Dr. Kevin Cope – I thank you very much Carleen and Chairman for allowing me a brief moment. Comedy is about survival. People think it is about laughing, but the real message is that if you can tell a joke it means that you are still alive. Sort of like you are reading Ann Landers. And so it is that my usual function here is to take a rather light-hearted approach here and reassure the board that the faculty are surviving and are getting along and doing their work even despite the controversy that is always roiling around Louisiana. However, today I come with a rather more sober message and that is to talk about some of the extraordinary pressure that is being exerted at various levels of state government to reorganize the university, to restructure higher education, and to affect some sort of panaceatic cure to the problems that we suffer under by means of structural manipulation. Let me point out that over the last several months there have been no less then maybe five or five and a half commissions. They have all reached different conclusions. There has been LAPERC, there’s been the legislative push under Chairman Tucker, and there has been the greater New Orleans higher education authority. There has been the Louisiana Governance Commission and now out of the wild west has come NCHEMS, apparently from a conservative venue but funded by liberal ford foundation money. I suspect much to the surprise of those who are adopting its recommendations. The point is that faculty have been all but excluded from the consideration of all these plans and are increasingly distressed and unhappy about it. In that litany of unhappiness, also would go the numerous outside influences that are coming into play. These include quite an extraordinary appearance on the radio in New Orleans by a person who is noted for his capacity to produce misleading messages. We have an array of coalitions that have histories of personal and financial relations with the decision makers that at least require a clarification. We have of course word from that mecca of educational skill in Minden, Louisiana. And we have got the craziest idea of all that the governor wants to make a big announcement pretty soon, whatever that might mean. But underneath all of these there are a variety of superstitions. What are those superstitions? They include the notion of monoculture, that if every university of a given kind is placed in one system, everything will be alright. If you have ever raised a whole field of cucumbers, you know that doesn’t work, all you get are caterpillars. There is the efficiency theory, that again if everybody is the same that we will be able to order more paper towels effectively. Not true, no evidence for it. Paper towels have a different price in Alexandria than they do in Shreveport. The work force theory, I don’t know if there is any university that has climbed to the top on the strength of training large number of people in the space of one month per the latest NCHEMS report, to do one job which is subsequently obsolete. And worst of all there is the no system theory, that if we just wipe out all of you, everything will be okay because after all you don’t have to do anything except enjoy this beautiful building and the wit and wisdom of President Lombardi. So what is it that we want in this moment? Well, the answer is a multifold. One is that we simply ask that with the unanimous consent of my colleagues here today, that when you receive these reports and when you suffer under the pressure that we recognize is out there, that you take a more deliberative approach to the matter. Universities have been going since Padua in the later 13th century. We don’t really need to get ready for the big announcement, on February 9th or February 14th or whatever it is. Number two is an inclusive approach to in which faculty, staff, and other
stalk holders are at least given the opportunity to comment in something other than this sort of Roman form that we occasionally have here. And which is frankly intimidating to some of the church mice that make up the university system. We want a reputable approach that carries some credibility. We will accept help from anybody, we will even take help from Manda Sausage, I like a good weiner now and then. But, we want this to be creditable and not done in the back door by a group of in-groups, coalitions, lobby groups, whatever you might approve. Now of course Louisiana and this will be my last word, is a gigantic rumor mill and I know very well that the promising youngster there with the bold glasses has made some presentations to those at the top of the educational pyramid and the decision making pyramid. Some of those are indeed pretty good, but we are strongly in favor of a period of consultation in which people who actually understand how education works, who deliver it every day, and who know how students come through the stream and arrive at graduate school and satisfy the demands not to have low completed programs. How all of that actually works. So, in the end, what we would like you to do is in fact what you are. That is to supervise, to take a moment and look around and figure out what the score really is, not knuckle under and prove to the faculty that you are in fact what we think you are, that is our defenders from belligerent political forces and dangerous elements that are not committed to the best interests of the university. Thank you very much.