

APRIL  
2008

# THE FACULTY SPEAKS

Welcome to The Faculty Speaks at the threshold of one of the most critical periods in Texas Southern University's history. Indeed, at no point in recent memory, perhaps not even during the "Tim and Jessie" days that few on campus were here to witness, has the voice of the faculty been more essential in its relevance.

How so critical? For the past two years, the University has been besieged by a barrage of negative publicity regarding former president Dr. Pricilla Slade; and her upcoming re-trial as well as the upcoming trial of the last of an original quartet of defendants promises that said publicity will not soon cease. Since the year 2000, TSU has struggled to neutralize the problems that accrue to dropping enrollment at open admissions institutions, rising from just over 6,000 in 2000 as the University was placed on financial aid reimbursement status to over 11,000 during Slade's bi-directionally meteoric tenure but suffering a drop in quality of student performance from the attendance of "dead men walking." Retention and graduation numbers, understandably the greatest legitimate threat to the survival of this or any university, suffered accordingly: the dean of TSU faculty and administrators, Professor Emeritus Dr. Llayron L. Clarkson, apprised the faculty in @2000 that the R&G numbers for the general student population were lower than 5%, while athletes and all other students who have standards imposed before enrollment graduate at ten times that rate.

Since Slade's dismissal, problems have persisted. Enrollment dropped fifteen percent during the 2007 Fall semester. The Southern Association's placement of the University on probation for problems with finances and integrity, coupled with the usual loss of half of

[The following is the text of Dr. L. Alex Swan's Fall 2007 inaugural speech to the faculty. The Faculty Speaks reprints it for the benefit of those who were not in attendance and to refresh the memories of all others. The Editor]

## It's All About the Faculty

From the neighborhood to the nation,  
we must tell about education,  
and let the world know  
that it's all about the faculty.

Let everything we do, and everything we say,  
show others the way,  
so that they'll know,  
it's all about the faculty.

We have taught the least of these,  
and the very best of these,  
from Texas to Vermont,  
from Miami to Seattle.  
They'll all come to know,  
that it's all about the faculty.

To the faculty and those present:

I am indeed pleased and honored to have the opportunity to serve the faculty of this university in the capacity as Chair. I have served as Vice Chair, under Professor Otis King; and I am indebted to all former chairs, from Dr. Timothy Cotton to Dr. Sanders Anderson, and their Vice Chairs, all of whom attempted, with varying degrees of success, to make a contribution.

For those who are relatively new here, I served as Chair of the Department of Sociology, Economics, and Social Work, as it was then labeled, and Dean of the reestablished College of Arts and Sciences,

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## **The Why to the Woe of Retention and Graduation**

Ron C. Samples

Like many other colleges and universities throughout the nation, Texas Southern University is currently suffering from significant decline in graduation and retention rates for its six year cohorts. Recent newspaper reports identify fifty percent as the average graduation rate for the nation's colleges, but the rate for Texas Southern University is far lower, falling as low as four and a half to five percent for the general student population in 2000 but climbing no higher than fifteen percent in 2004 and 2005. The overall rate becomes significantly higher when students on academic and, however, ironically, athletic and other scholarship are included, especially since the graduation rate for such students is forty-four percent. Indeed, students in the general student population also graduate at a forty-four percent rate if and when they reach junior-level status via accumulation of sixty or more semester hours of credit. But, reaching that 60+ level is a problem, and the question for the University and/or those who would honestly address the problem is why.

The answer lies in part in the ironically superior academic success rate among the University's athletes. NCAA rules require athletes to meet several respectable requirements prior to participating in college-level sports activities. Consequently, athletes must at least think about preparing for success in college prior to enrollment, whereas, in contrast, the student from the general population is required, for admission to an open admissions institution, to meet far less stringent requirements. Additionally, NCAA rules require athletes to continue to perform academically and to make significant progress toward acquisition of a degree, whereas the performance requirements for merely retaining eligibility for continued enrollment are drastically lower. The key is that athletes have requirements imposed on them. And, being pressured by the imposition of requirements, they perform. Student athletes and students who are not athletes are, in one significant way, the same: both groups derive from essentially the same genetic pool. Moreover, there has been no huge genetic shift in the past thirty or even fifty years. Students are still essentially the same in their academic potential. The difference is made by the standards that are imposed, the structures to which they must respond.

