

## **FACULTY CONCERNS: STATEMENT FROM RICHARD RICE**

### **Concerns Regarding Communication at UTC**

Regretfully I will miss the first Senate meeting of 2008 as I travel to present my research at an academic meeting. In that this meeting will be the first opportunity for faculty to fully respond to the sudden and unilateral decision to shut down UTCSTAFF announced on December 6 -- just hours before our last meeting of the year -- I wish the following to be part of the "official" record in hope that the Senate will consider the matter. I hope this memo will also offer some insight upon recent events. If others, including the current administration, dispute the account below, they are welcome to correct or amend. Indeed, other than two emails from Chuck Cantrell, there has been administrative silence on this issue, possibly due to the long university break.

Reacting to our "dismay" and personal communications, Chancellor Brown called a meeting for leaders of faculty and staff on December 12. There Chuck Cantrell explained why closing UTCFSTAFF, which had been planned for August or September, had to be delayed until December 7. He repeated administrative concern over commercial or service provider comments on Raven, but could produce no email or other documentation from Knoxville demanding that UTCSTAFF be shut down. He mentioned phone calls and meetings. Chancellor Brown took full responsibility for the decision at that meeting.

President Gavin Townsend suggested that the FACULTY listserv had never been abused and might serve as an alternate forum for faculty concerns, if not staff. However, within hours of our meeting, Provost Oldham decided to moderate the FACULTY listserv. President Townsend and the Executive Committee were not informed of this decision.

The following issues need immediate and clear resolution:

1. Guidelines for the new Raven protocol. Chuck Cantrell promised that UTCINFO will interpret more broadly their role, mediated by his staff. More than a month after our December 6 meeting, no guidelines have been published, so presumably decisions are being made on an ad hoc basis. The only "official" problems mentioned in the two emails received by the community and the Executive Committee are brief: "ranting, raving, pontificating," and, more problematic, "personal opinion." Please note that none of these problems relate to buying, selling, or giving away items. We deserve more clarity.

The Faculty Handbook assures us that: "The freedom of the academy includes not only the right of faculty to teach, read and write without prior restraint or censure, but also the obligation to make public what labor and caution and care and the freedom to inquire have enabled them to know." I would maintain that this includes opinions on the policies and priorities of governance.

Furthermore, the Handbook says: "The principal mission of The University is the discovery and dissemination of truth through teaching, research and service. The Board recognizes that freedom of inquiry and expression is indispensable for this purpose and

believes that it and the administration and faculty should cooperate to that end...in a mutually beneficial exchange of information and ideas.”

Both the manner and timing of the Raven shutdown and the moderated FACULTY listserv suggest that the real problem was “unofficial” opinions that disturbed our leaders, not commercial transactions. Note that there was no attempt to correct the situation by a command to cease and desist.

2. Campus security. In this unfortunate age of campus and mall shootings, UTCSTAFF provided an immediate and unmediated means of warning the campus of a potential life-threatening situation. Now we hear of a secret security system that had not been perfected. Although details are vague, it involves something called a “reverse 911” technology whereby we can call 911 campus security, which is manned 24/7 (unlike our information office), and police there have the capability to instantly issue a message campus-wide, just like UTCSTAFF did.

It is now a month later, and we are already more than a week into the semester, and no announcement has been made. Raven should not have been cut off before this alternative was in place. It is foolish and perhaps even criminal to put faculty, staff, and students at greater risk if a shooter shows up on campus. A false alarm last fall in Brock Hall led to confusion about whether to leave the building (fire) or lock down (a threat). The Senate should demand immediate and effective action to restore a rapid campus-wide warning system in addition to other methods.

I hope members of the Senate and the broader UTC community share some of my concerns. I look forward to reading the minutes when I return to campus.

Richard Rice

Officially Senate Past-President, former UT Faculty Trustee, Professor