

Seminole State College
CAMPUS MEMO
From Dr. Jim Utterback – President
August 31, 2006

I hope this memo finds everyone in the campus community happy, healthy, and appreciative of the many blessings that have been bestowed upon us. As we get the first couple of weeks of the new academic year under our belts, I wanted to update the campus on some important items.

Division Chair Rotation

The decision to rotate division chairs has been met with a range of reactions from very positive to disappointment and anger. This was natural and expected. Since the North Central Association of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) proposed in their March 2000 *Report of a Visit* that the College “establish a system to regularly rotate division chair responsibilities” (p. 44), this issue has been a source of emotional debate. Since personnel are involved, it would be inappropriate to discuss specific issues related to the decisions which were recently announced. I thought, however, that anyone who may be concerned might find some comfort in the background that lead to these changes.

The official joint position of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the American Council on Education (ACE), and the Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities (AGB) makes it clear that such actions are standard and clearly within the purview of the president. The AAUP, ACE, and AGB "Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities" states the following: ***"As the chief planning officer of an institution, the president has a special obligation to innovate and initiate...The president must at times, with or without support, infuse new life into a department; relatedly, the president may at times be required, working within the concept of tenure, to solve problems of obsolescence. The president will necessarily utilize the judgments of the faculty but may also, in the interest of academic standards, seek outside evaluations by scholars of acknowledged competence."*** In our case, the recommendation of the outside scholars of the HLC to routinely rotate division chairs was directly in accordance with the official guidelines and was designed to strengthen the future of the institution.

The HLC team recognized that the then long standing practice at SSC of appointing division chairs semi-permanently was limiting and contrary to the official guidelines of the AAUP, ACE and AGB. The joint guidelines state: ***"The chair or department head should not have tenure in office; tenure as a faculty member is a matter of separate right. The chair or head should serve for a stated term but without prejudice to***

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reelection or to reappointment by procedures which involve appropriate faculty consultation." In their *Report of a Visit*, the HLC observed that "most chairs have been in their role for a long time. Without passing judgment on the effectiveness of any particular division chair, the team recommends that the College establish a mechanism whereby these responsibilities are rotated among qualified and interested faculty. Such a mechanism will help to ensure the continued vitality of the institution" (p. 14).

Rotation of division chairs is based on sound academic principles and is viewed throughout higher education as an accepted procedure. Understandably difficult for some, these changes create new opportunities. I am confident that the new division chairs will bring forward innovative ideas on how to improve our academic programs. For the future, I have asked Dr. Kennedy to work with the faculty to recommend procedures for more routine rotations of division chairs based upon specific terms in office.

Capital Projects

Progress is being made on every front. The architects are moving forward on the new maintenance building, the new Student Services / Academic expansions, and the softball complex. Next week, we will receive information from Boldt Construction on the total cost of the 150 bed residential learning center project. With skyrocketing building costs, I am anxious. Across the state, presidents have reported that bids being received on their building projects are ranging from 15% to as much as 60% over professional cost estimates. Towards the end of the last legislative session, I voiced this concern to Governor Henry and legislative leaders. I anticipate in the next legislative session that the presidents will be asking for priority funding for completion of the bond projects previously approved in the Higher Education Bond Issue.

Nichols Building

Under the leadership of Larry Smith, the SSC Educational Foundation has completed a dramatic renovation of the former Nichols building at 600 W. Strother. We anticipate that the AmeriContact Call Center will be moving into that building this fall. The Nursing Department gets kudos for being patient during this time.

Thank you for your service. We are in exciting times full of new possibilities. If you have any thoughts or ideas, or would like to discuss any of this further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best Wishes,
Jim