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AY 2003/2004 Faculty Seante President's Report

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Report to the USF Faculty Senate, February 18, 2004

Elizabeth Bird

- Since I began as Senate President, my goal has been to rethink the role of the Senate. I've wanted to make it relevant, and to reassert its role as the voice of the faculty. Perhaps most important, I've wanted to change the stance of the Senate – from reactive to proactive. Our job is to put issues on the agenda, not wait for the agenda to be given to us.
- Today, I'd like to quickly go through some of the ways in which we have tried to do that – and perhaps some of the successes we can claim, or may hope to claim.
- First, the salary initiative. At the beginning of the year, we requested full information about comparative salaries, and I believe we started to establish why the issue is now on the front burner for everyone. You probably saw my memo on the issue, as well as the compilation of some of these responses, which do point to the frustration many feel, as well as the damage low salaries are doing to USF. The Provost has defined this as the “no-excuses priority,” and we're all glad to hear that. I have been meeting with the Provost and her staff to establish a road map for where we go from here. We're all agreed that we need more detailed information to establish where the major problem areas are, and to develop a plan to start correcting things – while of course acknowledging from the outset that this issue is subject to collective bargaining. The Provost has promised some clear progress by the end of March.
- There has been important progress on the regional campus issue. Vice Provost Wilcox is leading a small group charged with rewriting the 1991 Operating Guidelines, and the later Memoranda of Agreement. After two productive meetings with regional and Tampa campus leaders, it was agreed that the new guidelines will effectively confirm the basic principles outlined in the recommendations of the Senate's Regional Campus Committee. Essentially, it will be affirmed that on the Lakeland and Sarasota campuses, the Campus Executive Officer is not the Chief Academic Officer – there is only one Provost. The CEO has fiscal, not academic authority – academic authority lies with the faculty, in their departments. This is very significant, and it will have important consequences. And I don't believe it would have happened if in July we had not questioned a new set of Operating Guidelines slated to go into effect this past August. That new document would have essentially transferred academic authority to the campus CEOs, leaving their faculty with none of the normal protections. Senator Permuth and I are part of this rewriting group – we'll report back when the document is completed.
- Related to this, but independent from it, I received official requests from two tenure-track faculty members who were non-reappointed last Spring on the Lakeland campus, and who believe this was done without adequate consultation with their departments. They requested that a senate committee be formed to look into the circumstances. I agreed to form such a committee, with a very specific charge – to look at the issue of whether the faculty members' department were adequately consulted, in keeping with principles of shared governance. The committee has begun its business, chaired by Senator Jim Strange, Distinguished Research Professor of Religious Studies, with Fred Zerla, Professor Emeritus of Mathematics and former Speaker of the Senate, and Susan Greenbaum, Vice President of the Senate. The committee hopes to report back to us by early March.

- The reform of the emeritus process, initiated by the Senate, is now complete, with the new procedure in place now. The final piece – the parking issue – has been resolved. Emeritus faculty will receive a special ID card that will allow them to pick up a one-day pass every time they come on campus, to park in the green lots.
- The ad hoc committee to look at issues of representation and senate structure is moving along, seeking input from colleges about different ways we might redistrict, in order to make the Senate more representative. Senator Donchin will be bringing a report to next month's Senate meeting, where we will have some preliminary discussion.
- We are finally seeing some movement on the Shared Governance initiative, passed by the Senate in September. Provost Khator has just sent the document out to all department chairs requesting departmental discussion of the document and of the way shared governance can be made real. I'll look forward to seeing progress on that too
- Vice President Susan Greenbaum and I went to Tallahassee in late January, and met with other Senate Presidents and Vice Presidents, as well as the system chancellor and vice chancellor, and with Steve Uhlfelder, chair of the accountability committee. We learned that the issue of possible standardized testing is by no means dead, and we agreed that it will be necessary to voice our opposition to any such proposal.
- I have received several questions from faculty about the university's decision to award retired general Tommy Franks the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters. This is being presented to the Board of Trustees as a recommendation of the Senate Honors and Awards Committee, which technically it is. However, in checking on this, I discovered that the Committee, although formed under Senate auspices, does not report back to the Senate, nor does it seek Senate endorsement for its recommendations. I think it's time we change that – and I plan to initiate such change. Honorary degrees recommendations are very significant honors, and they should be made with the full endorsement of the faculty. I am not necessarily saying that Gen. Franks would *not* be endorsed by the faculty – but neither can I honestly say at the BOT that he *is* endorsed by us.
- Finally, we cannot move on without a word about a most important administrative appointment. As we all know, Dr. Renu Khator was recently appointed to the permanent position of Provost, having served as Interim since the summer.

I don't need to go through Renu's background; I think we're all familiar with her history here at USF. Rather, I'd just like to take the opportunity to welcome you, Provost Khator, on behalf of the Faculty Senate.

I think it's clear that the Senate is developing an excellent working relationship with the Provost's office, and I'm optimistic about the future. I believe we have a Provost who is genuinely committed to the basic premise that the faculty is the heart of the university.

We all know that we have had problems at USF. There *is* demoralization; there *is* alienation, and it didn't come from nowhere. For too long, too many faculty members have believed that only lip service is paid to the idea of faculty consultation, and that decisions ultimately are always made by those at the top. Too many administrators have surrounded themselves with people who tell them only what they want to hear; the perception is that disagreement, or "speaking out" is not a wise thing to do at USF. Yet debate, discussion, disagreement, are the

very foundations of the academy, and we must learn to nurture them, rather than seeing them as signs of disloyalty or division.

Renu: The Senate is trying to assert itself, and to become the genuine voice of the faculty, and you'll probably hear from us a lot. I give you my word – I will *not* only tell you what I think you want to hear. I will speak my mind, and I'll be honest and consistent. And if you disagree with me, I won't take it personally. I believe you will do the same.

So on behalf of the Senate, I welcome you.