The evidence upon which such a claim is based may at this point seem scanty and even insufficient. But, consider this admittedly anecdotal information. On April 4, 2006, two days before the deadline for dropping classes, an informal survey was conducted among students in a Monday/Wednesday/Friday English 132 class, an academic foundations "knowledge-based" class in which both questions and answers are repeatedly given. First of all, only ten of the 35+ enrollees were in attendance. Second, of those in attendance, only three to five were passing the class. Third, after having been reminded of the number of hours one should plan to study, all who were in attendance were asked how many total hours they spent studying or preparing for class each week and in how many semester hours they were enrolled. The answers, which were revealing, were as follows:

Student	Enrollment	Hours of Study
1	16	7-8 hours
2	15	5-6 hours
3	13	1-2 hours
4	15	3-4 hours
5	12	3 hours
6	9	7 hours
7	12	6 hours
8	15	4-5 hours
9	12	3 hours
10	17	12 hours

Not surprisingly, the student who was spending an average of seven hours in out-of-class preparation for nine semester hours of enrollment was the one student in the class who was performing above the “C” level, and that only marginally. A second anecdote points to the same essential roots of the problem. In an English 131 class of nearly fifty enrollees in the Fall of 2001 (recall that as the semester during which burgeoning enrollment precipitated the faculty’s overextension), a repeatedly announced quiz was given to test students’ having read a simple one and one-half page story that they had been given weeks to read due to the time it takes to wade through basic instruction in composition. On the day of the quiz’s administration, only twenty-two students chose to take the quiz even when threatened with being marked absent for not submitting a quiz response. Of the twenty-two who took the five-item quiz, only eleven wrote enough on the page to merit a look. And, of those eleven, only five had answers sufficiently fleshed out to have a chance at earning a passing grade. Dismissible as anecdote though these reports may be, far from anecdotal is the general survey conducted by the first ever committee on retention and graduation in the College of Liberal Arts and Behavioral Sciences through which virtually all students at the University must pass. When allowed to provide an anonymous response, a response with which they could make no political hay, the four hundred students participating in the survey told the committee that they were studying on average fewer than three hours for an average fifteen semester hours of enrollment. And the survey was conducted during the second semester among mostly academic foundations students after the deadline for dropping classes had passed, meaning the students participating were generally representative of the University’s best, most committed, and most inclined to feel that they had some hope of passing. Are we missing something here?

Over thirty years ago, when I was working with John Wilkerson at the McGregor Tennis Center with Zina Garrison and Lori McNeil, Wilkerson asserted that “the person who wins the match,” meaning almost any match, “is the person who spends the most time on the court.” Wilkerson had and still has a great eye for talent: when Zina and Lori were six years old he recognized fully that “these two will be in the top ten in the world in twelve to fourteen years.” Not only did Wilkerson say as much but, as many Houstonians well know, his prediction proved absolutely true. His talent for such insight was uncanny. Not at all uncanny, however, was his premise about winning. Surveys tell us clearly that students are not spending enough time on task, enough time with their studies, enough “time on the court”; they are not spending enough time with their studies outside the time that they spend in class. There is nothing uncanny about this observation. Indeed, what is uncanny is that we seem at some levels in the University unwilling to see what the why of our woe really is.

