

Faculty Address August 2009

I would like to thank Provost Grahn for his introduction and President Meadors for allowing me to speak first this afternoon, so that I have time to outline the Senate's top priority: finding the silver set missing from his house. I also want to thank you for being here, because, like our students, you have a choice. You could be attending Congressman Snyder's town hall meeting. All kidding aside, I promise that we will end with plenty of time for cookies and punch or to race over to Reynolds.

Well, what a difference a year makes! Let us briefly recall that one year ago this opening meeting was the culminating event of nearly six weeks of controversy that will not easily be forgotten. This event occurred several hours after a hastily-called meeting of the Board of Trustees at which they considered our former President's request for a full buy-out of his contract in exchange for his resignation. I have three very vivid memories from this day one year ago:

----The first: former Senate President Kurt Boniecki seated in the half-empty Board room in Wingo Hall writing his address to the faculty on a laptop a few hours before giving it;

----The second: Jimmy Bryant accusing me of ruining the ending to his centennial history of UCA;

----The third: in-coming Chair of the Board of Trustees Rush Harding's pledge that he would work to restore confidence in the Board and to collaborate more frequently, openly, and productively with the faculty, a promise that he has kept. With the controversy resolved and the healing begun, the campus community hurried to First Security Field to enjoy the Bears' 38-14 win over Henderson State. End of story, right?

Well, little did we know. Little did we know that our university was to be tested and bombarded by an unprecedented series of events never before seen in UCA's history.

Little did we know:

1. That as classes began UCA was already carrying a balance of around \$6 million on a line of credit never approved by the ADHE;
2. Or that we would come within days of failing to meet payroll as Wachovia bank teetered on the brink of collapse causing them to freeze our assets deposited in their Common Fund;
3. Or that a discretionary scholarship program had financed well over \$500,000 in scholarships that were awarded without hardly any criteria;
4. Or that UCA was owed millions of dollars in unpaid student fees from the previous three academic years (estimate, \$2.6 million);
5. Or that we were on target to end the fiscal year with a deficit of around \$8 million;
6. Or, and this is the most sobering, that our campus would suffer the tragedy of violence and the senseless loss of student life.

Well, I am proud (and relieved) to say we survived that perfect storm and that as a result we can affirm that our faculty has never been stronger. Why? Because this campus, this faculty and this community continued to focus—amid all of these distractions—on our one and only core mission: the academic preparation of the men and women who choose UCA. We taught classes, graded papers and gave exams. In one department, it is rumored that spring final exams were even printed on our former President's stationary as supplies of paper dwindled to nothing. We met these challenges together and they were made easier by the leadership of four people who accepted the call to lead amid extraordinary challenges. Thanks to their leadership, that \$8 million deficit was reduced to zero. Please join me in recognizing them: Tom Courtway, Bunny Adcock, Lance Grahn, and Kurt Boniecki. [APPLAUSE]

One positive by-product of this past year has been an increased recognition of and enthusiasm for shared governance and the role that the Faculty Senate plays both officially and behind the scenes. This interest was evident in a record number of candidates for the at-large elections in April and a dramatic increase in voter turnout. The result is this year's Senate. It is now my privilege to introduce each senator. I would ask them to stand as their names are called.

The senators from the College of Business are Summer Bartczak, Mike Moore, and Jim Bell.

From the College of Education: Jud Copeland, Shelly Albritton, and Terri Hebert.

From the College of Fine Arts and Communication: the President-elect Lynn Burley, Joanna Castner Post, and Jennifer Rospert

From the College of Liberal Arts: Phillip Spivey and Wendy Castro

From the College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics: George Bratton, Lori Isom, and Parliamentarian Chuck Seifert

From the College of Health and Behavioral Sciences: K.C. Poole, James Fletcher, and Kim McCullough

The At-large senators are: Don Jones, Debbie Bratton, Cathy Acre, Senate Secretary Art Lichtenstein, Lisa Ray, and Mike Schaefer.

