

ECU Board of Trustees Meeting – September 11, 2020  
Report from the Faculty  
Purificación Martínez, Chair of the Faculty

Dear Members of the Board of Trustees,

On behalf of the Faculty at ECU, I bring warm wishes of health and safety to you and your loved ones.

I want to start my remarks to you with a loving “I knew it, I told you so.” In case you are wondering, this is not a reproach about the move online for undergraduate students after only two weeks of face to face instruction. I am quite certain that anybody “con dos dedos de frente” (with common sense) in this virtual room knew that the pivoting would happen sooner rather than later. As we have seen in college town after college town, the entire country was and continues to be unprepared for thousands of people entering a community in the middle of a pandemic.

I left behind my science education a long time ago, when I decided to follow my passion for literature, but with it, I did not leave behind my critical thinking capabilities, they were actually enhanced. Our collective refusal to accept the unequivocal fact that we are not in control of nature is astonishing to me. Our misplaced faith in personal choice and not in a system of public health is at best misguided; at worse, as we are witnessing, deadly and unjust.

In the past few months, I have developed a weird taste for revisiting music from when I was much younger. How about if at this juncture we all accept the wise words of my beloved Eric Clapton?: “Time can break your heart, have you begging please, begging please.” I don’t know about you but my heart is broken and I am begging for this universal pain to stop every night before I close my eyes. But regardless of how much we wish this to go away, it will not stop, even if we pretend it is not there. Sometimes, I feel that we have become the white rabbit in Alice in Wonderland, and move at a frantic pace saying “I am late, I am late.”

No, we are not late, we are in an unprecedented health crisis and we need to treat it as such. Rushing will not do, only an educated citizenship who can separate fact from fiction, with well-funded research programs will be able to bit

this virus and every other challenge that we might encounter. Higher education is more needed than ever. Yesterday, it gave me great hope to see that all of you understood this and are ready to lobby and meet with whomever is necessary to protect ECU. Your answer to Trustee Shook's question was exactly the right one, your priority spot on: "funding, funding, funding."

While you do your work, here at ECU, the faculty will continue working hard to advance ECU's mission. I told you so in July! (yes, that is what I was talking about at the beginning): In August 10<sup>th</sup> we were prepared and ready to teach. [SLIDE SHOWN HERE.] Take a look at this picture a good friend of mine, Geological Sciences Professor Catherine Rigsby, sent me a week or so ago. This is how a 4000-level lab is taught right now. The professor, who is the primary care giver for her 88-year-old mother suffering from cancer, is at home supervising the work the students are doing in the lab. Her image is projected on different screens. The students are wet sieving, with the help of a Teaching Assistant. Catherine watches their work and pipes in with suggestions, warnings, whatever is necessary. Despite the pandemic, these students will graduate with the necessary knowledge and skills to ensure safe drinking water, safe oil drillings, safe roads.

But all this work by the faculty does not come without a heavy toll in our mental and physical well-being. You heard yesterday from Vice Chancellor Hardy about the increased number of students who have sought counselling since the beginning of the semester. Students are not the only ones. One of the best parts of my job as Chair of Faculty is to get to know colleagues from all over the university, to read their e-mails or meet them for the first time. One of them recently wrote to me: "we have forgotten to support each other, to care for one another." For the past two weeks, I have facilitated the organizational meetings of the 28 Faculty Senate Committees. A very approximate calculation tells me that during those meetings I have met at least 200 faculty members. At each one of these meetings the committees establish new priorities for the year, review and prioritize pending business, self-evaluate effectiveness.

Similarly to the e-mails I receive, these meetings allow me to hear my colleagues talk about how their teaching is going, how their students are doing, how worried they are about their children's education or their parents wellbeing. I am sure that you know that the workload of the faculty has tripled because we are teaching in a condensed schedule and we need to tend to the educational needs

of all of our students, those who are healthy or who are sick; those with resources and those struggling to find a hot spot to do their work. Our virtual offices are now open 24/7 so our students can catch up. We don't want to leave a single student behind.

And we worry as much as Assistant Vice Chancellor Whaley does about our future students, that is why we must continue our research. I hear or read this: "I am working on two grants", "I am tenure track and have two manuscripts to revise and resubmit", "I am fixed term, I have to work extra hard this year, so I get a job next year."

And with each statement, my convictions are reaffirmed: a winning day at the stadium is a nice experience for our students, but none of them will get a job because ECU won a football game, they come here for a first-rate education. Our research, our excellence, is what will ensure that our yield and retention percentages are healthy now and in the future.

But don't forget, we the faculty are not monolithic, we are a tapestry. Each voice brings unique experiences and expertise, each one is determined to see our students succeed. For example, some faculty thought that the Faculty Senate's recommendation in favor of a Pass/Fail policy for the Fall semester was the correct ethical choice while others thought that it diminished the efforts of our most driven students and negated the endless hours faculty had dedicated to prepare for a semester that everybody knew would be difficult.

The solution to all these apparently conflicting ideas is really quite simple, learn like you know your name what shared governance is, follow well established procedures that have survived the test of time and many different leadership styles at the top.

And talking about leadership styles. At this moment, there is no single employee at ECU who is not aware of two facts: budget cuts and chancellor search. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that in the many difficult decisions that will have to be made in coming months we protect the core mission of the institution. That can only be done if we have good leaders. Before the new chancellor arrives, faculty, staff and administrators present here today can propose the best thought

out plans for the future of ECU. All of that can be erased, discarded or, even worse, manipulated, if we do not select the appropriate person to lead us.

Much has appeared in the news about students' parties. [SLIDE SHOWN HERE.] A week ago, I had the privilege to attend a big student gathering. I took this picture with tears of pride in my eyes. 200+ student athletes saying "we demand change" in the most respectful way imaginable. Talk about "flipped learning." I became the student that day.

Yesterday's decision by this board to create an ad-hoc committee about named buildings shows that ECU is ready to live up to the expectations of our students. I applaud and support the actions of the Board. I encourage all of you to take one step further and commit to selecting a chancellor who will foster diversity, inclusion and excellence in our university, independent to external forces, no matter how powerful or well-intended they might be.

I welcome your comments or questions now and always. Remember, Purificación Martínez, [martinezp@ecu.edu](mailto:martinezp@ecu.edu)