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which included the former Schools of Public Affairs and Communications as departments along with nine other departments. I came to TSU from Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee, where I served for six years as Chair of the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Gerontology. On occasion, Dr. Bobby Wilson makes the point that all of the positive and progressive administrative moves he makes he learned during the year he served as Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Allow me to speak for the next little while, grounding my remarks in the notion that “it’s all about the faculty” and our direct support system. The mission and the role of the faculty is the foundation on which this educational, academic enterprise is established; every other entity is complementary and peripheral. Within the context of who we are as a faculty – a scientific and application community – relative to the mission and designation of the University, we will attempt to accomplish several things. We will be guided by goals -- that is, by what we are commissioned to do -- and by objectives – that is, how we plan to achieve those goals.

First, we will attempt to develop and have in place, as quickly as possible, a Faculty Strategic Plan to include who we are, what we want to do and must do, and how we plan to do what we must do. A first-class 21st century university is the result of the nature, character, and quality of the collective performance of the faculty. Students will come, given the quality and extent of our performance, because we are here. The nation must hear from us and about us. Any organization, industry, business enterprise, if it plans to be successful and progressive, must have in place a Strategic Plan and adhere to it. Included would be the identification of the major issues, challenges, and concerns facing the (educational) enterprise, with collective positions of the key participants, in this case the faculty. Hopefully, a faculty profile will be included in the document. We would hope to achieve a satisfactory measure of consensus on the issues and positions that will be revisited from time to time. By the way, our faculty profile is one of the best in the city and among comparable universities in the State of Texas.

Issue Leaders: Persons who demonstrate a focused interest in a matter will be invited to lead a group of between three and five persons who will research and become the experts and specialists on the issue. Reports will be constructed and made available to the Executive Teams, the Senate and the Assembly at regular and called meetings. Each faculty member will have an issues document.

Our role in governance will be defined by the role we assume in carrying out our actual and perceived commission: in advocating collective faculty positions on macro, meso, and micro issues, and in blocking any interference to the achievement of our physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, professional, and financial well-being. We will employ all methods of resistance and protest.

We will and must, all of us -- the external official entities, the board, the administration, the students, the alumni, the community at large, and even the faculty – fully understand that “its all about the faculty.” We have got to get this in our spirits and work at believing and behaving as if it is the case, because it is. The faculty drives this bus, this train, flies this airplane, this space ship.

In this regard, let me remind our key academic administrators that your professional and academic protection here is secured or is a function of your status as faculty. Consequently, what you do to or for the faculty, you do so to and for yourselves. Furthermore, it is well to.

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remember that every thing earthly is temporary – three years, five years, or ten years Your position can be taken away; you can be taken away. We do not own positions; neither are we entitled to them.

As an equal opportunity observer, let me hasten to make the point that all is not well with the faculty. We proclaim that unity is strength, but we seem to specialize in disunity and weakness. We can and have to fix this condition, like yesterday. We know the enemy – it is us. We have to endeavor to be on one accord as a faculty, even if we dislike a few of us. Some of us are hard to like. But the “one accord” requisite is imperative to being strong and effective as a collective.

I have been around here about thirty years, and I have come to realize that some of us will never publish before we die. Some of us don’t even like teaching; it gets on our last nerve. Many of us do not like committee work, and we put all kinds of rubbish down as community service. There are those of us who like committee work. I hear us bragging about being on this committee and on that committee. I would urge that we find two areas in combination that we seek to excel in each year: please let teaching be one of the areas. We have made the false assumption that every faculty is a good or great teacher. There are some hip-pocket teachers among us. They know it and their students know it. That is why some students complain among themselves and to other faculty that they are not learning anything from you. We have to do better by all of our students. Let us teach them how to become familiar with the material.

