

Fall Faculty 2017 United Faculty Speech

Congratulations to all the faculty award winners. You are all amazing and make me even prouder to work at UNI. I also want to add my personal welcome to our new faculty members who are joining our UNI family.

Awards and welcomes notwithstanding, today is a sad and somber start to Homecoming at UNI with the tragedy in Las Vegas, but also with some troubling developments here on campus. The rain and darkness outside reflect my mood today, but I'm hoping for some sunshine soon.

Intro

- this is my 20th year as a faculty member at UNI in the Department of Teaching, but I grew up here at UNI, attending our now-closed laboratory school nursery kindergarten-12th grade, and spending time on weekends playing in my dad's office at Schindler, drawing on the whiteboards and playing elevator hide and seek. I'm also a proud graduate of UNI and remember with great fondness what I learned from several wonderful professors here in this room today. So my roots here run deep. I'm not the only faculty member like that. The deepest roots I think I've found so far are Doug Hotek's in the Department of Technology, who is a fourth-generation faculty member, all in the same department at UNI. Can you believe that?

{I'm going to start by saying a lot of positive things. I always tell my students that when you are giving feedback, it's important to start with something positive}.

- I love UNI, I bleed purple and gold, I love cheering on the Panthers, especially the VB team, every month I donate to a number of athletic and academic scholarships. I love going to great theatre productions with the UNI production of RENT as one of my top favorites. I appreciate the work of our Merit and P&S staff as well as the generally positive relationship United Faculty has built with President Nook and Provost Wohlpart. I love that you often hear people talk about UNI as a family, and I often feel that way myself about all of you, part of my UNI family.

- The UNI Family has many parts, but what really makes UNI special for me are those who are the engine of our core mission: Our outstanding faculty. ***The University works because we do.*** For more than forty years, United Faculty has championed the rights of faculty and has won important safeguards, benefits, and rights to protect faculty. Despite changes to Iowa's collective bargaining laws last spring, UF continues to do this. We turned a tight corner together last spring, working collaboratively with administration to write a new Faculty Handbook, which preserved nearly all of the rights of our former contract. We continue to represent the faculty on several committees, including the Faculty Handbook Committee, the Faculty Evaluation Committee, and the Faculty Petition Committee whose work I believe to be absolutely pivotal. I am hopeful that these groups will be models of outstanding labor-management collaboration and will result in positive outcomes for faculty. But a slow start and other signs make me wary. The work holds a promise of a system that will inspire and support great faculty to become truly extraordinary but there is also a risk of a punitive

system that counts the wrong widgets and ignores what makes UNI great.

Here's where I'm going to start moving into more critical feedback, but let's understand this as caring coaching from a critical friend who loves UNI and wants it to remain a great place to learn, to teach, and to work.

- You see, we are entering a new era with a lot of unknowns. The legislature has basically issued an open invitation to our administration to take a strong draconian hand when it comes to managing our labor. The legislature will continue to challenge our administrators to do more with less and there will be more pressure on them to turn on us and **tell us to work more, get paid less, to accept cuts to benefits, and to ignore our voice in decision making.** I like our President and Provost very much as people, but in their positions, they are also cogs in a larger machine that devalues academic labor and higher education. It is our duty to continue to remind them to make the right choices and to feed and care for the engine of learning here on campus and not that larger machine that is out to destroy our work. We must remind them to **enact** their words and philosophies, not just to express them.

- Two weeks ago, I heard a lot of positive words from President Nook about our student and faculty success and how high-quality faculty is integral to the success of the university. That without high-quality faculty, the university cannot be successful, so faculty deserve "reasonable salaries and appropriate benefits."

It was a good speech and I really loved those words, but what I want to push back on is actions.

