Notes From the Chair

The Board of Regents met on the campus of UNR on September 8 and 9, 2016.

The Senate has opened a Twitter account and we encourage all faculty to follow us. We will be providing useful updates on what’s going on with shared governance on campus, and, in this case, beautiful photos of the meeting and the UNR campus for those who have never been there. (And, for those of you who missed my last missive, you are constantly reminded on their campus that they have twice the square footage per student we do. Their student union is four floors, all with active student spaces, their Student Achievement Center is four stories, all with packed students spaces, it’s kind of depressing).

We are: @UNLVSenate on Twitter.com. https://twitter.com/UNLVSenate

The first “big issue” at this meeting was the establishment of the search committee to find a new Chancellor. The NSHE Code (which is our employment contract) states that the search committee will consist of a group of Regents and that:

“Before it makes its recommendation or recommendations to the Board, the Committee shall consult with an advisory Committee consisting of the presidents of the System institutions, the chairs of the senates and the presidents of the student governments.”

While that sounds to us as the eight presidents, nine senate chairs, and nine student leaders should constitute the advisory group, the actual advisory group created by the chair of the Board contains 14 people, of which two are presidents (CSN and UNR), one is a senate chair (CSN), and one is a student body leader (NSC). The others are community folks.

UNLV is represented by a Vice Provost, the three northern community colleges and DRI have no representation at all. There are no research faculty on the committee.

On the morning of the first day of the meeting, the senate chairs met with the chair of the Board and the Chancellor, and we asked for an explanation. We were told simply that they interpreted the wording of the Code differently than we did. That afternoon, they told the student body presidents the same thing. In public comment the next morning, the senate chairs and student body leaders made public their concerns.

Yesterday, almost a week later, the senate chairs received an email from the Chair of the Board, indicating that there would effectively be two advisory committees, the already formed one, and the one specified in the Code. The committee of presidents and chairs won’t participate in the search, but will meet with the search committee at the conclusion of the interviews. I am
heartened by this reasonable compromise.

It is my advice to never get into a poker game with the Board of Regents. In addition to them signing your employment contract, when you speak to the group they all look engaged and interested, and reveal not the slightest information about whether they agree or disagree with what you are saying. Sometimes, you just have to appreciate the outcome and go on your way.

The second “big issue” is the NSHE’s proposed intellectual property policy which says that every book, article, song, instructional material, thought, or idea you have belongs to NSHE, unless they explicitly give it back to you (though they keep the right to perpetual royalty free license), and, before you think a thought, you have to fill out a form asking permission. [slight hyperbole, but only slight] The chancellor’s office had scheduled this for consideration at this meeting in September, the Senate chairs got it moved to next March. We will not let this happen with the wording in place and we will, in concert with the system attorneys, come up with something that works for everyone. The Boyd School of Law faculty have been very helpful to us in this endeavor.

The Chancellor gave a State of the NSHE presentation which primarily compared Nevada to a group of states with similar populations. Obviously, the comparisons rarely make Nevada look good. The powerpoint is on the Faculty Senate web site: http://facultysenate.unlv.edu/news/state-nshe.

The Regents gave to the Presidents the right to hire and fire Athletic Directors and coaches without regental approval. As a side note, the Board, while doing this, made their ad hoc Athletics committee permanent, and, while they have dissolved the state-wide health care “system,” they kept its oversight committee active as well.

The Regents also passed language which now makes the Presidents get approval from both the Chancellor and the Chair of the Board when hiring a provost. Originally, it included all vice presidents, but we were able to get it slimmed down to only provosts. The Board’s theory is that provosts often become presidents, at least temporarily, so the Board should have a say in who they are.

UNLV created and deleted a bunch of things, all of which have or will end up in Provost Alerts.

I am constantly amazed, as another side note, that at each and every Regent’s meeting the Board commends campuses for “efficiency” actions that save $50,000 a year, then the Board, without comment, passes duplicative or seemingly unnecessary new program requests that cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. This time, UNR got a new PhD in math and a new BA in Dance, all the while acknowledging how good UNLV’s existing programs in this area already are.

The Board has hired a number of consultants over the years who have pointed out that mission creep and program duplication are the biggest money wasting problems in the NSHE, but somehow it never ends.

The Board passed new policies: (1) encouraging programs at the community colleges that give up to 60 credits of college courses to students in their junior and senior years of high school, (2) limiting drones on campus, (3) creating limits on access to the campuses by registered sex offenders, and (4) eliminating the geographic service areas for the community colleges.

UNLV had to spend time at the meeting talking about internal issues within a unit that had risen to Board attention. Among other things, this unit had apparently scheduled all its required courses for majors at the same time, making it impossible for students to graduate. We held this up as an example of how our internal program review process actually works, identifies issues, and recommends change, while maintaining the role of faculty in the management of
their unit.

President Jessup ended the meeting with a good presentation on the upcoming debate preparations.  https://twitter.com/UNLVSenate

The only other really funny moment was CSN announcing that they had hired Isis to help them create their campus master plan. Everyone agreed that the business involved needed to change its name, once they regained their composure.

Bill Robinson
2016-2017 Faculty Senate Chair