The Board of Regents met on March 1 and 2, 2017, at the College of Southern. As always, I apologize for the length of my summary, but I want to give you some of the flavor and context, not just a few scattered facts. The meeting was less eventful than most, with the interesting stuff primarily happening in the committees.

1. A couple days before the main meeting, the Athletics Committee met. You may have read a report of this in the local papers. The first issue was the budget deficit in athletics, which is the result primarily of lack of attendance at men’s basketball and football games, lack of post season play in those sports, and the worst television contract on the planet. The Regents were also critical of how the two universities prepare their EADA reports to the NCAA, something I have commented on before. Those reports are on the Senate website.

   The second issue first, the EADAs are supposed to provide data on equity in athletics, but ours prevents an outsider from evaluating the revenue and expenses on a sport by sport basis in a meaningful way. I teach sports economics, and have used past EADAs as the basis for class projects to analyze the economics of UNLV athletics. You cannot use the current docs from either school to do that. In my book we have never fairly treated many sports, and it used to be pretty obvious. For example, we gave baseball more money for bats and balls than softball, and we gave them more money per player for travel expenses, yet softball was actually generating more revenue. You can’t make those comparisons anymore from the current reports.

   The Regents have promised to return to this issue, which is especially important given that we’ve just increased the student fee for athletics.

   The state of Rebel athletics was the other concern. Some Regents felt that 2013 was a banner year, the best in the last 20, and in 2016 we had fallen to the low point in our entire history. The counter argument is that we were barely bowl eligible in 2013 because of poor academic performance, basketball attendance was declining, and, in fact, 2016 was a record year in that 7 of our 17 sports made the post-season, the most ever (volleyball, soccer, tennis, golf, etc., had great years). We’ve won the Governor’s Cup against UNR each of the past four years.

   I look at athletics as being on a solid foundation (good new coaches in football and basketball, solid results across most of the other sports), with some important issues to resolve. I will let you know how this plays out.

2. On Thursday morning, the Academic, Research and Student Affairs committee met. As expected, they redid the student absences from class policy I have described before.

   The deleted this: Students are expected to attend the classes in which they are enrolled unless absent for institutionally approved activities or other reasons allowed under institutional policy. For institutionally approved absences, it is the student’s responsibility to consult with the professor in advance and as soon as possible regarding the absence and to arrange for the completion of all missed coursework.

   They deleted this: Such policies should take into consideration absences in courses where specialized accreditation or the coursework’s nature may necessitate the student’s presence.

   They deleted this: Instructors may set course attendance requirements, which may include consequences for absences that are not institutionally approved, but such requirements must not conflict with institutional
policies governing student absences.

They added this: Institutions may adopt policies allowing student absences for institutionally approved activities or other reasons allowed by the institutions.

In other words, they deleted the requirement that students attend, and the ability of faculty to control their own attendance policies, transferring the authority to the institution. The Senate will, before this semester is over, fix this by exercising our authority (with everyone's help) and placing in the UNLV Bylaws language to give faculty control over their classrooms. If for no other reasons than ensuring academic freedom and that we meet accreditation standards, such authority must exist. For the current semester, the now deleted Regent's policy was listed in the catalog when the students enrolled, so we are still covered by the old language. The Senate has also suggested to the administration that the registration process include a click to accept on policies, like when you install a new piece of software, rather than have us put pages of stuff into syllabi and catalogs that nobody reads.

3. The Board also approved the exciting new Public Policy Institute, which has the joint backing of former Senator Harry Reid and former Speaker of the House John Boehner, and funding from MGM.

4. The Senate chairs (with help from the Boyd School of Law) presented a rewritten version of the new Intellectual Property Policy to the system office. You may recall that the old proposal said essentially that any idea any faculty, staff, or student has belongs to NSHE, and you had to ask permission before you thought something. We have managed, it appears, to work out a 180 degree turn. The policy which should go to the Board in June will say that traditional scholarly work, work done outside your scope of employment, and most student work belongs to whomever created it and NSHE has no claim. The one exception to that are syllabi, and we as a campus will work on meeting that obligation without creating issues for faculty. In the end, we had a productive, cooperative meeting with the chancellor's staff, and the result is a decent policy that reasonably protects everyone's interests. I'll keep you informed as it moves forward.

5. The Board approved tenure for all our candidates, and gave Francisco Menendez from Film Studies the Regents Creative Activity Award, and Alyssa Crittenden from Anthropology the Regent's Rising Researcher Award.

6. The Senate Chairs made several statements during the meeting about the importance of correcting salary and benefit issues. We tried to phrase the debate in terms of the NSHE creating a long-term plan for compensation, the same point I have made 10,000 times with our administration, with my call for a Faculty RPC (Retention, Promotion, and Career) Program. Until we get systematic, we will not get anywhere. All of the other Senates approved versions of the UNLV Senate’s statement on the PEBP, which was read to the Regents and has been sent to the PEBP. We will keep fighting.

7. As we've noted, the budget outlook is generally good, but there were errors in how the NSHE budget numbers were entered into the state budget system that are apparently not going to be corrected. Crudely, imagine that we put $X into our base budget request to buy a starship, but the state decides space ships are a non-base item. To make the change, the state accountants create a second entry deleting the starship from our base, then create a third entry adding it back in as non-base. (The one entry has become three, but with the same result – two plus $X and one minus $X). Now the governor decides not to fund our starship, but the accountants accidently delete only two of the three entries (the adds), without deleting the minus. Our budget gets dinged the cost of the starship, which should not happen, since the starship was an add to the base, not part of the old base. It appears that there were about $30 million in these errors in the system budget, which in a 16,000 line item, couple billion dollar budget isn't a lot, but UNLV took the bulk of the hit. The NSHE still gets $150 million or so in new money, and UNLV still gets a nice chunk of new funding, but not exactly what we should and with less flexibility than should be there.
8. The last items in the agenda were more detail about getting the medical school up and running, and moving the existing UNR faculty and residents in Las Vegas to UNLV. Lots more to do, but everything seems to be on track.

9. Let me finish by reminding everyone that there are elections going on for Senate seats and committees in every unit. We do important work for the institution, and we need your help in making positive change. Please join us by volunteering to serve.

Till next time,

*Bill Robinson*,
2016-2017 Faculty Senate Chair