

Faculty Senate Presentation 10/9/01

My name is Zach Robinson. I chair the Evaluation Committee of the Math Department, which is the committee responsible for department planning and evaluation. I thank the faculty senate and my colleague, David Pravica, for the opportunity to speak today, briefly, about a proposal that is being put forward by Dean Sparrow to transfer to the School of Education a substantial number of Math faculty, along with the Mathematics Department's BS degree program, our MAEd degree program and a number of other math courses that relate to mathematics teacher education. This proposal will seriously damage the Math Department and it will weaken its national award-winning teacher education program. This proposal is expressly opposed by the Math Department faculty generally and by the Mathematics Education area in particular. This proposal, furthermore, would set dangerous precedents for the university, stemming both from the manner in which it is being brought forward as well as from its content. I would like to speak in favor of the motion by our faculty senator, Dr. Pravica, to support the Math Department faculty resolution of 9/5/01.

The Evaluation Committee has prepared an extensively documented position paper in support of the department's resolution on mathematics education. It begins by outlining the credentials of our successful teacher education program. It states the main goal of our resolution: to ensure the highest quality teacher education at ECU. It makes the case that this goal is best served by the present arrangement. Indeed, locating Math Education within the Math Department fosters active collaboration between Math Educators and traditional research mathematicians. This position is supported by national policy statements of the American Mathematical Society, the organization of research mathematicians in the US. Our position paper also documents the adverse impact of the proposal both on teacher education and on the mathematics department: removing Math Education faculty and programs would cut our undergraduate majors by 60% and remove the source of over half of our graduate students. The Mathematics Department would be reduced to the status of a service department. Our position paper is available online at the department's home page, just click on the link marked "committees."

There is not time today to present the position paper. Instead, I would like to make a few points outlining key areas of precedent that need to be addressed here in a timely manner before the Faculty Assembly's quarterly meeting in Chapel Hill on November 16. That is why this motion is before you today.

1. Regarding the manner in which this proposal is being brought forward. The faculty learned of the proposal at our first department meeting this semester. It was inadvertently leaked by our acting chair when he was asked why he had closed the Mathematics Education office during the summer without consulting faculty. It is relevant to note, in this connection, that our acting chair is an associate dean and a member of the English Department who was appointed by Dean Sparrow after the unplanned resignation of our long-time chair Bob Bernhardt and after the untimely resignation of our interim chair Mike Spurr. The

acting chair told the department that Math Education faculty and programs would be moved with "95% certainty" by this spring. This was the very first the faculty had heard of the proposal. The department immediately requested a meeting with the Interim VCAA. When he came to the department with Deans Sparrow and Sheerer to make a presentation on the proposal, he listed 5 faculty names on the chalk board as being slated for removal. None had been consulted prior to that meeting.

2. Regarding the transfer of a substantial number of tenured and tenure-track faculty against their expressly stated wills. We must take care that we do not allow tenure and academic freedom to be compromised at ECU or anywhere in the UNC system.
3. Regarding curriculum issues. Dean Sparrow's proposal moves in a direction opposite national policy statements by the AMS that call for a greater role for collaboration between traditional research mathematicians and Math Educators. Indeed, by decision of the editorial boards of the main international mathematics research associations, Mathematics Education is now classified alongside more traditional mathematics subject areas as part of mathematics for research publication review. It is important that the university recognize the central role of the faculty and of the professional disciplines in key matters of curriculum policy.

In conclusion, the mathematics department has a nationally-recognized teacher education program. Our faculty's research is supported by the National Science Foundation and it appears in well-regarded publications. Our department enjoys modest success in every aspect of the university's mission. Although we have requested it, to this date, we have not been given a written statement of the goals and rationales of Dean Sparrow's proposal. The only verbal argument that sticks in my mind is the Dean's statement that we need to overcome our teacher's college heritage. To me, that is not argument, but prejudice. Please support the faculty of the Mathematics Department by voting for Dr. Pravica's resolution.