- I appreciated hearing stories about the meritorious work of our faculty, but we all know that the meritorious work earned no merit pay last year and from what I understand, none this year as well. Now, part of that is because we have a broken merit system, so maybe it makes sense to not pour money into it. We need a merit system that is not broken, that does not contribute to ongoing inequity, based on an expanded understanding of scholarship that includes the scholarship of teaching and learning, the scholarship of engagement. One that includes recognitions and rewards for term and temporary faculty as well as tenure/TT. I have great hope that now that the Faculty Evaluation Committee has *finally* started to meet, that they will accomplish this work, and I thank Carissa Froyum, Amy Petersen, and Chris Martin, all UF leaders, for their commitment and hard work on the task. I know they can get this job done if their work is not obstructed and if our administration remains committed to this shared goal.

- I appreciated hearing that we value collaboration and transparency and shared governance, but that doesn't always match the actions of administration. In my college, for example, new college-wide evaluation criteria were emailed out to faculty on a Friday afternoon without any prior communication that they were being developed or any consultation with faculty or any note in the narrative of the email that anything had changed regarding the attached criteria.

- It also doesn't match with a decision that has already been made and put into action to add UNI Merit staff to the Faculty Insurance plan. This decision was also made without consultation or communication with faculty leaders and on Friday we learned that as a direct result, faculty insurance premiums are going up, far more than they would have if staff had not joined the plan. This result was entirely predictable, completely in line with the conclusions drawn by Labor Management Committee which for more than a year studied the impact of creating a larger insurance pool. Those rate hikes will more than cancel out our 1.1% base wage increase, way more, and will result in a net pay cut for faculty.

Suddenly nice words mean a lot less to me because we are talking bread and butter issues, especially for younger and newer faculty. We aren't just talking about bigger monthly premiums, we are talking about larger copays for doctor visits and larger maximum out of pockets. Does it have to be that way? I don't believe so. The university could elect to pick up a greater share of the premiums for faculty to smooth this transition. They could also find the money for merit pay. It is all about priorities and budgets. I hope that all this not what President Nook meant by "reasonable salaries and appropriate benefits" and that it does not portend more of this kind of decision-making in the future.

United Faculty will be calling an emergency meeting next week regarding changes to insurance, so watch your email for more details.

- It feels like it is time for another positive, so let's talk about Tim Kidd's baby, Genesee, and President Nook's two new baby grandchildren for a minute. I'm a big sucker for babies and I already told UNI is my family. But as a union leader, babies mean something more to me than the most adorable thing ever. They are beings in need of care and create new demands on the work/family balance. Last year, the Faculty Handbook Committee's first recommendation for this year was to standardize and make transparent the university's policy for family leave and to create clear guidelines for paid modified duties that would allow for quality bonding and strong families, and to complete that task by December 1st. That is an action I would very much like to see and very achievable, despite the fact that the committee hasn't met yet. And don't get me started on day care, or we'll be here all day, but an expansion of the UNI Child Development Center that would make room for more children of faculty, that would be pretty awesome too.

- Speaking of family leave for our UNI Family, let's talk about allowing faculty to use more of their own sick leave to care for a seriously ill family member. In the last six months, both my sister and a friend who is a colleague here at UNI lost their partners to aggressive forms of cancer. My sister, a state worker in Colorado, was able to use all of her accrued sick leave to care for her husband and to allow him to die at home surrounded by family. Then she was given generous administrative bereavement leave to help her three children heal and to grieve as a family. Here at UNI, we are allowed to use 10 days of our own sick leave, and that was a hard-fought concession from the last two contract

negotiations. It is a good start, but not enough. It should be more. Here at UNI, paid bereavement leave “may” be considered. It should be “shall be provided, or at least offered.”

- There are so many other examples I could talk about and so many stories I could tell from my union work, but all of this boils down to ensuring that faculty are full and equal members of our UNI family and that collectively we **care for and support them with actions as well as words in regard to pay, benefits, leaves, and most fundamentally by giving them a voice in decision making and governance. To do otherwise makes our family dysfunctional.** United Faculty will continue to be a strong advocate and champion of our faculty and we challenge the administration to **enact** concrete changes to recognize, reward, support, and empower faculty.

The University works because we do. But we have a lot of work left to do to when it comes to valuing faculty.

Thank you for all that you do, Happy Homecoming, and Go Panthers!