

Faculty Council Meeting, February 14, 2020

Opening Comments

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Welcome to the February meeting of the UNC Faculty Council. Every month brings new developments and events at our University; Today is Valentine's Day and love should be the subject of the day; but we have other feelings to discuss.

This week we've received the good news that District Court Judge Allen Baddour has overturned the Silent Sam Settlement that the Board of Governors made last November with the Sons of Confederate Veterans. This is a legal ruling to celebrate. I appreciate the efforts of the various students, faculty colleagues, alumni and lawyers who worked to develop legal questions and challenges for the November settlement.

We all remember our December Faculty Council Resolution, which condemned this settlement as a violation of our University's core mission to conduct careful research and teach carefully-established knowledge in all fields, including history. We've talked about how more than 30 different departments and University Units also condemned the settlement; and there have been ongoing efforts by faculty and students to explain why an agreement to pay more than \$2.5 million to a neo-Confederate organization was wrong.

We don't know what the Board of Governors will now propose as a solution for this Zombie Confederate Statue that seems always to reappear; but we must continue to emphasize in the clearest possible terms that we don't want the statue returned to our campus. I think our Chancellor will provide his perspectives on Judge Baddour's recent ruling, though he may still be uncertain (like all of us) about the likely next steps. For the moment, however, we can celebrate the Judge's decision to void the awful agreement which had required our University to give millions of dollars to an organization that defends the racist cause and armies of the Confederacy and that should never receive our own much-needed money

The latest legal ruling alters a recent injustice, but it does not alter our ongoing efforts to understand our University's long, complex history. Since our last Council Meeting, the "Commission on History, Race, and A Way Forward" has officially launched its work. As the co-chairs of the Commission, Pat Parker and Jim Leloudis, told us in January, they will pursue a comprehensive, difficult reckoning with our University's complex entanglement with slavery and later structures of white supremacy; and we don't know where their work will lead;

I want again to thank Chancellor Guskiewicz for setting up this Commission and for pledging to support its honest exploration of the past; and at the Board of Trustees meeting in January, I urged the members of the University Affairs Committee to respond positively and actively to the recommendations that will emerge from the Commission.

As we continue to engage with historical legacies, I want to mention that the annual African-American History Month lecture will take place this coming Monday, February 17, at 7:00 pm at the Sonja Haynes Stone Center. The speaker will be Beverly Guy-Sheftall, who is the Anna Julia Cooper Professor of Women's Studies at Spelman College in Atlanta and a leading expert on the history of African American women; This will be another important event in a

series of events marking African American history this month at UNC; and I encourage you to attend.

I want now to say a few words about the themes of today's Council meeting. We'll begin by honoring our colleague John McGowan who is receiving the Thomas Jefferson Award, and after some remarks from the Chancellor and Provost we'll discuss two reports on recent surveys of Students and Fixed Term Faculty. The Student survey explored student views about Free Expression and Public Dialogues on our campus; and the Fixed Term Faculty Survey explored how the non-tenure track faculty view their work and lives at UNC; both surveys offer a snapshot of current concerns. Our colleagues will provide reports on these surveys, so I won't summarize their themes now.

I do want to note, however, that our University community seems to resemble the wider society in that people are talking about a lot of fears. I hear about the fears of colleagues and students almost every day. Fear is of course a common emotion—and even on Valentine's day it can challenge love for emotional dominance. People have had all kinds of fears in every historical era. But in my recent conversations with faculty, students and staff I've been struck by the ways in which people are feeling so many deep fears in this winter of 2020.

You've probably also been hearing about a lot of fears when you talk with colleagues and students.

People fear that we're seeing the breakdown of democratic institutions and traditions in both our national and state governments; and we're often watching almost helplessly as these institutions become dysfunctional and face exceptional pressures.

Or people fear a global pandemic as the Coronavirus spreads through communities in Asia and into other places in Europe and America.

Students, faculty and staff alike fear the consequences of the rapid climate change and global warming that our political leaders are unwilling or unable to address.

Many people are promoting popular nationalisms in Europe and America that stress fears of immigrants or different religions or different ethnic and racial communities.

Within our own University there's a lot of fear about campus safety and the dangers of white supremacist groups who might bring guns into our community.

We'll talk today about specific fears that keep some students from expressing their beliefs in classrooms and campus events.

I also hear from colleagues about how they fear the policies of our University System's Board of Governors or the priorities of our state government leaders.

Faculty in fixed term positions fear the uncertainties of year-to-year employment and both faculty and staff fear the current health care costs for their families.

Some fear the influence of outside donors on the values of our University culture or the anti-intellectual dangers of a hostile political culture.

I'm sure you've heard and even felt many of these fears yourself. Fear is a powerful force in our national culture and even within our own University. But these widespread fears give University Faculty an essential social role, because our teaching and research offer alternatives to fear. Gaining new knowledge offers ways to demystify what people fear; and education is empowering because it provides skills to confront the forces that create our fears.

Political leaders and radical Nationalists thrive by stoking fears and urging people to be fearful of those who are different. *Universities at their best can reduce fears by building knowledge of and engagement with people who come from different cultures, different traditions, and different experiences.* Great Universities—when they are doing their work well—can become an antidote to the pervasive fears that polarize societies and foster obsessions with cultural and national difference.

Franklin Roosevelt recognized the problem of pervasive fears in his famous first inaugural address. I happened to read his speech recently, and it seemed that his views of America in 1933 might well be relevant for our University in 2020. *“This is preeminently the time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly,”* he argued in 1933. And his claim about the nation could be applied to our University. *“This great nation [I’ll change the word to University] will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. So, ...let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.”*

I'm sure that as critical-minded, skeptical scholars we could find flaws in Roosevelt's claims from 1933. But as we go forward in today's discussion about the University and the fears that people may be feeling—I'd like to propose that we also think about how the University can serve an essential public role as an empowering antidote to fear.

So Happy Valentine's Day, and let's move on from Franklin Roosevelt and his critique of pervasive fears to the achievements of our fearless Jefferson Award recipient for 2019-20. And I'll ask Chancellor Guskiewicz to introduce this recognition event.