

ECU Board of Trustees Meeting – November 6, 2020

Report from the Faculty

Purificación Martínez, Chair of the Faculty

Dear Members of the Board of Trustees,

It is my privilege to bring you greetings on behalf of the faculty at ECU. Since I will not have an opportunity to address you before the holidays begin, I would like to extend to all of you and your loved ones the faculty's warm wishes for a season filled with health, relaxation and joy. Next time we see each other will be 2021. I can't wait for this annus horribilis to be over. Faculty are grateful for the unusually long break that we will have between the Fall and Spring semester. We need to recharge our batteries, because we know that the Spring Semester will be most likely a difficult one.

Yesterday the trustees received detailed information about the financial challenges that Covid 19 has imposed on the institution. I fear that the heartbreaking furloughs are only the beginning of the difficult choices that ECU will have to make during the upcoming months. You will remember that last year, ECU received a 4.7% cut from not meeting our enrollment targets. This year, the UNC System Office has advised all UNC institutions to plan scenarios for a 10% budget cut, in preparation for how the General Assembly will create a budget and deal with what might be diminished revenues for the State.

Besides this difficult planning scenario, ECU has named a Fiscal Sustainability Coordination Committee. The committee, comprised of administrators, staff and faculty, is charged with a holistic examination of ECU finances to ensure that resources are aligned with strategic priorities. The premise behind the committee's formation gives me nightmares: we must prepare for further budget cuts along the way besides those already looming on the horizon for next year.

As a faculty member, I will readily admit that I am quite troubled by the fact that these two budgetary exercises are being carried out independently of one another and in quite different ways. I would like to compare and contrast both of them and to discuss why they are not conceptually different.

The formation of the Fiscal Sustainability Coordination Committee was announced very soon after the Fall semester started. Faculty and staff had the opportunity to elect their representatives to the committee. The Chair of the committee, Vice Chancellor Van Scott has already sent two memoranda to the entire campus and a web page has been established to receive feedback. Just this Tuesday, Vice Chancellor Van Scott answered questions in the Faculty Senate about the purpose and scope of the committee and made clear to the senators that no recommendations from the committee will be final until they have been vetted by the

campus community. In his careful planning, Vice Chancellor Van Scott, is following the lead of Chancellor Mitchelson who, during the organizational meeting of the committee, reminded the members to support one another, to work for the best interest of ECU, to communicate with all constituencies on campus and to be a model of transparency and inclusiveness.

The work of the committee has just barely begun, but in my mind certain themes have already gained prominence. ECU will thrive if we embrace our identity: an access, research intensive university. We must have frank discussions about our current structural model, to see if there is unnecessary duplication of services, to understand who pays for what and when, to eliminate or significantly reduce what does not support the core mission of the institution. We must find ways to eradicate our long practice of surviving on the backs of faculty who do extraordinary teaching but have no job security. We have to recognize that we cannot significantly increase extramural funding if our teaching loads are increased or we do not have sufficient administrative support. This is the time to abandon once and for all some phrases that I have heard too many times: “We have always done it this way”, “this is ECU, we do more with less.” We cannot continue doing the unbelievable with so little. We cannot attempt to do the impossible with nothing.

Other members of the committee might not agree with my assessment. But everybody can certainly agree on the deliberative and thoughtful way in which the work of the Fiscal Sustainability Coordination Committee is being planned.

In contrast, the planning for the 10% budget cuts, seems more ad-hoc. All faculty know that plans are being made, and that faculty are involved, but overarching guiding principles or common strategies have not been designed. I would argue that those need to exist in this exercise as much as in the Fiscal Sustainability Committee because otherwise the community that is ECU might be permanently damaged.

During the faculty interviews with candidates for Chancellor, one of them asked us, “what does keep you up at night?” Since we were 14 people, and only 5 of us had a chance to ask questions, I did not answer the candidate’s question. I spoke with the person afterwards to tell them what keeps me up at night: what will be of us if this 10% cut becomes a reality? If this were to happen, the recommendations of the fiscal sustainability coordination committee would be meaningless because at that point ECU would be a drastically different place. By the sheer power of cuts, we would have been reorganized. That is why planning for the short-term cuts and for the long term with the Fiscal Sustainability Coordination Committee must be conducted in similar ways: with guiding principles, with data, with representatives from faculty, staff and administrators at the table, with ample opportunities for engagement at every step of the way.

