



"Committed to Academic Excellence"

NEWSLETTER

November, 2009

WARTBURG INAUGURATES ITS 17TH PRESIDENT

On October 16th, 2009, Wartburg College inaugurated Dr. Darrel Colson as its 17th president. Official representatives from 75 colleges and universities from 27 states attended the event. Twenty-five representatives were from Iowa institutions. The inaugural dinner was followed by reflections by representatives of the college's various constituencies: the Board of Regents, the student body, staff, faculty, alumni and the Waverly community. Ted Reuter, chair of Faculty Council and AAUP member, spoke on behalf of the faculty and sounded a note of optimism about the college's future under Colson's leadership.

PRESIDENT COLSON ADDRESSES AAUP MEMBERS AT FALL DINNER

For the second year in a row, the annual AAUP fall dinner featured a presentation by the college president. His topic was "The Louisiana Scholar's College – 'Integrative Learning' before its Time."

In his talk, President Colson told the fascinating—and often amusing—story of the founding of the Louisiana Scholars College for the Liberal Arts and Sciences at Northwestern State University, an adventure in which he took part. The college was started, at least in part, as part of an effort to save the university, the enrollment of which had decline precipitously. Dr. Colson described the politics surrounding the founding of the college, the challenges the faculty faced as it tried to fulfill its mandate to create *de novo* an alternative institution that eschewed "all traditional limits," and the joy of working closely with colleagues and students in the unfolding of a highly interdisciplinary and individualized curriculum.

The founding documents of the college called for a revolution in pedagogy and curriculum. The new faculty was charged by the state legislature to develop a program with two curricular options: (1) "An integrative program emphasizing the interrelatedness of science, math, the humanities and the professions" and (2) "Experimental study groups in which students would approach their studies in a way that is free of the constraints of time, learning methods and subject matter imposed by the traditional curriculum." This proved to be a tall order, and the faculty found itself struggling to meet the expectations of radical innovation implicit in its charter and to address the demands of the registrar who faced the daunting task of articulating and enforcing academic standards and procedures for the new college. The faculty settled on a program they called "Texts and Traditions," an approach reminiscent of the St. John's great-books model.

Colson described the beginning days of the college with great fondness. The intellectual intensity that enveloped the whole enterprise was an educator's dream come true. Students rose to the high expectations of the program and took ownership of their learning to an exceptional degree. The faculty struggled to meet the demands inherent in delivering new courses with innovative pedagogy, and they found working in teams to both design and deliver the new curriculum especially challenging.

Not surprisingly, this idealistic educational experiment faced substantial challenges, not all of which could be overcome. Chief among these were the need to award degrees that fit within conventional academic categories and the challenge of securing funding for the enterprise. Ultimately, the college was forced into a more conventional paradigm, but one can see today the ideals that informed its beginnings in its website's description of its programs and unique identity.

All in all, it was a fascinating story, and it gave the Wartburg faculty in attendance insight into our new president's passion for liberal education and an appreciation of the value he places on collegiality, interdisciplinarity and programs that ask students to invest themselves deeply in the pursuit of academic and personal excellence.

Brian C. Jones

BUDGET TRANSPARENCY IS A CULTURAL SHIFT

The budget planning process is much on people's minds as Wartburg negotiates a tight economic landscape. Wartburg's budget process, from my experience as a Building and Budget committee member, has a surprising number of pieces and steps. At the beginning of the fall term, there are three separate budgets under review and many unknowns. The previous academic year's financial records are still being finalized. The current academic year's budget is provisional and subject to revision up until the first meeting of the Board of Regents at homecoming. And the planning process for the following academic year's budget is only beginning.

This budgeting process is further complicated by a number of factors ingrained in the Wartburg culture. First, the Board of Regents must be the first body outside of the president's cabinet to be made aware of any financial data. This means that the final budget for the academic year can't be seen by members of the Building and Budget committee until it has already been approved by the Board. Second, the harm that partial or preliminary information can do is always being weighed against the benefits of earlier and more complete communication. Third, the information that goes into making the budget is controlled by many different entities, both at the faculty and administrative level. For example, the Appointment, Rank and Tenure committee has information on compensation that is not shared with the Faculty Council or the Budget and Building committee for confidentiality reasons. Similarly, the organizational units of the college not directly associated with faculty have little, and sometimes no, communication with members of the faculty.

Consider the case of departmental budgeting. This is an area of great strategic interest to Wartburg College, because the relative strengths of the College's programs affects the students who can be successfully recruited and thus affects the long-term health of this tuition-driven institution. Information about those allocations are not available to any faculty with an advisory role in reviewing the college budget. This is an example of a cultural factor that impacts the effectiveness of the budget-making process.

Pointing out these factors as complications of budget transparency is not to suggest that transparency is impossible. My intention is to stress that the structures that dictate

who has what information and when they have it are cultural constructions. Recognizing this allows us to imagine processes that can serve to change these structures. As forward-looking faculty, we must encourage structures that enable peer-like sharing of information, that allow clear decisions that balance openness with risk and that permit planning information to flow between units in a way that facilitates healthy decision making. The tight economy has cast into stark relief the need for cultural changes that promote transparency.

