

Mimi Chapman  
FC Comments  
September 11, 2020

Colleagues:

Welcome to our first Faculty Council meeting of the 2020-2021 academic year. This is of course my first full Faculty Council meeting to preside over and again, I want to thank you for entrusting me with this position at this critical time. Nineteen years ago, also on September 11th, we found ourselves as we do now deeply shaken, both as a campus and as a country. Certain elements of our collective life were brought into sharp relief, aspects of our personal and professional lives that we are often able to ignore and overlook. But now we know that in this moment and perhaps in all moments really we are called to action, even as we are called to reflection, called to joy, and called to grief. I want to spend a few minutes on grief.

On September 11, 2001 we lost alumnae of our institution as well as the personal losses that many in our community experienced. In the weeks leading up to 9-11-2020 we have lost, quite suddenly, two scholars and friends, who inspired and embodied so much of what we hope to be at Carolina. Jenny Tone-Pah-Hote, was an associate professor in American Studies. Her friend and colleague, Larry Chavis, sent a message that he has given me permission to draw from. In it he noted that Jenny was spearheading efforts to craft a Land Acknowledgement for UNC. It was important to her that native peoples be recognized and honored by the university. He also remembered a particular community arts event Jenny sang in a spur of moment open mic session. He notes that her choice to open herself up through song and fully participate in the event allowed for a genuine connection with community members. He says, "She wasn't a professor that stood outside of a community, just an Indian woman being in community with other Indians. She built more community ties and goodwill in those few moments than most professors will build in a lifetime." Godspeed to you, Jenny Tone-Pah-Hote. You have set an example for us and we will miss you.

We have also lost Randall Kenan, a prize-winning author and a teacher deeply invested in his students, their writing, and their success. Several people sent pieces of his work that I might consider reading today. However, I've chosen to read excerpts from two interviews he did that share something critical about who he was as a professor, an advocate, and a writer. The first excerpt I'll read is about teaching:

Professor Kenan recalled:

The first year I taught was the best year because I was forced to think about things that I believed but had never been made to articulate. And I think that is a strange sort of power...Teaching expanded my ability to deal with various and inverse forms because the last thing I wanted to do was to force somebody to write like me, or to force someone to drink only from the cup I drank from. So, if someone came to me and said that he or she was from this

part of the country and these were the writers that a person really liked, then I had to find ways to help the student achieve their vision and work through that canon.

Next is a Quote that speaks to the advocacy embedded in his work: Here he is referring to a character in one of his stories that some critics see as based on himself as a young man. Yet, there is an unhappy outcome and the interviewer is asking why Randall made the choice to have the character come to a tragic end.

Professor Kenan replies:

If you're looking at it from a political angle – which is what I do at the very last moment – the situation has not gotten that much better for a lot of people. It seemed, and it seems, that for a community to change they have to understand the devastation that they are wreaking on certain people. ...That's what tragedy does. As a reader, you should be upset. ...I have upset you; now I can get you to think about this.

That has particular resonance for me as we think about the police murders this summer as well as our campus work on racial equity that so many faculty, staff, and students are pushing forward right now.

This last quote features the joy he found in his craft:

Sometimes I think people think I'm being avant or what not when I say this, but I really do like being up at two o'clock in the morning, and you've been up forty-eight hours, and you're grungy, and you have a bad taste in your mouth, and you've been drinking all this coffee, and your hair is a mess, and you haven't seen a human being for a long time- or the sun is coming up- and you've just finished writing something, something you like. Well, there's not enough money, or lack of it, to take that away. I really do love it.

Jenny and Randall, you will continue to inspire us to teach with fire and compassion, to engage deeply and genuinely with communities inside and outside of our campus, and to push for equity in all that we do as we attempt to truly be a university of the people. We mourn your passing.

Now to today's agenda: Even in difficult moments, there is much to celebrate. We'll begin with awards and introduce some student representatives, we'll hear an update on where our campus currently stands, and then move to discussing two very important areas: the budget and the spring semester. I've asked the provost and the chancellor to provide as much detail as possible in these areas, with a particular focus on process and how faculty voices will be engaged.

To that end, you've heard me speak about a version of an "after action review" or a "post-mortem" on the road map to fall, a chance to reflect on what went right, what went wrong, and what needs to be different going forward. I think this type of experience will dovetail with a

committee the Chancellor will be describing today. So I will talk more about the “after action” aspect once those details have been provided. That description will not happen today, but I will write to you or otherwise communicate about it next week. I know this is a shift, but I don’t want to do things that become simple exercises and are not meaningful given the pace at which other developments are happening. So more to come on that.

We will have some opportunity for questions and comments today. To do this, if you are a member of faculty council you can use the Q &A feature in zoom. Helena Knego is going to be feeding me questions to pose that come in from the Q &A. Chat is on. But will not be monitored. For those of you outside the zoom room watching by livestream, you can pose questions and comments using Poll Everywhere and we will bring those into the discussion in the same way. At this point, I’ll turn our meeting over to our Chancellor to announce our award winners.