I am telling you all these internal details because I understand shared governance as a three-legged stool. As Chancellor Mitchelson says, a three-legged stool does not wobble, it is solid. Trustees, Administration and faculty support this community that is ECU. So, while faculty and

administration engage in meaningful and difficult discussions about finances, I ask you to support our community by doing what you do best: reaching out to legislators and Governors in the UNC system and talking to them about our university.

Remind them that universities are not an expense, they are an investment in the state's economic future. And, if that is true of the UNC system, it is even truer of ECU, which serves our region so well. We are a national leader in social mobility. ECU can only continue to be the economic engine of Eastern North Carolina with appropriate economic support. Challenges in front of us are formidable. Only by confronting them together, as the community we are, we will succeed.

: we will receive further budget cuts, and we must be ready Planning for further budget cuts in The committee will forward to the executive so that resources are aligned with our strategic priorities.building reserves and revenues so planning for next budget cuts. from public universit

and the AS are all other UNC institutions, ECU is preparing scenarios for cuts up to 10% in its permanent state appropriations budget. This cut comes on top of last year's 4.7% cut, that only ECU had to make.

Unlike other UNC institutions, last year had to execute a 4.7% cut because ECU had to execute a 4.7% cut prepare for a scenario with a 10% cut. Besides that But, after last year's 4.7% cut, unique to ECU, nobody here has any idea of how we can possibly do it. The easiest way might be to keep vacant positions unfilled and to fire enough people to make the cut. That number, 10% is so huge that engaging in strategic cuts might not seemed possible. However, it must be attempted. And it has to be done in collaboration between administrators and faculty. And it must be done with clear and frequent

There is no time in recent memory when a long break between semesters is more needed than this academic year.

As it is to be expected under current circumstances, this Fall, faculty's efforts have been spent in adapting to a new teaching environment and schedule. But that is not all we have been doing. Candidates for tenure and promotion have put together their Personnel Action Dossier for consideration by their tenured colleagues. We, the tenured faculty, have given a thorough review of their dossiers and have spent long hours in virtual meetings discussing their merits. In April, when the worthy candidates' names get to your agenda, Trustees can be assured that these faculty members have earned the tenure or promotion that they are seeking.

Also, during this semester, both tenure-track and fixed term faculty will be asking their tenured colleagues to observe and evaluate the teaching effectiveness of their courses. With Spring, we will begin the cycle of writing progress toward tenure letters, examining Portfolios for reappointment of non-tenure track faculty, putting together our annual evaluations, writing letters of recommendations for students who are applying to graduate schools or seek honors, scholarships...

Of course, we will once again invest time and energy in improving our teaching. Many of us, myself included, are quite new to teaching 100% online, we will seek the help of the Office of Faculty Excellence and will follow the recommendations of our colleagues in the Faculty Senate Distance Education Committee about making our courses more engaging.

You can see from this brief overview that, contrary to popular misconceptions, faculty are not solitary wolfs interested only in their obscure topic of research and disconnected from the world, our

colleagues, or students. Our professional life is collaborative and interdependent. Our success is due in part to the support we have received along the way.

on April, Tenured faculty have just completed a thoroughly review of the Personnel Action Dossiers of candidates for tenure and or promotion. Faculty

the review of Personnel Action Dossiers for candidates for tenure and promotion. By the time Trustees get to see the Personnel Summary Form of candidates, the names of those recommended, they would have gone through an minil have attended a few meetings of this board by now, and although not yet complete, my understanding of the complexities of your duties is much increased since July. Since we are all seating around this table because we believe not only in ECU in specific, but in the value of higher education in general, I would argue that the April's meeting of the BoT is the most important one in the calendar.

your April meeting is the most important one in your calendar. That is when you, as the of the University confer tenure and or promotion to deserving faculty members. Each one of the faculty you approve has gone through a review process that starts with the review by their peers. The By the time the recommendations However biased you might think I am, I still think that your April meeting is now and In April you will have tlf this Fall the faculty had to focused a lot of energy to adapting to a new teaching environment and schedule, we expect to have to

faculty would need the long break between Fall and Spring semesters than