We must strengthen our hand as professionals. We have to challenge our students and teach them, really teach them, not just the subject matter; we have to teach students how to learn. It is indeed an epistemological process. The illiterate of the 21st century is not the person who simply cannot read or write, but the one who does not know how to learn. Faculty, let us teach our students how to learn. We empower them when we accomplish this. For the most part, as a collective, we know how to teach, do research, publish, and serve the university, the community, and our professions. As a matter of fact, a good number of us are not simply a published group; we have advanced to the next level where our works are being referenced, cited, quoted, and used in classrooms nationally and internationally. There is no question that members of this faculty, over the years, have demonstrated god-like abilities and professional qualities in that we have taken very little (persons and resources) and on occasion comparatively close to nothing and created persons of added value and academic and professional worth. We specialize in doing just that, and some of us are testimonial products. We have divine favor because we serve the least of these. I realize that there are negative cases in both groups, faculty and students. For the most part, we know when to hold our students’ hands, when to push them, when to come alongside and yoke up with them to give them the necessary and appropriate support and encouragement; and we know how to challenge their independence, complacency, and their indifference. We can differentiate the able -- and give them what they need or require – from the disabled and provide them with what they need or require, even if it takes a little longer. The state does not and really cannot truly compensate us for what we actually do with what we get and have. However, we urge the state to make an effort. We are rewarded by the fact that we are change agents; we change lives and situations for the better. We have testimonies and evidence of thousands of students all over the nation, and even the world, who are on their way, have found their way, and are making their way. Make no mistake about it, “it’s all about the faculty.” Let us stop all of the foolishness, all the griping, bickering, fussing, and fighting among us as faculty. My back is already suffering from stab wounds. Let us remember that our

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existence is temporary. We all have appointments with the cemetery, without the privilege of cancellation. It is conceivable that the very thought of my being the Chair of the Faculty Assembly/Senate makes some folk nervous. However, I am bored with the “do nothing” crowd. Several years ago I invited Dr. Freeman to preach at my church, and his topic was “There Is No Excuse for Doing Nothing.” My subscription and prescription exactly. I yawn through the reviews of rules and regulations, and I get excited by the challenges and risks. I do not anticipate pats on the back or great waves of applause, maybe a kick in the rear or a stab or two in the back. Nonetheless, changes are good, and of course, some feathers will get ruffled. I might even be the subject of town or campus talk. However, I don’t always color within the lines, and I can be notorious for not staying within the fences. And that makes some insecure folk terribly uncomfortable and reactionary. So be it; they will get over it, or get out of the way.

Finally, let me make the point that there is nothing wrong with Texas Southern University that cannot be fixed by what is right with Texas Southern University.

Please, be blessed and progressive this academic school year, and please believe me, “it’s all about the faculty.” Let’s make it so, and keep it so.

Peace Be Unto You

### **Faculty Assembly/Senate Agenda Items for 2007-09**

Pursuant to the Faculty Chair’s promise to proceed systematically, the following list of “Faculty Assembly/Senate Agenda Items for 2007-09,” identified October 4, 2007, is provided for your information. Starred items are those that have been identified for priority consideration; new priority items will be identified as substantial progress is made regarding items first given priority. As per the Chair’s assertion, all faculty are eligible to participate in focus groups, propose additional agenda items, or recommend revisions or amendments to the current list.

- Providing Organizational Structure – Faculty Strategic Plan
- University Administrative/Academic Structure – The Essential Entities
- Faculty Financial and Professional/Academic Health – Budgeting Merit and Cost of Living Raises, Faculty Development Funds
- Filling Faculty and Administrative Positions – Adherence to Rules and Processes
- Decisions Regarding Faculty Promotions and Tenure
- Faculty Direct Support system
- Operation and Function of the Senate
- Graduation Rates and the Role of the Faculty
- Policing and Police Protection – Safety and Protection for Faculty
- Retirement and the Issue of Phased Retirement
- The Faculty Speaks and Journal Possibilities
- Distinguished Faculty Identification and Designation
- Faculty Headquarters – Condition and Repairs
- Faculty Merit Raise Evaluation Instrument
- Adjustments to the Faculty Constitution and Manual
- Resolutions Review – Application and Implementation Process
- Council/Institute on African Affairs
- Leadership Matters and Presidential Search
- Faculty Workload and Responsibilities
- Faculty Social Affair
- Legislative Insight
- Evaluation of Administrators

