Chancellor’s Report

March 30, 2016

Successful Bond Initiative

Two weeks ago, the voters of North Carolina overwhelmingly approved the $2B bond initiative which included $110M for a new natural sciences building for Western Carolina University.  Inasmuch as approximately 2/3 of the total bond package was designated for higher education, I see this vote as a strong demonstration of support for higher education from the electorate, and this heartens me.

Of course, a new natural sciences building will be a game changer for us at WCU for all of the reasons which I have enumerated innumerable times.  To be sure, we have many other academic space needs – some new construction, and a lot of repair and renovation issues.  But the new natural sciences building was the top academic building priority in the campus master plan we completed a couple of years ago and thus represents a significant step forward.

We are now beginning a period of planning before construction itself begins, hopefully in early 2017.

UNC President Margaret Spellings Visit

President Spellings visited WCU three weeks ago as part of her tour of UNC institutions, and she had a wonderful, informative experience with us.  Her visit included a two-hour tour of campus highlighted by stops at the Rapid Center, the commercial and electronic music studio, the mosquito laboratory in HHS, and the body farm; at each of these stops, she met with students who spoke about and demonstrated their work, as well as with their faculty and staff mentors.  And of course, we toured her through the steam plant (which we are now referring to as the “steam museum”, new name courtesy of Curtis Monteith).

In addition, Margaret met with representatives of faculty, staff, and student leadership, and I have heard nothing but very favorable reviews of those meetings.  She also met with the Board of Trustees, enjoyed a reception with community representatives and leaders, and hosted a press conference with Dean Richard Starnes and me in the natural sciences building.

Margaret left Western Carolina with a good, initial understanding of who we are as a university, our momentum, and how we are pursuing our unique mission.  And, from my perspective, WCU really does align well with her emerging, strategic priorities for the UNC System as articulated in The Boston Consulting Group’s Report on Organizational Effectiveness released earlier this week.

* **Access.** Provide opportunity for all.
* **Affordability and Efficiency.** Ensure a UNC education is within the financial means of all in the state.
* **Student Success.** Increase degree attainment and ensure value and relevance for students.
* **Economic Impact.**  Contribute to the state.
* **Excellent and Diverse Institutions.**  Help institutions achieve excellence against their missions.

Finally on this topic, thank you for your roles in hosting, welcoming, and sharing with our new president.  She was very impressed with you and, through you, our university.

Campus Dialogue re Civil Discourse

Allow me to make a few remarks as a complement to my recent campus-wide emails on the topic of civil discourse.  As you are aware, our university, like many across the country, is grappling with issues related to free speech and diversity, and, while our university values both free speech and diversity, our campus community has room to grow in living those values.

It seems to me that our campus response must be comprised of three parts:

* Clear communication that WCU has related policies and procedures which we use and will use to govern our work and behavior, to ensure the safety of the members of our campus community, and to protect our fundamental freedoms and rights.
* Opportunities for members of our community to speak, to be heard, to listen, and to engage in constructive dialogue.
* Action – activities, events, continuing conversations, etc. – which will advance learning and a campus culture wherein our actions mirror the values we articulate.

I am heartened by the many faculty, staff, and students who have already stepped up to say, “I want to be part of the solution.  How can I help?”  Such a responsive approach bodes well for us both in the short-term and in the long-run.

I certainly would not have chosen to have Western Carolina University experience the occurrences of hate speech it did several weeks ago.  Inasmuch as we did, however, it seems to me that we have, not just an opportunity, but a responsibility to chart a course to pursue intentionally our best selves and our university’s best manifestation.

As always, thank you for all you do for Western Carolina University.

David Belcher

Chancellor