

THE UNIVERSITY of TENNESSEE CHATTANOOGA

Provost's Page

April 3, 2009

What a difference a few weeks can make! I promised myself not to spend this entire newsletter discussing the budget. To be honest, I'm pretty tired of the subject. However, let me simply offer a few brief comments in light of recent events.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Federal Stimulus Bill) has given us minimally a two-year reprieve from our immediate budget crisis. Governor Bredesen has presented next year's proposed budget <http://www.tennesseeanytime.org/govfiles/FY09-10-Budget-Document.pdf> to the legislature. With the aid of the federal stimulus funds, this budget restores state appropriations to higher education to FY08 levels. That is great news for us, but it does not eliminate the necessity for us to continue our diligent effort to eliminate any unnecessary costs. We simply have a much more reasonable timeframe to work within than we would have had otherwise. Therefore, many of the proposed budget reductions will proceed as planned as will the thoughtful review of low producing academic programs. We must implement this process in the coming months to avoid finding ourselves in the same predicament two years from now when the stimulus funds are gone.

Unfortunately, this drama is far from over. We will have to wait to see how the legislature reacts to the Governor's budget, and we still must negotiate reasonable tuition increases in keeping with the intent of the stimulus bill. Additionally, we also have this specter of a possible major reorganization of higher education within the state. No one in Nashville seems to be in a hurry to do anything hasty in that regard, and the issue will likely be studied carefully for a year or so before any changes are recommended for consideration. I will do my best to keep you all informed as the situation continues to evolve. If you have any specific questions or are concerned by any rumors, please don't hesitate to contact me directly.

Now let me turn to something more encouraging. Although we have some absolutely outstanding students here at UTC, one student in particular has received an outstanding honor. We just received word last week that LaShunda Hill, a senior political science, sociology, and humanities major and Brock Scholar, was named a 2009 Truman Scholar. LaShunda is only the second Truman Scholar awarded to a UTC student; the first was awarded to Barbara (Elwood) Schalmo in 2002. Congratulations to LaShunda, her family, and all those faculty and staff who helped mentor her for this competition!

Also, whether you're a sports fan or not, I hope we all take some pride in how our UTC student athletes have represented us this past month. In particular, the men's and women's basketball teams and the wrestling team completed outstanding seasons in the conference earning the opportunity to compete nationally. These teams competed against the best in the country as we have come to expect of them. However, sometimes we may forget that they are first and foremost students. I have taken the liberty to quote some excerpts from an email the Chancellor

received from Michael Lutz, Director of Banquets and Conference Events at the hotel in Philadelphia where the men's basketball team stayed during the first round of the NCAA tournament.

I wanted to thank you and your school for including me as one of your brethren during your NCAA tournament here in Philadelphia. The Team, Staff, Pep Band, Cheerleaders, Sugar Mocs, and fans are the embodiment of what Southern hospitality is all about. In my job, I come across a lot of student groups. Ninety-nine point nine nine percent of the time they are a nightmare and a headache for me and the hotel. The Chattanooga Mocs were that .01% that makes my job a pleasure to have.

I always felt that a university's central mission should be the development of human beings as a whole through the cultivation and enrichment of the human mind and spirit. Numerous times I strolled around the hotel amazed at the students' priorities. Let me explain. I enjoyed college (La Salle University '97 Go Explorers!), emphasis on enjoyed. If I were a Moc on Spring Break, or playing in the NCAA tournament, the last thing I would be thinking about would be my academics. Yet there wasn't an hour that went by where I didn't pass a player studying or a student typing a paper. Sir, that is a testament to your school's character, and it's something that I felt needed to be acknowledged. The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga truly does have student athletes."

I felt that this excerpt was important to share with you, the faculty, not only for you to share in the pride of our students' accomplishments but also to remind us again that what we do makes a difference in the lives of our students and their families.

Finally, let me give you a quick update on the efforts to address our student retention and success at UTC. I'm happy to report that our freshman fall-to-spring retention rate improved this year by six percentage points (84% to 90%) over recent years. We have also seen the highest freshman fall GPA and the fewest percentage of students below a 2.0 GPA since 2003. These indicators all bode well for even more success to come. As part of the overall effort, we are aggressively reorganizing and expanding a University Advisement Center to primarily serve all freshman and undeclared majors. It will take us some time to fully staff the center but the center should be minimally functional in time for new student orientations this summer.

Below are updates of initiatives we're continuing to pursue. As always, please feel free to contact me directly at phil-oldham@utc.edu with any suggestions, questions, and/or concerns you may have regarding any university-related issues.

Updates and Announcements

- **Faculty Honors Program**- The annual Faculty Honors Day was moved to the spring semester this year to better coincide with other year-end celebrations. On April 16, we will begin at 12:30 p.m. in the UC gallery with an academic showcase (poster session) of recent scholarship produced by our faculty and students. Refreshments will be served during the poster session. Immediately following the poster session at 2:00 p.m., we will convene in the UC Auditorium for the Faculty Honors Program to recognize and honor our most recent faculty recipients of major university and college awards.
- **Brown Bag Lunch with the Provost**- The last Brown Bag lunch of this semester will be on Tuesday, April 14, in the Foundation Room of the University Center.

- Stimulus Funding for Special Initiatives- Richard Brown and I serve on a UT system-wide task force to strategically pursue federal stimulus funding opportunities for UT. These are competitive programs within the traditional federal funding agencies. A handful of target areas at UTC have been identified where we have the best chances of successfully competing for funding. A UTC task force has been organized, led by Andy Novobilski, to support this effort locally.
- Advising –In addition to the hiring of new advisors , a newly formed Advisement Committee is working with Faculty Senate representatives and current professional advisors to discuss ways to improve our current advising system.
- FAST program – The Freshman Academic Success Tracking (FAST) program will expand next fall to include all freshman level courses. In the fall we will be asking faculty who teach these courses to report the absences of their freshmen in these 100 level courses.
- Quality Enhancement Plan QEP) – Many thanks to all those who attended the March 27 conversation to help focus the campus on an effective QEP and also to Karen Adsit and Linda Johnston for their organization of this event.
- Orientation – Academic Affairs staff has been working with Student Development and the Advisement Committee to assist in the development of the program for Freshman Orientation. As this work continues, we will need broad faculty participation to help with the advising portion of Freshman Orientation.
- Other Initiatives – Academic Affairs is also working on a number of initiatives for course offerings and learning communities for the fall. You will be hearing more about these in the next month.