

January 6, 2015

To: Senate Executive Committee

From: Paul Escott, Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom and Responsibility

In response to your request, the Committee on Academic Freedom and Responsibility met today to discuss the Vision 2020 report. Ten members of the committee successfully arranged their schedules to attend a meeting in this period between semesters; two additional members of the committee sent comments that were shared with those present; a third additional member sent comments which were largely consistent with today's discussion but arrived late.

The Committee recognized that the Vision 2020 report aimed to generate enthusiasm and encourage progress and synergies on campus. As a starting point, its intent may be to spur useful discussion of issues relating to information technology and teaching. But the report has a specific viewpoint and lacks breadth. The Committee saw a number of problems or reasons to be concerned:

- The Committee supports encouragement of the use of technology in teaching. But it believes that Wake Forest's goal should be good teaching, however a faculty member achieves that result. The Committee was in favor of rewarding those who use new technology successfully, but not in favor of requiring, forcing, or penalizing those who do not.
- The tone of the document is overly enthusiastic and generally uncritical in regard to the use of technology. Phrases such as "remarkable potential" and "transformative" effects are common, but the report does not cite convincing research to support such claims. Where empirical research is needed, the report often substitutes the claims of individuals who have a commercial interest in promoting their product. Members of the Committee have not seen in their students the large benefits that are supposedly accruing in secondary education due to the use of new technology.
- The Committee felt that before plunging ahead, research is needed on the positive and possibly negative educational impacts of today's modern information technology. Committee members felt that it would be good for the faculty to have access to sound research and expertise bearing on both desirable and undesirable impacts of the new technology. Collection and dissemination of this research are appropriate before adoption. A committee or several existing groups on campus could provide this service to the faculty. Wake Forest also should ask, how are we going to measure the benefits of new learning methods or technologies?
- The Committee was troubled by a tone that seemed designed to herd faculty members in one direction; some feared what was called "coercion creep." As specific examples, the Committee saw reasons to be concerned with Recommendation 11 on page 19, which concerned tenure and promotion, and also criticized the last sentence of Recommendation 10. In the view of several members of the committee, these potentially raise issues of

academic freedom. Members of the Committee also disagreed with the idea (page 18) that the faculty should be a “cohesive whole” and suggested that the strength of a university derives from its individual, diverse faculty members.

- The Vision 2020 report failed to take into account important differences among disciplines. This is especially notable in regard to open access, which seems desirable in theory but for various disciplines is currently impractical as a way to publish one’s research and gain professional acceptance for one’s work. The Committee also noted, as does the Vision 2020 report, that funds for open access publishing are not adequate for potential future needs at this point. If open access is to become common, faculty and administrators will have to move carefully through a transition period, and open-access publishing cannot be required or demanded of all faculty during such a transition. There was general agreement that, if peer-reviewed, open-access publications are legitimate and deserving of respect.
- The Teaching and Learning Center was established in 1995 by the undergraduate faculty as a resource for the faculty, run by the faculty. At that time it was made very clear to the administration that its role was merely to provide funding; the programs and direction of the TLC were to be left in the hands of the faculty. The recommendations of the Vision 2020 report continue a movement toward control by the administration of the TLC.

We hope this report is helpful to you. As Chair of the CAFR, I will be happy to attend the Executive Committee’s next meeting to answer questions or assist in some way, if that seems desirable.