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CAMPUS NEWS

Faculty discuss the 'new normal' in higher education at symposium

By Sharron Hannon

shannon@uga.edu

Some 60 UGA faculty members discussed the "new normal" in higher education at the 20th annual Academic Affairs Faculty Symposium March 26-27.

The participants examined how the current economic crisis and other factors have impacted the university in teaching, research and service as well as graduate education and work/life balance.

In addition to panel discussions and break-out sessions, the symposium included a keynote address by Susan Martin, provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, who shared some of what has happened at her institution where budget cuts have been "long and sustained."

Martin said she worried that as faculty are asked to do more work with less help and less pay there is a tendency to "retreat behind the office door, hunker down and hope it doesn't affect me."

Emerging from the current economic crisis in the best possible condition requires "focus and discipline as an institution," she said, with strategic planning becoming more important than ever.

The group also heard from UGA President Michael F. Adams, who used the occasion to announce—to appreciative applause—that the university plans to develop two buildings on the Navy School property for use as child care facilities.

Child care and elder care came up in the break-out group focused on work/life balance, whose members stressed that such issues should be viewed as employee issues, not just faculty or women's issues. Among the group's recommendations, presented as part of their summary report, was the creation of an Office of Work/Life Balance under the auspices of Human Resources.

As another outgrowth of the discussion, Chris Franklin, a faculty member in the statistics department, agreed to convene a Faculty Learning Community for 2010-2011 to further address topics such as demands on faculty time, managing technology and how the administration can facilitate balance. Faculty can register to participate through the Center for Teaching and Learning Web site, www.ctl.uga.edu/flc.

The break-out group on instruction discussed the changing composition of the instruction corps and called for a campus-wide conversation about the appropriate role for non-tenure track faculty. The break-out group on research called for more flexible class scheduling, including the possibility of making classes longer and semesters slightly shorter, and advocated an annual "research fee" for all undergraduates that would be used to support the Center for Undergraduate Research Opportunities and faculty research in areas that are less likely to attract significant grant funding.

The group addressing university citizenship discussed ways to better communicate to faculty about - opportunities and obligations to serve on committees and task forces, as well as the need for such service to be acknowledged and valued.

The break-out group on graduate education called for the establishment of a Graduate Student Life Center on campus, incorporating a writing center and career center, to give graduate students a sense of community as well as more visibility within the university.

In closing remarks, Jere Morehead, senior vice president for academic affairs and provost, told symposium participants that it was important for them to push ideas forward and not let them get lost in day-to-day campus life, noting that the creation of the Office of Service-Learning grew from an idea proposed at an earlier symposium.

Morehead, who attended his first Academic Affairs Faculty Symposium as an assistant professor two decades ago, also reminded the group that an important outcome of the annual event is the opportunity to meet faculty from other disciplines and forge lasting relationships.

The symposium was sponsored by the Office of the Provost and the UGA Teaching Academy. Joe Broder, longtime chair of the academy's executive committee, chaired the symposium planning committee.

ON THE WEB

Proceedings from the symposium will be posted on the Teaching Academy Web site <http://teachingacademy.uga.edu>