

Opening Remarks by Chair of the Faculty Mimi Chapman  
Meeting of the Faculty Council  
February 19, 2021

Colleagues: Welcome to Faculty Council. We know we have a full house along with guests watching on the livestream. As you know, we've been challenged during the pandemic to figure out the best way to hold Faculty Council meetings from a technological standpoint. Today, we're trying another variation. As you can see, all Faculty Council members and guests are in the "panelist" category. This allows us to all see and talk with one another. We do have one resolution on our agenda that will require a vote and we're going to see if we can do that without having to put voting members into the attendee status. I'll let Vin explain that when the time comes. However, depending on what transpires, we may get into a position where we'll have to make that switch. So, if we need to make any changes, we'll explain what we're doing and why. So please bear with us if that happens. Now I'd like to move to more substantive comments.

Any "down time" I have had this week has been spent thinking about what I would say to you today. As you know, last week, members of our chapter of the AAUP published a letter calling for the Chancellor's resignation. I heard about this letter before it was published and wrote to the chapter president letting him know that I disagreed with this choice. Other leaders in faculty governance also did this and they called the AAUP's decision "reckless." As I understand it from news reports, the "vast majority" of what was described as a 70 member AAUP chapter supported this statement. Since the term "vast majority" has no real meaning, what we know is that somewhere between 36 and 69 people actively supported this unsigned letter. This statement does not represent the 4000-person faculty of the University of North Carolina at

Chapel Hill. It is the view of the people who released it, nothing more and nothing less.

What is clear is that our campus remains deeply injured by events surrounding the removal of the statue known as Silent Sam. There is no one in this community who is untouched by current racism or by the historical wrongs that Silent Sam embodied. This week I have talked with faculty members who have told me what it feels like to be descendants of enslaved people on our campus during these difficult times. For many of us, our ancestry is littered with people who enslaved others or benefited from the system of slavery. The legacy is painful for all of us when we really look at it. And so, it is no wonder that the new information published by the Daily Tar Heel raised new questions. I and others asked the Chancellor to respond to those news items and he has responded. For some of us the response was satisfactory. For others, questions remain. Although the Chancellor will speak for himself shortly, it sounds to me as though he has told us what he can about the situation given the governance structure in which our university sits. I recognize many of us crave the particulars: the who, what, when, where, why, and how, and, because of our student journalists' work, we know more of that than we did before. But the reality is the people that can tell the whole story are most likely working at the UNC system level and/or within the Board of Governors. If we want further answers, that is the place to look.

Many people have called Sam a lightning rod and I think it's an apt comparison. A lightning rod draws down all of the energy from a storm into one place so that other structures are protected. In some ways, our continuing focus on Sam does the same thing. It keeps us focused on the statue and settlement and diverts our attention from the other structures on our campus that perpetuate racism, both literal and figurative, that desperately need our energy and focus. Students have told us about classroom experiences that alienate them. Faculty and

staff of color voice concerns about current circumstances that need attention. And, as we know, many people are working hard to move equity forward on our campus. But too often, that work is pushed only by our BIPOC colleagues. That is unfair and unjust. We all have to commit ourselves to equity every day in all our work.

In focusing on these present challenges, I do not want to suggest that the circumstances of the statue's removal, the proposed settlement with a group with ties to white supremacy and an inaccurate view of the civil war is any less repulsive. It was and is abhorrent. And the fact that, but for one judge, a \$2.5 million settlement would have been the only way to keep that statue off our campus, is terrifying. Furthering the difficulty is that as a community, we have not had time to face and grieve what has happened. The December 6<sup>th</sup> Faculty Council meeting that has been pointed to of late occurred not six weeks before the first case of COVID-19 was identified in the U.S. Now, over a year later, we are just beginning to feel like there is hope to move beyond the crisis. As we begin to come out of the pandemic, we will need ways to re-orient and face all that has happened including our experiences with the statue. We will need to think as a community – faculty, staff, students, and administration – about what we have learned about truth-telling, transparency and decision-making. To do so honors our commitment to and relationship with each other.

Over the last few days, Dr. Sibby Anderson-Tompkins, Dr. Dawn Osborne-Adams and others have begun to think about a series of talking circles where members of our campus community might come together to talk about what these experiences have meant, what has been learned, what we grieve, and what we want leaders in administration to know about how we hope they will interact with faculty, staff, and students when the next difficult set of circumstances or crisis hits. Because such times will come, and we all need to learn from what has happened and consider how we might do better. Not

everyone will want to participate in those conversations. Some feel talk is cheap, and I understand that sentiment. But as a plan and such invitations to join in come together, I hope you will consider participating nonetheless. We never know which conversation will make the change and shift the narrative, indeed which drop will make the cup overflow.

With that, I'll turn it over to our Chancellor.