

Faculty Council Meeting, April 17, 2020
Opening Comments
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Welcome to the April meeting of the UNC Faculty Council, which is our last Council meeting for the year and another extraordinary gathering on Zoom. We also have the usual livestream, though we are sharing today's video with people beyond the Council via Youtube, where there is also information below the video about how non-Council members can ask questions via a link or a text message. Council participants should note via the chat function that they have a question, and you will be recognized to speak through the usual zoom audio.

I want to begin this meeting with a hearty thank-you to the great team at the Office of Faculty Governance for the work they've done to organize the complex technology for this event: *Thanks to Helena Knego, Lisa-Jean Michienzi, Kadejah Murray and Faculty Secretary Vin Steponaitis*. They've worked very hard to organize this meeting; and I want to stress that Faculty Governance depends constantly on the amazing work that they do throughout the year—even when there is not a pandemic. I also thank Emily Blackburn for her assistance in managing the technology for questions at this meeting.

I said last month that there had never been a Faculty Council meeting in an almost empty room or on Zoom, but now I can say that we're carrying this social isolation to an even higher level; and I'm sure that our predecessors never convened a Faculty Council meeting at which not even two people were present in the same room. We're all living in Zoomland now, and it can wear us down.

As people in every community and institution keep repeating: we're truly in uncharted waters as we struggle to keep our personal lives and professional lives precariously balanced within the four walls of our scattered houseboats that are keeping us afloat in these choppy seas.

We are scholars and teachers who like to think that we can understand and explain many different aspects of the natural world and social world. But I'm sure that when we convened our first Faculty Council meeting of this academic year, nobody imagined the situation in which we would be convening our last meeting of the year in April.

Although we're mostly dispersed in our own places now, we've all shared this disorienting experience in which the usual components of our lives are severely disrupted and we're forced to live with all kinds of uncertainties. Our undergraduate and graduate students are living this experience, but it's also the experience of our staff, our faculty, our administrators, and all of our families. So in a strange way, we're all learning about the many vulnerabilities of our lives and our institutions—even as we try to respond as creatively as we possibly can.

I want to thank everyone for the incredible work that you continue to do in these times; both faculty and staff alike are all learning about the meaning of resiliency as we deal with a looming budget crisis. I also want especially to note the challenges that our graduate students are facing as they lose summer research fellowships, travel grants, and job opportunities. This pandemic is affecting students at all levels, but it's a particular professional crisis for graduate students, as some explained in a list of concerns and demands during this past week.

There has also been a clear summary of concerns in a collective statement from the Senate of the Graduate and Professional Student Federation, to which the Chancellor, Provost and Dean of the Graduate School have responded. And I want to emphasize that faculty share the concerns that the Graduate Student Federation has summarized.

At today's Council meeting we're going to hear from the Chancellor and Provost about the University's evolving response to the Covid-19 crisis, which includes issues that may affect students, staff and faculty in different ways. But we'll also discuss some changing plans for the new Data Science program and the work of the Task Force on Promotion and Tenure, led by Ron Strauss. This working group has developed recommendations that are designed to provide greater flexibility in the ways we can recruit new colleagues and evaluate faculty for promotion. We'll also hear from the Chair of the Committee on Appointments, Promotion, and Tenure, Steve Crews, who will report on his Committee's support for these recommendations.

Before turning to the future, however, I want to stress that Faculty Governance has played an essential role throughout this year in addressing issues that arose *before* the Covid Crisis as well as issues that have arisen during the crisis. And these issues will continue to affect our University after we emerge from the current upheavals.

Both the Council and our many Faculty committees have responded to complex, controversial issues such as: (1) the creation of the Program on Public Discourse; (2) the Board of Governors' now-rescinded agreement to give Silent Sam and \$2.5 million to the Sons of the Confederate Veterans; (3) the AAU report on Sexual Misconduct; (4) the challenges of budget uncertainties and salary inequities as well as the specific concerns of fixed term faculty; (5) the student, staff and faculty concerns about campus safety; (6) the difficult engagement with our University's historical entanglement with slavery, racism, and discrimination; and (7) attitudes about Free Speech and diversity within the UNC community.

At the same time, the Faculty Council and Committees have been much engaged with the University's pivot toward the future, which includes: (1) the work of our Task Group on historical reckoning; (2) the innovative proposals for a new data science programs; (3) the implementation of the Strategic Plan, *Carolina Next*; (4) the roll-out of the future General Education Curriculum for undergraduates; and (5) the ongoing success of our ambitious fundraising campaign.

There are many other issues that I could mention—issues that raise new challenges as well as new opportunities. But my main point in noting issues we've addressed this year is to emphasize that Faculty have to be involved in the analysis and policy-making that accompany all important problems, controversies, and institutional changes. Faculty will also need to be deeply involved with the processes that will shape the transitions back to classroom instruction and campus research as well as the continuing refinement of on-line teaching.

The institutional structures for this involvement will come through Faculty Governance and the commitment to shared governance among both faculty and administrators. As I welcome our next chair of the faculty, Mimi Chapman (who will speak to us soon), I want to emphasize to all our faculty colleagues that she will depend (as I have) on the amazing work of people throughout every part of this very strong university.

We are especially fortunate in having University leaders who have wide experience as faculty members themselves; and I particularly thank Kevin Guskiewicz, Bob Blouin, and the deans of all our schools for their remarkable work in responding creatively to the vast consequences of the Covid-19 crisis. They will continue to face major challenges. But I know that they intend to work constantly with the faculty, staff, and students as we go forward into the still-unknown territory of declining economic resources, changing instructional patterns, and continuing uncertainties about when we can resume all of our normal public activities—from sports events and theatrical productions to state outreach and service programs. We have to be a collaborative team as we make our way through all of these complex transitions.

As we move now into the issues on today’s agenda, I want to say that it has been a great honor for me to serve this year as chair of the Faculty Council. I’ve learned from so many people and gained new insights into the incredible talents of the people who work and study at UNC. I’ve also developed a new appreciation for the people who held leadership positions at UNC in the past; and I’ve thought of myself this year as one of the baton carriers in the University’s great relay race toward the future.

Our predecessors have given the UNC baton to our generation, and we’ll pass this baton to others who will build on the work that we’re doing today—including our work during this pandemic. In a moment we’re going to honor colleagues who have died over this last year, and we’ll recognize them as some of people who have given us the institutional baton that we’ll pass on to others.

But I want to conclude my remarks today by quoting the wisdom of a wise philosopher. As I think you know from past meetings, I like to turn to humanistic traditions and writers to make sense of our current situations. Last month it seemed that Boccaccio and Camus offered especially useful perspectives for our current crisis.

But today I want to quote the Stoic thinker Epictetus, who lived in the era of the Roman Empire from about 55-135 CE. He had been born into slavery and though he eventually gained his freedom and became a teacher, he knew about all the adversities of the human condition—from physical limitations to the numerous obstacles that block people from achieving their goals or ambitions. His perspective on how to live a good life is worth quoting briefly as we move forward with our own struggles in 2020.

“What really frightens and dismays us [Epictetus explained] is not external events themselves, but the way in which we think about them. It is not external things that disturb us, but our interpretation of their significance.”

“The greater the difficulty, the more glory we have in surmounting it. Skillful pilots gain their reputation from storms and tempests.... Make the best of what is in our power, and take the rest as it occurs.”

May we all be “skillful pilots” as we sail together and with our University through this great Covid tempest. And now I would like to ask for a moment of Silence in our Zoom-bound homes as we recognize the colleagues who have died over this past year.