Remarks from Bruce Cairns, Chair of the Faculty

Faculty Council Meeting

February 19, 2016

Good afternoon and welcome everyone to the second Faculty Council meeting of the 2016 calendar year.

We have a busy agenda and we are going to talk about a number of important and challenging topics so I don’t want to take too much time with my opening remarks but there are few things I would like to reflect on today.

To me it seems like the year is flying by and I think we all recognize we are in time of great transition and change for the University and the faculty.

The nominating committee is working hard on the slate for this year’s faculty governance elections and we will get you more information during the month and at the next Council meeting.

In addition as you already know, Joe Ferrell is retiring as Secretary of the Faculty after so many distinguished years of service, and the Chancellor Advisory Council will bring its nomination for his replacement to the Council soon.

In addition at the University level there have been numerous leadership changes ranging from my own Chair in Surgery Tony Meyer who is stepping down after 15 years to numerous changes senior leadership positions, including Deans and Vice Chancellor positions. From my perspective, both the Provost and the Chancellor have been extremely active in supporting these transitions, ensuring we have the right people in the right jobs and that they have enough resources so that the faculty can succeed.

I cannot reiterate enough how important it is that we have the Chancellor’s and Provost’s support so that is we can do our jobs so I would really like to thank them for their efforts.

Our Board of Trustees has also been quite engaged- working with us, the Chancellor, the President and the Board of Governors to ensure Carolina has what it needs to continue to be successful. We have one of our newly appointed, distinguished trustees here with us today, Bill Keyes. Trustee Keyes is an internationally recognized leader in education who established the renowned Institute for Responsible Citizenship. Trustee Keyes tells me he is here to
observe and learn rather than participate- but thank you sir for your service and being here. Each time new Trustees are appointed we give them an orientation on Faculty Governance and I am very impressed with how much they are engaged with every facet of the University.

As you know, Margaret Spellings will officially begin as President of the UNC System on March 1. There are of course a lot opinions about this but I would like to briefly share mine. I have not yet met President elect Spellings but I have to say I was pleased to hear state in a recent speech at the Board of Governors retreat that she is committed to many of the principals that we hold dear- access, affordability, financial aid, K-12 education, and I interpreted additional comments to mean she is committed to diversity in its many forms. I also heard President-elect Spellings say that she supports allowing our Chancellor, Trustees and Faculty and Staff run our University and be successful on our terms rather than be micromanaged at the system level.

As a result, I believe Margaret Spellings when she says “I look forward to meeting with, talking to and learning from those who have questions about my record and my intentions. When you get to know me, you’ll see that I am driven to provide education and opportunity for all.” I believe we should give her that chance and I am asking that you as individuals and the Council as a body do that as well.

I fully appreciate others may not fully share my optimism about this and I greatly respect my distinguished colleagues who are going to come forward and share important concerns they have with the Council. Regardless of process and procedure, I fully agree we must work together within the system to ensure that the rights and identities of all people at Carolina are respected and supported- it is who we are.

I also want to mention that the ConnectNC Bond is being voted on this March 15th during Spring Break. Please take the time to vote- this is a very important issue to North Carolina and the University. Chancellor Folt, Dean Bill Roper and many others have worked very hard to demonstrate why this Bond is so important to the University system, community colleges and the people of the state of North Carolina.

Professor Alexander has another wonderful session for the Diversity Syllabus lined up- I will let her explain but I am very excited to hear what our speakers have to say and I am sure you be as well.
I would like to thank the University and the Dental School for its wonderful celebration of Deah Barakat, his wife Yusor Abu-Sahla and her younger sister Razan Abu-Sahla whose lives were tragically cut short by senseless and meaningless violence. The service was simply remarkable, but I was particularly struck by Yusor and and Razan’s father describing their lives and commitment to service as a particularly American story- but I would respectfully add that their stories and lives are Carolina stories as well. This concept applies to many, but I am specifically thinking of Professor Feng Liu, in the Eshelman School of Pharmacy Colonel John Collins, Professor and Chair Aerospace studies, distinguished members of our faculty whose lives were also cut tragically short.

I will end by sharing with you an experience that I had with one of our colleagues, the wonderful Rosa Perelmutter, Professor in Romance Studies and member of the Faculty Executive Committee- by the way, congratulations Rosa on receiving the $1 million grant from the Mellon Foundation to diversify students pursuing doctoral degrees in the humanities, social sciences and fine arts. Rosa and I were at the UNC Hillel, where she is on the Board and Ari Gauss had invited us to have a discussion with two distinguished diplomats David Makovsky and Ghaiath al-Omari who have been traveling the country talking to Universities about their perspectives on how to address the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. What we heard was very encouraging- they told us now is the time for others in that region to respect each other’s identity while working together to slowly address the major issues that have seemed so intractable.

What an attractive concept during a such a tragic time of conflict. I believe in some small way- perhaps even large way- this concept is something we can adopt to help address the issues that affect our University today.