

Annual Report of the Faculty Senate Chair - 2012

The Faculty Senate experience over the last 16 years has been very gratifying to me. Coming in as a first year senator, I quickly learned that UofL is made up of faculty from many different philosophical views and varied backgrounds, but that they are all intelligent and thoughtful. Through participation, I also found that the real senate work is done in the senate's standing committees. Details of each committee can be found in their annual reports. This preparation gave me the background to ascend to leadership of the senate; a position with challenges, rewards and most of all a sense of gratification knowing that shared governance is alive and well at UofL.

When I speak of shared governance, I have the perception that many do not appreciate what we have here at UofL. Simply put, we have developed a strong level of cooperation between central administration and the senate. We are one of the few universities and the only one in Kentucky in which the president and the provost both make an attempt to attend each senate meeting and to give informative, meaningful material and listen to constructive criticism. (Some schools feel privileged if the president makes an annual visit.) The senate also has access to other high ranking administrators who will make open and candid reports as requested; a prime example being the Vice President for Finance and his office. Because of the mutual respect, the senate is offered a seat on nearly all administration based ad-hoc committees and the senate leadership greatly appreciates the fact that you respond to the call for participation in these assignments. As in all things, improvement can be attained and I look forward to President Ramsey's comments on shared governance contained in this year's State of the University address.

A major topic this past year has been the financial plight of the UofL Hospital. As you know, the president tried to orchestrate a merger that was ultimately vetoed by the governor. The reason for the proposed merger was economic with projections that the hospital would be running a deficit in the very near future. This would have a direct effect on the faculty as those at the HSC may seek employment elsewhere; consequently, weakening our ability to deliver the high standard of care currently given. A second point is that units campus wide could face budget issues as the hospital may no longer contribute to the academic mission of the university. Currently, there are ongoing confidential negotiations based on a Request for Proposal issued earlier this year to bring some economic stability to the hospital.

A faculty handbook has been talked about for many years and attempts have been made to build one but nothing came of these past efforts. I was determined to get one in place and with the approval and financial support of the provost, Tracy Eells and I co-chair the faculty handbook committee and will have a draft for review in the near future. The handbook will be online with an extensive table of contents organized in outline fashion. Each topic in the table of contents will be a hyperlink to the relevant information.

When I began as Senate Chair, I set out two goals:

1) Improved communication to the faculty regarding senate business.

Representatives from the UofL Communications staff, usually Janene Zacconi, agreed to take notes of our meetings and provide them quickly to senators from each unit for distribution to their faculty. In addition, the notes are posted to UofL Today. Many appreciative and positive comments have been given regarding the updates on the senate activities.

2) To better inform the Senate of relevant legislative activities.

A seat on the UofL legislative review panel was requested and granted. Much of the material discussed does not directly impact faculty such as maintenance regulations; however, topics such as admission of Pikeville University into the state system of higher education or alteration and possible reduction of scholarship monies are significant and the senate had a voice at the table to define UofL's position.

As the Faculty Senate moves forward under Professor Steffen's leadership, I would like to ask that you give him support in one of his initiatives which is communication. I think the monthly notes have helped and I encourage him to continue them, but a recent survey presented to the Great Places to Work committee indicated that only 55% of the faculty felt communication within the university was adequate. I know the president and provost will attempt to be more visible; but I ask that you, as senators, make a serious attempt at keeping those who elected you informed. Also, I want to encourage each of you to become more active regarding the legislature. Please let your local representatives know how vital funding is to our mission in higher education. I realize many of you may not feel comfortable doing this; but, when I started, neither did I. Now I see it as a must to maintain our position in higher education.

I would like to make an announcement of significance regarding a faculty position in the College of Business. I have initiated activity with Keith Inman and with the strong encouragement of the BoT have begun fund raising for a Chair in Business Economics in the name of Jim Ramsey. Dean Moyer indicates that he will make a faculty line available and the endowment will go to support the activities of the distinguished professor who occupies this position. Dr. Ramsey approves of this and wants to be closely involved in both defining the position and in the selection of the professor.

As I conclude my second term, let me say thank you for the courtesies and support you have given me over the past two years.

Respectfully,

Bob Staat