President’s Message

With the release of this issue of the Monthly Newsletter, the Faculty Senate has completed what bibliographers regard as its first “volume” of a periodical. That word might be applied in all its senses: not only has the Senate produced a defined series of printed documents, but it has turned up the volume for those who listen to higher educational events and it has increased the total discursive space occupied by issues of concern to faculty. None of this would have been possible without the helpful attention of readership up and down the state and now around the nation—without the geographical and audience volume that our generously responsive readers have given us. When the Newsletter resumes publication in the autumn, the volume control will continue to rotate clockwise!

Communicating and receiving responses—maintaining at least a little bit of volume—is a basic academic skill. Amidst all the racket created by the state budget broils, the basics not only survive but also require provident attention. So it is that the remarkably low-volume renaming of a couple of colleges draws attention to the telling question, “Whatever happened to “basic(s)”?” Having recognized its failure to persuade scholars of the value of new college names and thereby having stumbled in the basic art of communication, the administration went back to Machiavellian basics, slashing “Basic” from “Basic Sciences” by the bureaucratic equivalent of brute force. Words, too, have force. In the process of this not-so-bold move, the administration inadvertently confessed its loss of interest in the now-deprecated basics, including basic research. Doubtless this semantic and historic amnesia also accounts for the administration’s strange aversion to the phrase “Arts and Sciences.” Basic historical study would have explained the reasons that certain disciplines count as ”arts” even without the benefit of chisel, brush, baton, or easel. To get back to culinary basics, we now must face the “Twinkie problem” in which the love of processing replaces basic substance while fluffy fictions supersede grassroots products.

As it grows and develops, but with luck avoids “Little Debbie Syndrome,” the Faculty Senate Newsletter will continue to go after if not get to kernel of issues. Thank you for your commitment to whole-grain scholarship and likewise thanks to our retiring graduate student assistants and editorial staff, Casey Kayser and G. Gregory Molchan!

With all good wishes,
Kevin L. Cope, Faculty Senate President

TRSL: At It Again

All is not well in the world of retirement options for faculty and professional staff. To be sure, there are some bright spots in the gloom, but recent action in the retirement area highlights the gravity of the problems that we face. Last week, participants in the beleaguered Optional Retirement Plan (“ORP”) received a letter from the Teachers’ Retirement System of Louisiana ("TRSL") announcing that, in the interest of certain unexplained efficiencies and reductions, the menu of funds offered by “vendors” (the companies that provide financial services or “accounts” to ORP participants) would be reduced. This reduction is more dramatic than hinted—in the case of one vendor, from 115 to 15 funds—and was implemented without the slightest input from any faculty member that anyone can locate.

Hope glimmered for a moment when Representative Franklin Foil introduced HB331 to the Louisiana Legislature, which would permit certain faculty members to re-enter the defined-benefit (”TRSL”) program, albeit under Procrustean conditions. Aided by Coastal Studies Professor James Wilkins, Faculty Senate President Kevin Cope met with Representative Foil and with State Actuary Paul Richmond and also testified before the Louisiana House Retirement Committee (view the video here). Unfortunately, a hostile Retirement Committee containing three members from the public school systems but none from higher education “indefinitely deferred” the proposal after hearing adversarial testimony from TRSL Director Maureen Westgard, who argued against the preferences of the faculty whom she is said to represent. TRSL Board Member and former LSU Vice-Chancellor Jerry Baudin also submitted an advisory card opposing a measure that was vigorously supported by faculty across the state.

A third problem was discovered when a study of TRSL’s Board election procedures indicates that TRSL has failed to comply with its own rules and has not properly sought candidates for office. All is not bleak, however, and colleagues may be assured that the Faculty Senate continues its work with other faculty governance officials around the state in an effort to overcome the serious problems with the retirement system. The first issue of the newsletter in the autumn semester will include an action plan and a report of initiatives taken over the summer.

Faculty Senate Committee Assignments for 2010-2011 Completed and Posted

Committee assignments for the 2010–2011 academic year are now complete and may be viewed on the pertinent Faculty Senate web page. Many thanks to the dozens of volunteers who have offered to help carry a vast array of indispensable University functions and special thanks to Committee on Committee Chair Louay Mohammed for his astounding job of campus-wide and interdisciplinary recruitment.

No Campus Is an Island: Exporting PS–44

Fresh off the underground wire service is a report from the University of Louisiana at Monroe (“ULM”) concerning the removal of a Professor of Philosophy from classroom duties owing to firm grading practices. Details remain sketchy, but the emergence of this case immediately on the heels of a similar case at LSU underlines the degree to which statewide policies and political pressures trigger similar events across campuses and systems. Charged with protecting professional prerogatives, the LSU Faculty Senate Executive Committee is already monitoring the ULM case. LSU is fortunate in that our administration has expressed enthusiasm for a collaborative revision of PS–44, the policy governing grading. The Faculty Senate Executive Committee is attempting to arrange a formal visit to the ULM campus and to the ULM Faculty Senate to consider further joint action.