Please join me in recognizing their commitment of time and energy to serve on the Senate. [APPLAUSE]

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

For those of you who are unsure of what the Faculty Senate does, I would like to describe some of the more noteworthy accomplishments from last year:

First and foremost, we held the administration and the Board of Trustees accountable for last summer's events. As a direct result, we have a new president, positive changes in the administration, and a board that is paying more attention to the faculty.

Secondly, the Senate worked with Interim President Courtway and the Staff Senate to change the membership and procedures of the Budget Advisory Committee. As a result, when the committee met in the spring, it was a relevant

stage on which to debate the university's current budget. Third, the Senate worked with the faculty in the Honors College to approve joint appointments and promotion and tenure procedures for Honors faculty. Fourth, we collaborated in a study of concurrent enrollment and passed a resolution that is leading to a deliberate reduction in the number of concurrent students at UCA.

FACULTY CHARGE

As Jimmy Bryant's comment aptly suggested last August, over the last twelve months, we have slowly turned the page and now begin a new chapter in the life of our university. However, as Dr. Meadors assumes the Presidency, there are skeptics and naysayers who ascribe conspiracy to the Board of Trustees, or the search committee or other mysterious forces. Now, I have been known to embrace a good conspiracy from time to time, but a conspiracy requires some evidence. And I want to assure you that I have not seen or heard of any objective evidence in its support. Today, I call on us to move forward, to follow our noblest and most selfless instincts and to leave the controversies of the past where they are. UCA has a new President. It is now our job to work collaboratively with President Meadors, to educate him about what makes UCA distinct, to advocate for the academic resources to educate our students and to grow in our professions, to acknowledge and applaud when he has good ideas, and to challenge him when he does not.

It can be a complicated relationship as the last twenty years attest. As you all know, the President of the Faculty Senate carries the University Mace at all faculty processions. Traditionally, the mace is a weapon often designed to

protect a high dignitary. Today, however, the mace symbolizes the authority and responsibility to protect the University's integrity, its students, its faculty and staff, and its reputation. Last year, we did that, not because it was enjoyable, because it was not, but because we believed that it was the right thing to do. As we welcome President Meadors, we must continue to protect the university because its reputation, our academic reputation, is the basis for everything we do.

Now let's talk about GOALS for this year.

Goal #1--academic misconduct policy. I would say that perhaps the third time is the charm except for the fact that this is the fifth senate and the third Provost to have worked for its approval. Last year, SGA worked independently to develop a student honor code but their efforts floundered for some of the same reasons as ours. In light of last year's events, now is the time to affirm that UCA is a university community that values academic honesty, educates its students about what constitutes misconduct, and prescribes clear disciplinary measures for those who engage in it. We must now convene all of the relevant stakeholders and work together so that UCA may finally implement a policy that incorporates the ideas and responds to the concerns voiced by the Faculty Senate, the SGA, the Dean of Students, the registrar, the university counsel, and the council of deans.

Goal #2--institutional integrity. If there is a recurring theme to last year, it was our failure to ensure the university's adherence to institutional policies and practices that are financially sound and consistent with our mission. Millions of dollars of student fees remain to be collected. Spending must be controlled and

budgeted consistent with our academic mission. We must continue to shift towards realistic budgets in place of the fictions of a decade ago. The UCA Foundation must work with the administration to identify areas of the university's budget, such as athletics and scholarships, that can be, and should be, financed by private funds. University offices that are directly related to academics should report to the Provost. As the President organizes his office, we have asked him to consider the creation of a University Ombudsman—a resource to informally resolve conflicts that might have helped us to avoid some of the more disappointing events from last year.

On all of these fronts, we are making good progress. The Board of Trustees has created an independent audit committee. The Foundation, under new leadership, seems to better understand the nature of the university and its role-- asking questions, listening to the answers, and raising money from external sources. [And, the stories in the Democrat-Gazette now center on missing flatware.]

