November 30, 2012

I bring greetings from the faculty! Right now the fall semester is coming to an end: Tuesday is the last day of class. Final exams are December 6 – 13, and fall commencement is on December 14.

It has been an eventful semester at ECU. We are implementing the new plus/minus grade system for undergraduate courses. Even though this was a result of a faculty-led initiative, change is difficult. Many faculty members and students are resistant to modifying course syllabi and grading scales to the new system, but they are doing it. It has taken considerable effort to identify every policy that depends on grades and adapt it to the plus/minus grade system. We have worked hard to overcome these difficulties, and I do not foresee any significant issues with grades.

UNC President Tom Ross attended our October 2 Faculty Senate meeting and gave remarks about strategic planning and the role of the UNC system. President Ross stated that North Carolina will need half of a million new degree-holding citizens by 2018 and emphasized that we must be responsive to the changing demographics of the state in order to meet that need. I believe that ECU must play a major role in this effort.

Recently there has been considerable attention on unit codes. Unit codes are the governing documents for academic units at ECU, and the unit code is one of the most important documents for a faculty member. Unit codes contain definitions of voting faculty in the unit; criteria for evaluation, tenure, and promotion of faculty; definitions of the various unit committees; and descriptions of administrative positions in the unit. Unit codes must be written and revised to be consistent with the faculty manual and other university policies. I am pleased to report about significant progress on two unit codes. The School of Dental Medicine has submitted its code for approval by the Unit Code Screening Committee, and the College of Education will be voting on code revisions next week. Both of these documents are the result of many hours of effort by faculty members in those units.

To most faculty members, our day-to-day activities seem routine, but they are very important to our students and programs, which makes them remarkable. We prepare for and teach classes, advise students, conduct research and creative activities, evaluate tenure and promotion materials, serve our community, and much more.

At the last board meeting, I brought one of my colleagues from the Department of Physics and described some of his typical activities to demonstrate his commitment to teaching, both in the classroom and the research lab. Today, I brought a musician, Dr. Britton Theurer, from the ECU School of Music. Dr. Theurer’s has been at ECU since 1992. His creative interests include finding and performing new pieces for
trumpet, composing for orchestral instruments alone and in chamber settings, and finding efficient and effective ways to help students master the languages of music, both written and improvised.

Teaching students to master music performance is labor-intensive, requiring hours and hours of one-on-one instruction. Dr. Theurer usually has about 20 trumpet majors, each of whom take a one-hour weekly lesson from him in addition to a studio class. His typical day begins with a 7 a.m. warm up on trumpet and ends with an hour of practice from 8-9 p.m. In between he spends about four hours working one-on-one with his students, one to two hours teaching classes including playing trumpet with larger groups of students, an office hour to meet with students, work on school and university committees (several of which he chairs), and assisting with the Four Seasons Chamber Festival. ECU Faculty members like Dr. Theurer are why we excel in the performing arts. We are dedicated to our students, our creative activities, and our professions. Thank you!