Choppin Hall Aided and Abetted by Budget Choppin’

Recessions and budget crises often have literal silver linings (or what would be literal, if coins were still made of precious metals). The Newsletter always gives credit where credit is due, especially when prudence and economy eliminate the need for credit in the economic sense. Owing to the decline in the cost of building materials, bids for the renovation and general re-do of Choppin Hall have come in at a whopping $9,000,000.00 under expectations. Quicker than any bus conductor with a waistline coin-changer, Chancellor Mike Martin eyeballed at least half of that sum for the purpose of providing CAMD-like facilities on one of the upper decks of the revived building. Great call, Chancellor Mike! May Bobby Jindal and his money-mavens bless you and the project!

LSU’s Choppin Hall
ADMINISTRATOR IN THE SPOTLIGHT
David Heidke, Director of LSU Dining

David Heidke joined the LSU community in 1997 when the university privatized its dining program. As Director of Dining, he is responsible for the entire campus dining program on the global and programmatic level. For instance, he deals with structuring meal plans and oversees the operation of dining halls and retail vendors. When the university implements new food offerings on campus, Heidke guides the process from recommendations to the final selection and implementation.

One exciting element that falls under the umbrella of Dining Services is the concessions at sporting events. As a result, they are frequently involved in other big happenings, such as the upcoming Country Fest, a banner first-time country music festival that will be held in Tiger Stadium on Saturday and Sunday of Memorial Day weekend. The lineup includes Taylor Swift, Kenny Chesney, Keith Urban, and Brooks & Dunn. So far over 83,000 tickets have been sold, and Dining Services staff has been busy finalizing their preparations to provide food and drink for the thousands of attendees.

Another one of Dining Services’ most important current projects is the development of the Tiger Lair Food Court in the Union. When it opens, it will feature dining options from Papa John’s, Community Coffee, Quiznos, Jamba Juice, Chick-fil-A, and Panda Express. There will also be a Louisiana classics area, with local cuisine and comfort foods like mashed potatoes and meatloaf, as well as an upscale salad and potato bar, sushi, sandwiches, and bakery items. Heidke and his staff are very excited about the new and returning choices that will be offered in the Tiger Lair, which they think will be a “big hit with students.”

Three years ago, Dining Services finished a major project when the 459 Commons dining center opened, and this past January, another new dining facility, The S, replaced the former Pentagon Dining Hall on the northwest side of campus. Heidke describes 459 Commons and The S with pride: “There are very few campuses that have two dining facilities that are as nice as what we have.”

Heidke emphasizes that he owes much to his numerous staff members who execute the specifics and the day-to-day operations. He offers an example the opening of The S, which happened under a tight timeline. They were not given the facility until midnight on the first Tuesday of the Spring semester, and by 7 am, they were ready to open for breakfast, and the staff, some of them 20-30 year veterans, fed over 2,000 students on that opening day. This example in particular, Heidke says, is “real testament to the staff’s commitment to our students. We have a wonderful team.”

Dining Services is continuously looking for new ways to serve the campus community; for example, they recently held the first Mother’s Day brunch at the Faculty Club. Heidke reports there was “tremendous positive response” as students, staff, and faculty alike came out to share a special meal with mom. Because of the success of the brunch, Heidke says they may plan events like that more frequently at the Faculty Club in conjunction with holidays or big events.

One of Heidke’s favorite parts of his job is interacting with students in the dining halls and retail operations. When he’s not working, he enjoys photography and spending time with his family. Between he and his wife, Melissa, they have seven children ranging from fourth-grade to graduate school, who keep them busy traveling to and from various activities.

Heidke says he appreciates the “open, friendly, and welcoming” atmosphere on LSU’s campus, as well as the university’s overall commitment to students. Speaking of his 15 years of experience in food service management on different college campuses, Heidke says LSU stands out: “The focus on the students is at a much higher level here, from my perspective, than on other campuses, which is great. Obviously, that’s why we’re here.”

Faculty Senate Legislation: Flurry of Resolutions Debated

At its May 2010 meeting, the Faculty Senate debated and voted upon a large number of important resolutions. First on the docket was Resolution 10–05, introduced by Faculty Athletic Representative Dydia Delysier, which aimed to clarify the nature of and conditions on excused absences via-via course requirements and evaluations. Resolution 10–05 was defeated, but debate revealed several areas in which clarification of existing policies is required. The revision of PS–44 that is now under way may address several of these issues.

