

Chair of the Faculty Remarks – December 3, 2021

Hello everyone, welcome to our last faculty council meeting of 2021. It is hard to believe that we have made it through this difficult semester. The whole calendar year has been a challenge, but here we are and, I for one am grateful.

Let me start with thanks. There are so many people that worked so hard to make this semester, which started in the deep worry associated with the delta variant, work. We all recognize the amazing efforts of Dr. Amir Barzan who began setting up a state-of-the-art testing program in January of 2021 and adjusted that program to the changing needs of the pandemic and our campus. He balanced science with all of our worries. On more than one occasion, he called me to understand more about faculty concerns, listened carefully, and adjusted his plans accordingly. He described to me how his team was working around the clock and we all owe this group a great deal. Faculty Executive Committee member, Meg Zomorodi, was also deeply involved in organizing a student volunteer corps referred to as “Meg’s Army.” To Meg, her team, and those students again huge thanks.

Our provost, who we will say more about a bit later, worked very diligently to plan throughout the pandemic. He too called to ask me to help him understand faculty concerns in more detail. An insightful person recognizes when their own worldview and expertise are getting in the way of truly hearing others. Bob had these insights and acted on them to improve communication. So many thanks to him.

The Faculty Executive Committee also deserves great thanks. The committee began the pandemic acting as a conduit for information gathering and feedback for the campus as a whole. Your elected faculty representatives brought your voice loud and clear to every table. I thank them for their good counsel and for their robust representation of all of you. Likewise, the staff in the Office of Faculty Governance, Helena Knego, Kadejah Murray, and Emma Cromwell, together with our Secretary of the Faculty, Jill Moore have all been incredible. Pivoting in how we hold meetings to accommodate, not just the pandemic, but fast-evolving situations, getting documents out, editing letters, and helping me think through so many issues often with next to no time to spare. I personally owe them so much.

However, in truth, it has taken everyone in our campus community to move through this difficult time – and I should note – it is not over yet. You, the faculty, the staff, our graduate student instructors have been there to work with students who we know have suffered greatly. You have been steadfast in your commitment both to well-being and to education. Your research and scholarship continue to change the world. Now officially halfway through my term as chair, it remains the honor of my career to represent you in this way.

I am also happy to note the good news this morning that two buildings on our campus have been renamed to honor people who were trailblazers on this campus. Hortense McClinton, the first black professor at UNC hired into the School of Social Work, and Henry Owl, the first Native American student at UNC. This is a victory that was led by the Campus Commission on Race,

History, and a Way Forward – Pat Parker and Jim Leloudis – and our Chancellor, who takes these recommendations to the Board of Trustees for their approval. When people have not always been well represented, it sometimes takes some education, to understand why representation, such as the naming or renaming of buildings, is so important. Thanks to Pat, Jim, the members of the Commission, our Chancellor for doing that education work, and to our Board of Trustees for approving this change that will increase representation and belonging on our campus.

Today, I am focusing on being thankful, but I want you to know that does not mean I do not recognize how tired we all are and how difficult this year has been. I hope this holiday season will be a time of renewal for you in whatever way is most meaningful. I appreciate you, our campus, and wish you a very happy holiday season.