

Memorandum

COPY

To: Dr. William Shelton, Interim Chancellor

From: Dr. Frederick Niswander, Chair of the Faculty  
Dr. Catherine Rigsby, Vice-Chair of the Faculty  
Dr. Janice Tovey, Secretary  
Dr. Patricia Anderson, Parliamentarian

Date: October 27, 2003

RE: Critical Issues

The Faculty Senate officers are providing three critical issues that we believe must be understood, debated, and accepted by the University community as we move towards our 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We thank you for formally seeking our input and the input of others.

Our critical issues are highly inter-related. We also realize they are large-scale, philosophical issues with significant complexity, uncertainty, and, ultimately, tradeoffs. Yet we believe the University community needs to come to grips with these global critical issues in the near future.

In our view, the faculty and the University community needs to have greater understanding of the issues, their inter-relation, and the costs and benefits of choosing one alternative over another. In the end, such an approach will provide a more-complete acceptance of the course the University will chart, whatever that might be.

We are fully aware that ECU does not make decisions in a vacuum – forces within and without the University shape the questions, the solutions, and the execution. That reality must be part of the debate and its outcome.

*Issue 1 – What do we want to be when we grow up?*

ECU is rapidly changing. We are growing in numbers of students, we are placing more emphasis on research and creative activity, we are creating more Ph.D. programs, and we are moving from a research extensive to a research intensive institution. All these changes fundamentally affect the balance of teaching and research, our approach to undergraduate education, strength and funding of Masters-level education, hiring and tenure decisions, faculty evaluation processes, admissions and retention decisions, how we serve and relate to the citizens of Eastern North Carolina, and many more.

We do not believe the faculty or the University community adequately understand the questions, the complexities, the trade-offs, or the alternatives. Fundamentally, we don't believe we have a clear picture of what we want to be when we grow up and the implications of that picture.

*Issue 2 – How big do we want to be when we grow up?*

ECU has projected enrollment growth to 27,000+ students by the end of this decade. What does that number mean in relation to educational quality (particularly at the undergraduate level), the expectations placed on faculty, the expectations of faculty, and workload and expectations?

A critical imbedded issue for a growing University is the question of whether we can receive adequate funding to support the growth. Although we have received enrollment increase funding in the last few years we must seriously examine a strong growth plan given (1) simultaneous funding "takeaways" for permanent or temporary reversions and (2) a growing uncertainty as to whether the state will continue to fund increases of the magnitude we project in future years. Growth without financial support is not beneficial to the long-term quality of the academic endeavor.

Imbedded in this issue is the role and scope of distance education, particularly the impact of rapidly increasing DE enrollments on academic quality, faculty workload, and student learning.

*Issue 3 – Who will be working here when we grow up?*

Regardless of the answer to the first two issues, we must have employees in sufficient numbers and of sufficient quality to support the educational, research, service, and outreach missions of ECU. We must retain the good people we have and we must attract new ones. Yet salary levels in most disciplines are below the median, and non-salary benefits are marginal and their costs are high.

We realize that many of the salary and benefits issues cannot be solved solely by the ECU community. However, it is disingenuous of the state to insist on quality and excellence, yet fail to financially and intellectually support the very individuals who make that quality and excellence possible.