Neil Martinsen-Burrell

ENROLLMENT TRENDS

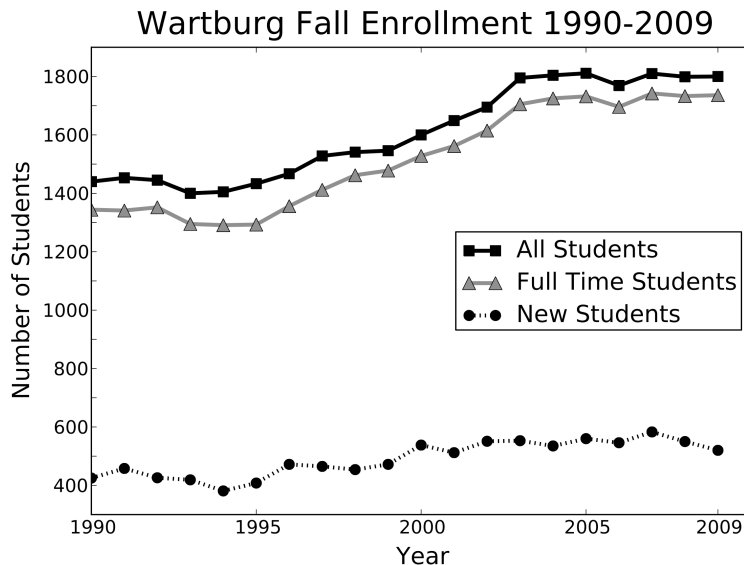


Chart prepared by
Neil Martinsen-Burrell

AAUP IS MORE THAN CRISIS-CENTERED

I continue to be surprised at the number of faculty members who say they support AAUP principles yet avoid membership. I have heard several excuses. One is "I agree with AAUP principles, but I'm not tenured." Another is "AAUP claims to be willing to help me in a pinch whether or not I'm a member, so why pay dues to become a member?" (The claim is correct. Over the years I've served on several grievance committees hearing appeals of tenure denials, and an AAUP advocate was always present to assist the complainant.)

Until very recently a common reason was "AAUP is too confrontational." Even when the shared governance process described in detail in the faculty handbook was violated, some who were conflict averse took exception to any dissent as an attack on "the institution." "My college, right or wrong" seemed to be their motto. Others didn't like to associate with those the administration called "trouble makers."

Well, times have changed! For years presidentially appointed task forces were used to end-run Wartburg's shared governance system. But since spring 2009 duly elected faculty members of the Building & Budget Committee have been meeting with the President's Council to discuss the budget, and Faculty Council members have also been brought into the budget process. In June the faculty itself voted to change the handbook regarding pension benefits for one year to provide flexibility in the college's fiscal position. This is not top-down unilateral decision making!

So without the purposeful exclusion of faculty input, where's the need for an active AAUP? Without a crisis, why AAUP?

A strong AAUP presence leads to improvement in communication and interaction between faculty and administration. Continued reminders to the faculty and the administration promote academic and financial discussion. The resulting transparency and mutual trust enhance the workings of any shared governance system.

The basic principles of academic freedom, tenure, and shared governance that were the concern of the AAUP's founders back in 1915 are still of essential importance today, even though new challenges have arisen. The AAUP has played a vital role in the continuing definition and incorporation of fundamental professional values and standards in higher education. A strong AAUP chapter can help to ensure that sound academic policies reflecting these values and standards are incorporated into the faculty handbook. Because of efforts of AAUP members in the past, the current handbook is loaded with policies and procedures taken directly from the AAUP's *Policy Documents and Reports* (the so-called *Redbook*). It contains *verbatim* the AAUP's classic statements on academic freedom and tenure, professional ethics, and plagiarism. The policy on sexual harassment closely parallels that in the *Redbook*, as do our policies on grievances, faculty evaluation, non-reappointment, dismissals, termination, suspension and disciplinary actions.

Back in 1995-96, Wartburg AAUP led the debate over the sexual harassment policy proposed by the administration (see the following issues of the *Wartburg AAUP Newsletter*: February '95, May '95, October '95, November '95, January '96 and April '96). Forums sponsored by the Faculty Review Committee examined the original draft proposed by the administration. The chapter sought advice about the draft policy from the national office of the AAUP, which noted two areas of concern: (1) the subjective definition of sexual harassment and (2) the lack of due process. The proposed and amended draft went through several faculty and board of regents votes before reaching its final version one year later. Without AAUP's persistence and guidance, the original draft would not have received the careful analysis it did. Individual faculty members were in no position to oppose and improve the original draft.

Before the Higher Learning Commission visit in early November 2006, Wartburg AAUP sent its own recommendation letter to the HLC team. Of concern were issues of governance, strategic planning, and faculty compensation (October 2006 *Wartburg AAUP Newsletter*); the HLC team report substantiated those concerns (May 2007 *Newsletter*).

New challenges confront the academic world regularly. For example, today the growing percentage of contingent (adjunct and non-tenure track) faculty and the status of tenure at large public institutions are of major concern; see the national AAUP website (www.aaup.org) and Jim Andrews' article on the corporatization of faculty at the University of Iowa (Spring 2009 *Iowa Academe*). Will financial considerations at Wartburg force a new look at the tenure system and Wartburg's use of contingent faculty? I surely hope the AAUP on campus is strong and its voice clear if such a challenge arises.

Warren T. Zemke

Editor's note: All members of the Wartburg faculty, not just AAUP members, are invited to make contributions to the newsletter. Submit contributions to the editor, Brian Jones, at brian.jones@wartburg.edu.