Part of our continued effort to ensure the integrity of the university is also to increase communication. The senate meets on the second Tuesday and the fourth Thursday of each month at 12:45 in Wingo 315. Our next meeting is Tuesday, September 8th. We would love for you to attend. The meetings are open to the entire campus community. We also hope that you will visit the new senate website, bookmark it, and review the agendas, minutes, and other documents frequently. I am also pleased to announce that the Provost has agreed to join me in hosting a town-hall meeting at which we will respond to faculty questions and concerns. If this meeting is successful, we may do more of them during the spring semester.

Goal #3—The Board of Trustees. At the same time, we are seeking to institutionalize a new and more productive relationship with the Board. Randy Sims has agreed to serve as Board liaison and those meetings have begun. What I can say thus far is that they are long overdue. Through them, I hope that we can begin to establish a collaborative relationship in which the Board comes to value faculty input and independently seek it out. For far too long, the Board's view of the faculty has been refracted by a university administration that often portrayed us as petty, self-serving, and unable to agree on anything. I do not think that this characterization is fair, but it certainly plays to a common stereotype. We must work to transcend this view by establishing honest human relationships with members of the Board so that our proposals cannot be rejected as petty and self-serving. We are already seeing positive results. Just two weeks ago, the Board, for the first time, approved money from their endowment on an academic need in the library. There is still a certain amount of skepticism about the board, and that is understandable, but mutual trust is only possible through honest dialogue.

Goal #4—the University budget. We must assert the primacy of our academic mission in university budgeting. The Senate has worked with the Provost this summer to develop an early list of academic budget priorities. They include faculty salary adjustments, resources to properly fund IT and the Library, \$2000 per faculty member for professional development and instructional technology, and initiatives for better student advising and retention. The total price tag: over 11 million dollars. To achieve this, the University must continue to align clear goals with consistent funding and to budget not only for today but for one and

two years into the future. All too often, we have drifted like a rudderless ship because faculty positions (often for replacements) have not been approved until November, December, or even January. We have been further disadvantaged in recruiting (and retaining) new faculty colleagues because our honest answer to questions about travel money and start-up packages—"I don't know"—is not a very good one. We must work with the Provost, the Budget Advisory Committee, and the President to solve these challenges. I am nevertheless hopeful. The President has articulated his goal of increasing the academic portion of the budget from 55 to 60%. This is a good start but it will not be enough to pay for all of our real needs. Consequently, the UCA community must increase private fundraising so as to shift some budgetary burdens from the university's budget to the foundation. At the same time, we also must work diligently to attract students to UCA based on the quality of our academic programs and campus experience rather than the size of the scholarship they will receive. (I encourage you to consider the purchase of a lottery ticket to help us reach this goal.)

CHARGE

Having set out these goals, I would like to address President Meadors on behalf of the faculty of UCA. As you come to UCA, I urge you to ask questions and listen to the answers. I ask you to remember that UCA's first mission is the academic preparation of our students. To help us accomplish this mission, I ask that you invest in our most valuable human infrastructure—the faculty who deliver education—through the dedication of resources to the academic priorities that we are working together to define. Finally, I ask that you remember that

your presidency should not be about you but UCA—its students and the education we offer them.

CLOSING

In closing, I want to remind us of a popular, if infamous, saying about academia that we have surely heard many times. “University politics are so vicious because the stakes are so small;” this is a notion so popular that its exact origin is unknown. But its origin is tangential to what it really means. I want to suggest to you today that this quote is routinely misinterpreted. For most, it is a backhanded slap at academics who fight over things so small as a principle. I suggest, however, that it contains a deeper truth and also a challenge. And here it is. If the stakes in academia are indeed so small, then should it not possible to follow our principles, to make things right and to keep them that way? If the University and its faculty cannot advocate for what is ethical and just when so little is at stake, how can we hope to instill this value in our students and our society when the implications of their actions are so much greater? As we look back on the sad events of last summer, the faculty of UCA achieved that goal. Today, one year later, we officially celebrate the beginning of a new chapter in the life of this university. My hope and pledge to you is that we will continue to advocate for UCA’s primary academic mission, to institutionalize accountability, and—yes—to develop deeper and more honest relationships with the Board of Trustees and the President. I appreciate your commitment and your attention this afternoon. Thank you and have a great year.