

ECU Board of Trustees Meeting-July 9th, 2020
Report from the Faculty
Purificación Martínez, Chair of Faculty

Good afternoon, my name is Purificación, (Puri), Martínez, and I am an Associate Professor of Hispanic Studies in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures. Since July 1st, I have the honor to represent the faculty at East Carolina University as its Chair. It is in this capacity that I bring on their behalf wishes of safety and health to you and your loved ones.

I thought you might be interested in knowing a bit about me. I am a native of Spain, where I did my undergraduate studies in Hispanic Literature and Linguistics. A year into my Masters in Hispanic Studies, and with little prospects for a job, I packed two bags and became a PhD student in the Department of Hispanic Languages and Literatures at SUNY Stony Brook.

I knew how to say hello and thank you in English, and I had never taught. It was obvious to me that I was ready for the challenge.

In New York, I married a fellow graduate student in the program and completed my PhD in Spanish Medieval Literature. You probably know that it is very difficult for academic couples to find jobs in the same city, much less in the same university. The difficulty increases when both partners work in the same department.

However, ECU opened its arms to us, and we both were able to secure tenure-track positions and to earn tenure. Except for very short periods of time when I worked at two other universities, I have developed my entire professional career at ECU; a career, I might add, that I have been free to design as I saw fit, with opportunities for professional development in the areas that were most appealing to me. For those of you who are alumni, I know this place gave you the tools to be successful. I learned here what being a professor meant, I became an adult here. ECU is my home.

It is my hope that our future interactions will come from an acknowledgement of two things: first, our mutual love for this institution, and the recognition that ECU holds the key to the prosperity of Eastern North Carolina. Second, that our perspectives on how to make the university successful come from the different points of view that we have and the different responsibilities attached to our respective roles. We all want our students to be well educated and engaged ethical citizens, ready to work in a diverse world. Yours is the eagle's view. Mine is, as we say in Spanish, "a pie de calle," in the trenches.

And let me tell you.

The trenches are abuzz with questions, concerns, anxiety. We, the faculty, are ready and eager to teach. We have compressed into months, sometimes only weeks, what should have been years of training in new pedagogical approaches and technologies. We have demonstrated our

flexibility, adaptability and commitment to students, as acknowledged in the resolution passed by this board. Thank you.

While preparing for a face-to-face experience this fall, we were taken by surprise with the decision to move to two 7.5 week blocks each semester, which was taken without consultation with the faculty. We think we understand that this was related in part to financial challenges, but a complete picture of what those are has not been clearly articulated to us. This move and how it came about are still sitting undigested in our stomachs and our minds.

However, while we pondered the whys and hows, we knew there was a lot of work to do. Rolling up our sleeves, the Faculty Senate formed a Task Force that created the hybrid model that is now the basis for ECU's schedule. Just two days ago, the Senate passed new academic calendars, new final exams schedules, new meeting dates for Faculty Senate. Another Faculty Senate Task Force has produced recommendations ranging from topics such as specific language for syllabi related to Covid-19, to how to have secure field trips. Besides these activities, faculty are busy at home redesigning all the courses they will be teaching next year to adapt to a format that is new for the majority of us.

Many will share the fear of losing their jobs already present among some of the staff, because they have very limited employment security. Full time fixed term and part time faculty will be overwhelmed by the sheer amount of teaching and preparing they will have to do for little money. Tenured and tenure-track faculty will see their research productivity reduced, their grants proposals maybe unfinished.

But we will be ready for August 10th, because it is our job and we are professionals. So, I beg you please, if somebody tells you that faculty are asking about masks, social spacing, signs, moving to DE, because they don't want to teach, be proud and sure in your answer: "I am a member of ECU's Board of Trustees and I know for a fact that what you are saying is not correct." We are asking because we want to teach well and safely, and there is a lot of uncertainty. We have been trained to examine the world critically. Nobody can expect that we will not be critical when reading the Reopen Pirate Nation documents or listening to the Interim Chancellor who, by the way, knows and expects this; he is a Professor. It is who we are, the State pays us to question and teach others to question as well.

If dealing with this pandemic at a personal and professional level was not enough, the terrible death of George Floyd and the antiracist demonstrations that followed also landed in our laps as educators. As the overwhelming majority of Americans did, it became urgent for us to confront once and for all the ugliness of systemic racism. Faculty in every college are working on initiatives to engage students, staff and fellow faculty in difficult conversations. For my small part, as chair of Faculty, I have asked Professor Crystal Chambers and Professor Amanda Klein to lead efforts in the establishment of the Faculty Senate Committee on Equity and Diversity. I know that Interim Chancellor Mitchelson and his leadership team are supportive of these initiatives. On this one we are all on the same page, only together will we overcome.

When informing you about the activities of the Faculty Senate, the first person singular pronoun appears way too often. But I am not alone. Standing with me are a new group of officers: Vice-Chair Jean Luc Scemama from the Department of Biology, Secretary Marlena Rose from Laupus Library and Parliamentarian Anne Ticknor from the Department of Literacy Studies, plus 57 senators and more than 200 faculty members serving in Faculty Senate Committees.

We are all aware that in the incoming months, you will have difficult decisions to make. The most important, the selection of a new chancellor for ECU. I know I speak not only for those faculty directly involved in shared governance, but for the 2074 faculty members who work here. If the pool is not sufficiently diverse or the candidates are only just OK, put the search on hold, dig deeper. You will have our support.

I started these remarks talking about ECU being my home. You do not invite just anyone to lead the place you love. You make absolutely certain that they are exactly the right person. This can only be done if the expertise of the different constituencies on campus is taken into consideration. When the time for finalists comes and those visits to campus are scheduled, the faculty will be ready to give honest and thoughtful feedback. We know confidentiality is important, we will keep it, that is my commitment to you today. But the candidates need to meet and interact with a healthy number of faculty so we can contribute meaningfully to the selection process.

But first things first, look at the pool and see if the right person is in there to lead a diverse, vibrant community into its future.

Thank you for listening. I hope that very soon, with appropriate social distancing of course, the other Faculty Senate officers and I will get to meet and talk to each and every one of you in formal and informal venues. If you have any question for me now, I will try my best to answer. Otherwise, I will finish the same way that Chancellor Mitchelson does: you can always reach me at martinezp@ecu.edu.