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the freshman class by the end of the Spring semester, contributed no doubt to a further significant drop in enrollment, a suspension of a process toward NCATE accreditation that had been well underway, and additional reason to doubt the efficacy of an administration that pays itself at rates among the top twenty-five percent in the nation. The earlier threat of receivership, the protracted process for dismissal of the remaining members from the previous board and the resignations of all others in the wake of a 17 million dollar shortfall, alleged tensions between the interim president and the board and others in the administration, board membership insufficient for Southern Association accreditation, the absence of a permanent president, administrative upheaval – not unexpected – attendant upon the installation of a new president, two successive “iffy” contestations of faculty elections – slavery exists with some acquiescence of the slave, denial of rights for faculty within departments to choose leadership and decide personnel matters, the disingenuous protestation by a board president that legally uncircumscribed faculty input was unnecessary in a critical reorganization plan that contains an entire chapter on academic programs reorganization, a doubling of faculty parking fees to pay for parking garages that were flawed in their planned funding and for retail shops that have no discernible tenants, an unpublicized epidemic of legalistic charges – some valid but most unsubstantiated and insubstantial – as the unrest in the upper levels of administration encourage chaos in the lower ranks as surely as it did for Willie’s Richard II and King Duncan, and an 0-11 season on the football field that makes for the least of the University’s worries. Apologies for the “Whitmanian Catalog,” string theory, and random order physics. But one needs to preclude an excess death of trees and yet represent the chaos and incoherence.

At this point Texas Southern begins anew with a new president. But, as Faculty Chair L. Alex Swan has asserted, “We don’t need a president; we need a leader.” With the moves he has authorized to date, President Rudley has shown ample willingness to make difficult decisions, especially of the sort that previous presidents either did not want to make, could not steel themselves to make, or did not have the power to make. The hope now is that, with responsible faculty input and careful consideration of that input, the decisions that Rudley makes are the right ones. Meanwhile – and one notes that the preliminary report from the Southern Association did not find any fault with the faculty – the faculty, with pay in the nation’s bottom twenty-five percent will continue to do what by and large it has always done: to wit, take care of the business that is fundamental to any university, the business of teaching and learning, and teach, apparently not for the money but for the T-shirt.

**Editorial Policy**

The Editor welcomes comments and suggestions. For publication consideration, The Faculty Speaks also welcomes submissions of articles of general faculty interest. Interested parties should send articles of two to three pages (1500-2500 words) as MS Word email attachments to

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The Faculty Speaks reserves the right to make minor editorial changes to submitted articles and/or to decline publication altogether. Current members of the editorial board are Howard Beeth, Thorpe Butler, Ron C. Samples, and Christopher Tymczak.

The seal of Southern University is a large, circular emblem in the background. It features a five-pointed star in the center, surrounded by a wreath. The words "SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY" are written in a circular path around the star. Below the star, the text "EST. 1865" is visible. The seal is rendered in a light gray, semi-transparent style.

### 2007-08 Faculty Senate Roster

The following list of elected senators and officers is provided in the interest of encouraging members of the faculty to contact representatives for information and input regarding Faculty Assembly proceedings. Please, let them hear from you.

Selena Ahmed (COLABS)	Nina Saha (COE)
Howard Beeth (Asst. Secretary)	Ron C. Samples (Editor)
Rambis Chu (Treasurer)	Lalita Sen (Vice Chair)
Mildred Bright (COPHS)	Marion Smith (Bus.)
Marian Ferguson (Library)	Alex Swan (Chair)
David Hansen (Bus.)	Christopher Tymczak
(Parliamentarian)	
Elsa Leggett (COE)	Mammo Woldie (Bus.)
J. Jonathan Lewis (COST)	Tommy Woods (COLABS)
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