

Remarks to the Board of Trustees
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Good morning, everyone. My name is Jeff Popke, and I am just beginning my second year as Chair of the Faculty. Before I begin, I'd like to acknowledge Crystal Chambers, who is here this morning, and was re-elected to again serve as Vice-Chair this year. I also want to extend a warm welcome to our new Board members – we are grateful for your willingness to serve, and we look forward to working with you.

As you will come to learn, our 2,000 or so ECU faculty members are a [pretty diverse lot](#). We are scientists and engineers, musicians and novelists, clinicians and professionals in a wide array of fields. But we are united by a set of common commitments: we are engaged in world-class research, creative activities, and clinical practice that make a demonstrable impact upon our region and the wider world; and we share a deep sense of mission built around the success of our students.

If you walk around campus this time of year, you don't see a whole lot of faculty, but rest assured it has been a busy productive summer already. Some of us have been teaching summer classes, helping to get our students one step closer to graduation. And some of those classes took the form of faculty-led study-abroad programs to some 35 different countries. Our students this summer learned about child welfare in Ghana, sustainable cities in South Korea, and fashion merchandizing in Morocco, among many other amazing opportunities. These can truly be life-changing experiences for our students.

Our faculty are also using this summer time to focus on research – and you heard Vice-Chancellor Golden mention yesterday that our research enterprise is at an all-time high. Just looking at my home department of Geography, colleagues have been in the field researching disaster management in Japan, chronic kidney disease in Nicaragua, and landslides in Colorado, and I myself will soon be travelling to Bangladesh, to study how farmers in the Ganges River Delta cope with the challenges of flooding and riverbank erosion. So, our faculty are doing a lot of great things, in both classrooms and research settings, and I think it fair to say that these faculty efforts are the driving force behind ECU's positive impact.

But I must also say to you this morning that I have some real concerns about our ability to continue to recruit and retain outstanding faculty, and I can tell you forthrightly that faculty morale is not high. There are number of reasons for this, but first among them is the erosion of faculty salaries, and the resulting problems of compression and inversion, resulting from a decade without meaningful legislative appropriations for faculty raises.¹ And let me note in this regard how dismayed I was to learn that this year's budget has once again shortchanged our university employees, incorporating just a 1% raise over the next 2 years, rather than the 5% budgeted for all other state employees. In addition to this, our general campus climate over the past couple of years has been somewhat unsettling, as you know, and this has made it difficult at times to focus attention on our core mission, to highlight the achievements of our faculty and the successes of our students. And now, amid a challenging environment for enrollments, we face the prospect of a hiring freeze and budget constraints, which will require our faculty to do more with less, and without the reward, recognition, or respect that I believe they are due.

If there is good news in this, it is that we have a strong tradition at ECU of working collaboratively and productively to address challenges as they arise, and so I want to close with a plea for us to protect, and where possible strengthen, our culture and institutions of *shared governance*. The concept of shared governance refers to the inherent partnership and common sense of mission that inherently exists among University stakeholders, but especially between faculty, the administration, and Board of Trustees. For those unfamiliar with it, I want to recommend the [Statement on Shared Governance](#) put out by the Association of Governing Boards, which emphasizes the value of shared governance principles from a trustees' perspective.

At its core, shared governance rests upon what the AGB Statement calls “a culture of meaningful engagement” (p. 6), and in my experience, we have been successful at ECU in building such a culture between the faculty and administration, and I want to express my appreciation to Interim Chancellor Gerlach, Provost Mitchelson, and the other Vice-Chancellors for their commitment to engaging the faculty in dialogue around our important shared concerns.

Over the coming year, I'd like to work toward strengthening channels of communication with the Board of Trustees as well. To start with, I hope that we can continue the arrangement by which the Chair of the Faculty participates in the Board's University Affairs Committee. But I welcome additional opportunities – formal or informal – for increased interaction between the faculty and the Board. I believe that a robust culture of engagement will be especially important when the time comes to initiate the search for our next permanent chancellor, a process that I hope will provide significant opportunity for faculty involvement.

In a companion [White Paper](#) to its Statement on Shared Governance, the AGB notes that “[during times] of challenge, stress, and change ... it is more important than ever that shared governance works well” (p. 3). I want you to know during these times that the ECU faculty stand as willing partners in our efforts to address our challenges, promote our many successes, and move ECU forward in a positive direction. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me personally, if there is ever anything that I can do to assist (popkee@ecu.edu).

ⁱ For additional information on salary trends at ECU, see the Chair's remarks from [the January 2019 meeting of the ECU Faculty Senate](#). For discussion of the problem of salary compression and inversion, see the [White Paper](#) produced by the UNC Faculty Assembly in support of a UNC System Competitive Compensation Fund.