

The Senator

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Donald Frey, President

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A Look Ahead: New Issues for the Senate

Donald Frey, Senate President

The Senate, while continuing its work on perennial concerns, must face several new issues. Before addressing these emerging issues, I direct readers to an article by the Senate's past-president, Larry Daniel, who reviews Senate accomplishments of the past year-- including an evaluation plan for university administrators. In addition, current Senate vice-president Gloria Muday tells how her Health Affairs committee has monitored the transition in health insurance from QualChoice, while pinpointing needed improvements in the new plan. This year, however, several new issues have emerged:

- *The Era of Financial Stringency.* The weak performance of Wake Forest's endowment since 2000 has put the university in a period of tight budgets, despite large increases in tuition and other fees. The Senate's University Oversight Committee is monitoring how cuts and retrenchments are allocated across different departments and schools of the university.
- *Intelligent Compliance with Laws and Regulations.* Laws on copyright, privacy, etc., now impinge on central educational and research functions. Compliance may occur intelligently or not. For example, a 1970s law gives students the right to see letters of reference written by professors-- clearly a blow to frank references. Allowing students to waive that right, is an intelligent way to comply while preserving confidentiality. This year the Senate's Intra-University Operations Committee will begin to study how Wake Forest could more intelligently comply with governmental regulations and laws.
- *More Faculty Communication with Trustees.* Several years ago the Senate helped get faculty observers appointed to committees of the Wake Forest Trustees. Yet, reports on how well this is working are mixed. Meaningful communication does not always occur; improvements are called for. In addition, the case must be made to the Trustees that the next search committee for a president of the university should include representatives of faculty, staff and students/alumni as full members. The Senior University Appointments committee will be building this case.
- *Ever-Expanding Subsidiary Enterprises.* Wake Forest has, over decades, shown itself adept at running subsidiary enterprises such as Graylyn conference center, Reynolda Village shopping center, and several office buildings. However, these enterprises are orders of magnitude smaller than the downtown research park recently undertaken by a unit of the university and they typically were acquired at little or no cost to the university. The University Oversight Committee will begin to assess the likely impact of this new enterprise upon the university.
- *Staff Issues.* Only in the last four years have there been senators elected from the non-faculty staff of the university, and their unique concerns are forcing us to think in new terms. For example, the Senate's Intra-university Operations Committee was originally constituted to facilitate relations among *academic* schools and departments. With the addition of staff senators, we have come to recognize what should have been obvious all along-- that non-academic departments interact significantly with other departments, both academic and non-academic.

- *National Movements for Athletics Reform.* In response to a national organization's request, the Senate this year is deciding whether to join other senates in endorsing a national framework for athletics reform. Any action taken would have no direct effect on Wake Forest's athletic programs, but would lend credibility to a national faculty reform group (in the process of formation) that wishes a place at the national table of collegiate athletics.

In most of these areas, the Senate is not empowered to make final decisions that will set the course for the University. Its charge generally is to monitor and advise. Yet, in carrying out these two functions with respect to both perennial and emerging issues, the Senate is likely to provide a valuable additional perspective for those charged with making those final decisions.

Health Affairs Update: December, 2003

Gloria Muday

The Senate Health Affairs committee in collaboration with the Senate Fringe Benefit committee hosted a Forum on Health Insurance on the Reynolda Campus in early December. The goal of this forum was to provide both short-term and long-term perspectives on our health insurance, as well as to address questions from faculty and staff regarding the current and future plans. Significant detail from this forum is elsewhere on the Senate Website (see new information at the Senate opening webpage), including the Powerpoint files used for the presentations as well as a detailed list of questions and answers. In summary, the impact of self-insurance on cost and coverage was discussed as well as specific details of the new plan and how individuals can save money under the current plan constraints.

As we turn our thoughts to the coming year, the committee will meet with Human Resources to discuss issues of coverage and cost. Our first job will be to inspect the claims cost for the recent year in order to assess whether the estimates are close to the current costs and begin to get a sense for the likely costs of the next year. As the costs for next year are likely to increase due to raising national health care costs (on average between 15 and 17%), the challenge to Human Resources and the committee will be to make recommendations on how and where to affect our coverage to meet these costs. Increased costs could reach employees in the form of premium increases, increases in copay for office visit and/or prescriptions, elevated deductibles, and changes in the percentage of money for coinsurance. Increased costs are inevitable, but the goal of the committee will be to represent the interests of WFU employees in order to minimize the negative impact of these changing costs.

