

Board of Trustees Remarks
Marianna Walker, Chair of the Faculty
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Today, my remarks will focus on the state of the faculty and the academy or the purpose for East Carolina University – the education of its students.

As you are aware, based on the presentation of Ron Mitchelson, Chair of the Program Prioritization Committee yesterday and the Chancellor's remarks today, our university is undertaking a major review and prioritization of our academic programs. This is serious.

Chancellor Ballard has charged the Program Prioritization Committee with the assessment of academic prioritization and potential university reorganization scenarios in response to budget constraints that our university and state are facing. Chancellor Ballard has allowed the university to engage in an inclusive and transparent process for this major endeavor. To date, this process has lasted for six months and many meetings with intense discussion for over 26 meetings. The organization of the committee and its focus has allowed for an open process within a time frame that is longer than many universities have employed, especially in our state.

Dr. Ron Mitchelson, Chair of the Program Prioritization Committee, deserves recognition for his leadership in undertaking this charge, which in my opinion is one probably one of the most important and controversial issues that has faced the university in decades. He has spent countless hours in his detailed research, data management, meetings with colleges, administrators, and faculty groups. His management style is open and inclusive, yet he is task driven and he certainly "drives" all of the committee members to stay on task. He has brought numerous ideas, suggestions, and concerns to the committee, based on comments from administrators and faculty, and has changed the data analysis and report content based on this feedback and the discussion of the committee. I truly respect this leader for his efforts, and for his poise in the face of adverse reactions and criticism. I believe that Dr. Mitchelson is the right person for this job and I admire his wisdom and integrity. In addition, all committee members have worked together in a truly cohesive, honest, and collegial manner. This is probably one of the most difficult tasks that many of us have ever engaged. I never thought I would be involved in the reorganization review of the Faculty Manual and the academic programs at East Carolina University at the same time!

As you are probably aware by now, we had a Faculty Forum on the initial draft of the program prioritization report yesterday in Mendenhall. There was a large turnout and many faculty (and one student) spoke relative to their concerns and suggestions regarding the process and the data used to complete the department and college self studies. There were questions as well and the committee did a commendable job in answering and responding to concerns. We will use this information in a strategic way in the task of completing the final program prioritization report that will be submitted to the Chancellor in mid-January.

Generally, many faculty displayed a sense of fear and frustration especially those whose department was in the lower quartile of the initial prioritized list. Many of their messages were a defense of their respective disciplines and why the disciplines must be part of the university. Many felt "devalued" and discussed the need and centrality of their disciplines in relation to the strategic missions of the university. It felt that many of the faculty felt that their discipline, and department may be an "endangered species" and their plea was to preserve it "for future generations". I understood their concerns and thought about what was really happening and what faculty are having to "contemplate" at the present time. What resonated with me was the question that by having to undertake this

prioritization task, are we really asking what it means to educate students? What does it mean to be educated? Does it mean getting a job, or having the foundations to problem solve and help with the societal needs, appreciate the world from multiple perspectives (including arts, sciences, and humanities), and ultimately to apply many of these 21st century abilities to the professions that our student undertake once they graduate?

So, as a fellow faculty member, I encourage the administrators and BOT members, to be sensitive to this angst among the faculty. Faculty retention has been a problem and we do not want to lose our faculty. We are losing many of our faculty to states and institutions who are recruiting them with better pay and benefits. Morale is low among many of our faculty. We have excellent faculty and we must acknowledge their contribution to our university – in the excellence in their teaching, in many forms, in their mentoring of student research, in their clinical skills and public service, and in service to the university. We have such talent and excellence among our faculty, and we must not lose sight of the contributions they bring to East Carolina University and retain our professors and leaders and mentors in research and service.

We want our faculty to be at their best. We need to be understanding of the time factors in carefully scrutinizing our priorities and not rush into eliminating academic programs unnecessary. We should look at our programs with different lenses and continue to provide forums and opportunities for faculty. While we may invest in many programs, we should maintain and preserve others. We need to use this PPC to showcase our strongest programs and identify opportunities for increasing productivity and collaboration between other academic programs. Not all academic programs have to be the same size, but we must work to determine this balance strategically and preserve our academic quality and retain our faculty. For without our faculty, what would the university be?