A third guiding assumption is that vibrant intellectual life must be coupled to a deep commitment to students. For learning to be prized by our students, we must take a vital interest in them and their development. We would be remiss if Wake Forest were not the kind of alma mater described by John Cardinal Newman as “knowing her children one by one, not a mint, a foundry, or a treadmill.”*

4. *A fourth guiding assumption is that Wake Forest's religious heritage, Baptist and ecumenically Christian, actually provides an opportunity for a rare contemporary experiment: to sustain education as formation both intellectual and moral. Stanley Fish has argued arrestingly in an essay titled “Aim Low” that a university cannot make students into good people or upstanding citizens and should not even try. I disagree—particularly at a place such as this. Forged by a community committed to Pro Humanitate, Wake Forest has the opportunity to take moral and religious issues seriously while being open to people of diverse beliefs and backgrounds, in addition to considering new and interesting ways in which our community can act “in service to humanity.”*

We have a rare opportunity to connect wisdom from the past with contemporary thought, to grapple with the ultimate purpose of our existence. The real opportunity is to deepen the questions we ask of ourselves and our students in the novels they read, the chemistry they study, and the art they create.

Innovation, faculty development, a commitment to students, an attention to moral as well as intellectual formation—these are guiding principles to which I am committed and that also deeply resonate in the rich history of Wake Forest. I look forward to learning from you about this place, its mission, and people. And I look forward to working together to make this one of the most vibrant and compelling experiments in American higher education.

Following is a **SUMMARY** of questions asked of President Hatch:

1. How do you proceed with grappling with the questions he has asked?
2. You highlighted the teacher/scholar ideal – do you have any specific steps to move towards this?
3. At Notre Dame you had the opportunity to think about Pro Humanitate. How does a university put this vision into action?
4. Staff representatives on our Senate are raising awareness of staff issues. We now have a Staff Issues committee looking at governance. What is your experience with a staff advisory group?
5. We have a faculty/staff Senate and this leads to potentially puzzling roles for some. Administrators who have expressed that they are not sure of their roles as a member. Comment?
6. Many times the vision of the future is colored by the past. What have you learned at Notre Dame?

7. Where does graduate education fit into your future of WFU?
8. We have seen a lot of growing involvement with some departments and the Medical School. Departments in the college would also benefit by engaging with the professional schools. This can be seen as a missed opportunity. What is your view?
9. Relative to the last question – there are different benefits for the Hawthorne and Reynolda campuses. What are your views?
10. In terms of governance – there are two campuses with different governance, which makes it hard for the Senate. How can this be melded together?

The Senate meeting concluded at 4:40 pm with a reception following.