

Comments of Dr. Rick Roth to the Academic Affairs Committee, R.U. Board of Visitors,  
September 15, 2011

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee on behalf of Radford University's faculty. Let me begin by saying that this University has a faculty that is accomplished, extraordinarily hard-working, and dedicated to both our students and to Radford University. It is a privilege for me, speaking personally, to be a part of the R.U. faculty and an honor to have been chosen to represent them.

This year's Convocation recognized several outstanding faculty and their accomplishments. The handout summarizes their awards and achievements, for those who could not attend Convocation. We are justly proud of their accomplishments, yet I don't want to lose sight of the fact that every year, many R.U. faculty who are not recognized accomplish great things too. They find new ways to teach English composition, calculus, and physics; they engage in research and involve students in their research; they contribute to the life of the University through committee work; and they are engaged in the community "in their spare time," lending their knowledge and expertise to solving problems of commerce, government, public health and safety, and civic life. They find time to counsel students and engage them personally. All these things they do despite what in most cases is a heavy teaching load, and for pay that on average is relatively low.

Last year, the Faculty Senate Campus Environment Committee conducted, as it has annually for a number of years, a survey of faculty morale. The results of the 2011 survey were distributed at the May 2011 B.O.V. meeting. The survey results show that faculty are very dedicated and care about the future of the University, but also that there are significant problem areas. In general, faculty are not satisfied with the state of the University, and their level of satisfaction decreases as one moves up the administrative ladder. In other words, if you ask faculty about their departments, their average response is somewhere between "pretty good" and "not too bad." As one moves up the ladder to deans, the provost, the president, and the Board, the level of satisfaction declines. Reasons for dissatisfaction vary. While one can get some insight into the sources of dissatisfaction by reading the written comments (which you have available), one must be careful not to read too much into these; most respondents did not include written comments, so the comments cannot be considered representative.

My own interpretation (and I have read the comments) is that we faculty are still recovering from the unfortunate events of 2008-2010, in which a failure to adhere to principles of shared governance resulted in a loss of confidence in the academic leadership, months of turmoil and wasted effort, and other consequences which we are still unraveling. To name just two specific

examples: the creation of the Core Curriculum, widely perceived as having been forced upon the faculty; and the restructuring of departments and colleges without involving or even consulting the affected faculty. In both cases, administrative decisions were made, hastily, without adequate consideration of likely consequences, and without involving stakeholders.

Thus it was with eager anticipation that we read in the job announcement for Provost, the following sentence: “Candidates must demonstrate a commitment to shared governance and to a decision-making process that is collaborative and fosters academic quality, diversity, and a culture of close faculty/student interaction in the learning process.” And thus it is with optimism that we look forward to working with Dr. Sam Minner, who has demonstrated a commitment to shared governance, and whose appointment I think reflects a renewed commitment to the principle of shared governance on the part of the President and the Board of Visitors. The Executive Council of the Faculty Senate met informally twice over the summer with Dr. Minner. Our discussions were frank and I think established a mutual sense of trust and good will. We told Dr. Minner that we wanted him to succeed as Provost and would do whatever we could to help him to do so. I think we are off to a very good start and we look forward to a productive and amicable partnership.

Last year the Faculty Senate accomplished a great deal. This year we hope to build on last year’s work on the Core and to address other issues, some new and some carried over from last year.

Let me just highlight a few of the academic affairs issues that the Faculty Senate intends to address this year:

--We will continue to work on the Core Curriculum. As a result of last year’s efforts, the organizational infrastructure for Core A offerings has been much improved. But challenges remain. Many faculty and students remain critical of the Core in its design and execution. Heavy reliance on adjuncts for the 200-level classes is unsatisfactory. It is unclear whether anticipated budgets can continue to support the small class size central to the concept of the Core. The Faculty Senate Executive Council looks forward to working productively and cooperatively with the new Core Director, Dr. Stephen Owen, and with the Core Curriculum Advisory Committee, to meet these challenges.

--We will review, with Dr. Minner, the system of internal governance here at Radford University. The Faculty Senate Executive Council has agreed, and we hope that Dr. Minner will agree, that there is a need to clarify and streamline internal governance structures and processes, to coordinate the work of the internal governance standing committees with the Faculty Senate and its standing committees, and clearly to distinguish processes for structural changes versus curricular changes in academic affairs.

--We will address issues surrounding an increase in offerings of distance learning courses, particularly online courses. As Dr. Minner pointed out to the Faculty Senate Executive Council, more distance learning is coming, driven by technology, economics, and consumer demand. It will challenge those of us comfortable with face to face instruction. Many issues will need to be resolved for distance education to take hold at R.U., including intellectual property rights; recruitment of faculty to offer such courses; and impact of such courses on faculty workloads.

--We hope to work with Dr. Minner and others to look at how teaching is evaluated in terms of the overall evaluation of faculty. The current heavy reliance on scores from student evaluations of faculty is too one-sided and may create a perverse incentive to lower academic standards, inflate grades, and pander to students. Untenured faculty who are subject to reappointment or are on a tenure track may be especially susceptible to such temptations, but any faculty member hoping for a raise will be subject to such an economic incentive.

--Last, but not least, we look forward to working together with the QEP Writing Team and Dr. Webster-Garrett, Interim Director of the QEP, to further develop and implement the QEP theme of "Scholar Citizens." The QEP writing team will present its work to the Faculty Senate later today.

To sum up: These are but a few of the challenges we face this year. Some are daunting. But, we have an outstanding faculty and a new Provost who we believe will also be outstanding, and we are ready to work together to meet these challenges.

| Thank you.