Resolution 10–07, sponsored by Senator Charles Delzell and Dominique Homberger, calls for the clear and accessible posting of membership on advisory committees (i.e., committees appointed by the administration rather than by the Faculty Senate) in the usual places, especially on relevant websites. 10–07 was passed by a voice vote.

Resolution 10–08, authorizing the IT governance structure developed by Chief Information Officer Brian Voss, garnered unanimous and enthusiastic support. The Faculty Senate Executive committee will begin working with IT staffers to populate the committees Brian has designed.

Resolution 10–09, an affirmation of faculty members’ right to assign grades, was postponed until the September Senate meeting in order to allow for the completion of the PS–44 revision.

Resolution 10–10, concerning final examinations and grade assignments, underwent its first reading and initial debate and shall, under the sponsorship of Kenneth McMillin, come up for final debate and vote at the September Senate meeting.

Keep Abreast of Legislative Developments

Those interested in an in-depth, minute-to-minute account of legislative action relating to higher education are invited to sign up for Capitol Notes, LSU’s online newsletter on government action. Sign up today at http://www.lsu.edu/externalaf-fairs/capitol_notes.html.

Baton Rouge Faculty Governance Officials Attend Statewide Forum at UNO

Regular attendees of LSU Faculty Senate meetings will remember Professor Steven Striffler, who brought his campaign for the reform of Louisiana higher education policy to the LSU campus during a recent Senate meeting. Striffler, professor of Latin American Studies at the University of New Orleans, recently expanded his efforts by organizing a statewide forum on higher education policy at the UNO Lakefront campus. Attracting both television and print coverage, Striffler’s forum included faculty governance officials from LSU, Southern University, and Baton Rouge Community College as well as from campuses throughout Louisiana. Striffler and LSU Faculty Senate President Kevin L. Cope are formulating plans to create a traveling version of the forum in the hope of energizing the faculty senates of Louisiana institutions where traditions of robust debate have not yet been established.

HRM to Seek New Director, Faculty Senate to Offer Input

With regrets and wishes for further success, the Newsletter takes note of the decision of Human Resources management (“HRM”) chief Marian Gaillier to return to private life. HRM-directing is the most consternating of jobs, in part owing to the unresponsive behavior of state benefits officials. While wishing Marian all the best, LSU Faculty Senate officers have already been busy confabbing with Interim Vice-Chancellor for Finance and Administrative Services Eric Monday, offering guidance in the search for a new director, who is very likely to be an outside candidate who will need to deal with several urgent faculty concerns. Faculty Senate officers are eager to ensure that the new HRM director take an assertive, pro-faculty approach to dealing with the state benefits apparatus.

Voss Lands Free European Internet Access for Faculty

Traveling abroad this summer? Chief Information Officer Brian Voss has bagged another trophy-level resource for LSU faculty. Colleagues possessing an LSU logon id may now access wireless service in dozens of locations around the world through Eduroam, a syndicate of higher education institutions willing to accept access credentials from users in all participating institutions. For example, an LSU Tiger might stride by the Old Forum Building at the University of Uppsala, pop open the laptop, and sign into the internet for free! Crusoe-copying CIO Voss recently had a chance to discover the merit of this system while marooned in Barcelona by Eyjafjallajökull’s ash. LSU ITS is offering an introductory page in Grok.

American Association of University Professors to Probe LSU

Unusually hot during this pre-summer month, the aforementioned underground news wires are also signaling that the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) will send a team of investigators to LSU to probe the state of academic freedom and assorted other irregularities on our campus. The Faculty Senate’s Newsletter has learned that the delegation will include prominent faculty members from Michigan State University, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Tulane University and that the inquiry will occur on August 27th and 28th. Sam Spade fans, don your trench coats!
GUEST COLUMN
Michael F. Russo, Chair, Ad Hoc Committee on Bargaining and Representation

In the spring of 2009, the Faculty Senate ad hoc Committee on Bargaining and Representation was created and charged with exploring ways in which the faculty’s concerns could be effectively represented to the university administration. In addition to such long-standing issues as pay equity and benefits, creation of this committee was prompted by more acute issues, such as the budget situation and the administration’s proposal to completely reorganize the university structure without faculty input.

More specifically, we were asked to consider various modes of representation, such as “traditional faculty unions, emerging labor agencies, professional organizations, arbitration, and mediation,” which we did. However, in our very first meeting, we came to the decision that no effective representation was possible without a legally binding, or contractual, arrangement between faculty and the university—that is, a collective bargaining agreement.

In a word, a union.