Senate Accomplishments During the 2002-2003 Academic year

Larry Daniel

When I began my term in the University Senate, one of the senior professors in my department asked what the Senate does. I think the implication was that the Senate does very little. I have now had four years to think about that question but I still don't have a completely satisfying answer. Since the Senate has no budget and no power to make binding decisions, the ability to "do things" is limited. However, the Senate has evolved over the past four years and is making significant progress in its contribution to the University. In reflection, my best and most lasting memory from the Senate will be the people that I have had an opportunity to meet. I have been most impressed with the unselfish commitment of the Administration, the Trustees, the Faculty and the Staff to do what is best for Wake Forest. However, the ideas of what is best for Wake Forest differ among these groups. The Senate provides a forum for discussion of these differing viewpoints and provides a means of communication. Thus, the best answer to my perennial question may be that the Senate allows the faculty and staff to express their opinions in shaping university policy decisions.

The main difference of opinion and the main topic of discussion in the Senate concerns money. The Faculty and Staff have endured years of modest raises in bad (and good) economic times. This coupled with the ever increasing cost of health insurance have led to an “erosion of compensation” with no end in sight. Last spring, the Senate held a special meeting to discuss health care costs. This was in response to a plan to keep the health care premiums lower by decreasing benefits. The Senate Health Affairs Committee recommended against this change because it shifted more of the cost to the patient rather than spreading the cost among all enrollees. The committee also felt that it allowed the University to artificially maintain that it pays 60% of health care costs (Reynolda Campus). However, the Senate recommendation was not adopted and this will be a continuing issue. The Senate also discussed the fact that a significant number of employees could not afford health insurance. Rather than lowering the cost for lower paid employees (which in self-insurance would just raise the cost to others), the Senate endorsed a plan to raise the minimum wage of Wake Forest employees by \$1 per hour. The Senate was told that this plan was adopted. However, in the final budget this raise was dropped. This should continue to be a topic of discussion. I want to finish this discussion by thanking Gloria Muday, Dale Dagenbach and their committees for all their efforts on Health Care Issues and Benefits.

Faculty salaries continue to be a major topic of discussion. While the numbers of the Administration and the AAUP do not coincide on faculty salaries in comparison to other similar universities, no one says they are near the top. One cited reason is that Wake Forest’s endowment per student is very low compared to other similar schools. The Administration and Trustees want to increase the endowment and keep tuition low. However, continued modest raises, which are cancelled by raises in health care costs, are bad for morale. Over time, these factors will decrease the ability to recruit and retain the best faculty. The Senate has regular presentations on allocation of resources. However, these presentations are not always clear to a Biochemist (or to others, I suspect). Hopefully, the Senate can continue to work to make these presentations more clear and useful.

To this point, I have talked about disagreement. However, there are many points on which there is substantive agreement. During the past year we have discussed a plan for evaluation of Administrators (Chairs and Deans) by the faculty. My sense of what the faculty Senators want is a mechanism to provide suggestions and feedback on the management of the departments and schools. President Hearn, Provost Gordon and Dean Applegate have all been very enthusiastic about discussing this plan and are supportive of moving forward with the evaluation process. Jim Flynn and the Inter-University Operations committee have worked diligently to develop a questionnaire and work on the implementation of this plan. Hopefully, the current IOC committee can get the evaluation process up and running in the near future.

John Butterworth and the Senior University Appointments (SUA) Committee of the Senate have worked hard to solicit nominations for honorary degree candidates from the faculty. They have emphasized awarding degrees to exceptional scholars who have special ties to Wake Forest and who have not yet been recognized by other universities. Michael Curtis, the new chair of the SUA Committee, reports that the faculties have made many excellent nominations for the spring 2004 graduation.

Another major topic during my term in the Senate has been the relationship of the Senate with the Board of Trustees. Carole Browne, David Levy and Tim Smunt, the Presidents of the Senate during my term, have all worked to increase communications with the Board. I have been a beneficiary of their efforts and had the pleasure of representing the Senate in the meetings of the Advancement and Communications Committee of the Board of Trustees. With this assignment, I have met many of the trustees and have found them incredibly dedicated to Wake Forest. They are also genuinely interested in faculty concerns. Hopefully, this communication process will continue to develop.

Another recurring topic in the Senate is cross campus interaction, particularly among the departments of the Medical School and the College. The Senate and Dean Melson worked to get shuttle service between the campuses and this has led to more collaboration and more opportunities for students to take a wider variety of courses. Also, several new faculty in Physics, Chemistry and Biochemistry are developing strong

collaborations in structural biology. Provost Gordon's efforts to strengthen the research efforts at Wake Forest will help these and future collaborative efforts to flourish.

In conclusion, I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to serve in the University Senate. It has been like a graduate course in the history and philosophy of Wake Forest University. My most lasting memory will be the many people I have had the privilege to meet who live by the motto "Pro Humanitate".