Since that first meeting, the committee has embarked on a campaign to illuminate some of the issues that are (or ought to be) of concern to the faculty, issues which could lend themselves to resolution through collective bargaining. Our Faculty Issues Discussion Series consisted of four programs which covered the topics of faculty benefits, the corporatization of the academy, the compression of professorial responsibilities, and the recent recommendations of the Post-Secondary Education Review Commission.

We end our first year having laid a foundation for more significant endeavors in the next. We are committed to moving forward and to being a committee that pushes for results.

In the year to come, we will be switching gears, expanding our membership to include instructors and graduate teaching assistants, in addition to tenured and tenure-track faculty. We will look at the mechanics of unionization and investigate in more detail the various organizations that could serve as effective bargaining agents. We hope, by at least the spring of 2011, to present the faculty with the proposition that an organized faculty is essential to professional as well as academic integrity. The ultimate decision, of course and as always, is in the hands of the faculty.

New Plaza at Alex Box Stadium Raises Questions about PS–70

Members of the Tiger Nation have probably observed the gradual erection of a curious, temple-like structure in front of the new Alex Box Stadium. Billed as a “plaza” but resembling an attempt by the Star Trek replicator to re-create Stonehenge in modern materials, this uncanny monument will commemorate the championship achievements of LSU’s hardball hitters. Lately, this LSU answer to the enigmas of the Salisbury plain has re-opened questions about the procedures and principles involved in naming structures on campus. Included in that controversy is the question of whether structures should be involved in more detail the various organizations that could serve as effective bargaining agents. We hope, by at least the spring of 2011, to present the faculty with the proposition that an organized faculty is essential to professional as well as academic integrity. The ultimate decision, of course and as always, is in the hands of the faculty.

Faculty Senate Executive Committee to Visit CPCs

It has come to the attention of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee that many colleges on campus lack a fully functioning College Policy Committee and that there is considerable confusion concerning the purpose and prerogatives of those bodies. To resolve this problem, members of the ExComm will undertake a series of pilgrimages to college CPCs and will also sponsor a CPC Chairs’ breakfast during the fall semester by way of reviving this important segment of our governance traditions.

Additional Compensation Rules to be Re-Evaluated

Two policies govern “additional compensation;” money received in exchange for service or consultation beyond one’s LSU salary. Thanks to Senator Joey Legoria, both the Faculty Senate and the Office of Academic Affairs have been made aware that PS–43 (for the LSU campus) and PM–11 (for the LSU system) create potential roadblocks for the highly expert cadre of instructors who teach certain career- or major-specific courses and who, in the future, may do substantial amounts of online or other distance teaching. LSU could potentially increase the cost of its labor force by limiting total compensation to these indispensable instructors and thereby creating a labor shortage, with the predictable supply-demand consequence of driving up price. Through that acumen that comes only from years of budget-making, the Office of Academic Affairs immediately understood the problem and stands ready to revise these policies at the earliest opportunity. Thanks to Senator Legoria for his economic eagle-eye!

Corrigendum

The April Newsletter reported on changes in the “priority point” system by which donors receive preferred status with regard to the purchase of athletics tickets, athletics parking opportunities, and other athletics-related offerings. This policy has now been clarified; henceforward, priority points will be awarded solely on the basis of lifetime philanthropic giving to the University, not on donations associated with ticket purchases. Still awaiting resolution is the granting of priority points to faculty for loyal service and distinguished research.

Also, the item in the April Newsletter on the “Top and Bottom 5 Websites at LSU” listed the Department of Construction Management & Industrial Engineering (CMIE) as the Department of Construction Management. Moreover, www.cmie.lsu.edu and www.ie.lsu.edu are aliases for the CMIE website at www.cmie.lsu.edu. Thanks to Dr. Gerry Knap for his input on this item.

Tip of the Month

Baton Rouge enjoys a plenitude of fine Mediterranean restaurants: Albasha, Roman’s Café, Aziz’s, Atcha Bakery, and Serop’s to name just a few. Until recently, fine Mediterranean condiments remained a restaurant-only item; however, a Louisiana start-up company, Pinnur Foods, has produced an utterly exquisite line of condiments, in which the straight-up hummus and the tangy tabouleh rank five stars. Academics in search of a quick snack or an easy appetizer for a reception should take advantage of the new “Nur’s Kitchen” line of middle-eastern specialty items, which is presently available at Whole Foods and the Farmer’s Market and may soon surge into other markets!

Also on the “tip line”: careful fashion observers have noticed Chancellor Mike Martin’s fondness for saddle shoes. Now, those striving to show “Tiger pride” as well as to get that “Chancellor look” can find a saddle shoe in an approximately purple-and-gold color scheme. Top-drawer shoe manufacturer Cole-Haan has recently released its “Pushover” model in a Mike-friendly color scheme. Interested readers can see the shoe at Cole-Haan’s website here.