

Week of November 8

Thanksgiving break is but a week away. We are also a week away from knowing who will govern Louisiana for the next four years. As you all know, we face considerable acute and chronic challenges in our state. I am not talking about just budgetary matters. I firmly believe elections are pivotal moments that create opportunities. We have the opportunity for unprecedented economic growth. We have the opportunity to address generational poverty and a history of underachievement in educational attainment. We have an opportunity to advance our state and its citizenry. NASCAR fans (at least two will read this) know the best time to advance your position is during the restart after a caution flag. Elections are restarts. Regardless of your politics, please ensure your voice is heard over the coming week. More importantly, we will make sure our voice is heard in the weeks after the election so that we can advance as many positions as possible in the short run, then settle in for steady progress.

One topic of conversation that has emerged over the past weeks is a desire to strengthen the Board of Regents (BoR). The structure of higher education will certainly be prominent in the policy discussions of the next administration. I have no problem with a strong BoR as long as their focus shifts from a focus on inputs and process-based accountability to a focus on performance and outcomes-based accountability. We will do all that we can to convey that message.

The Week

I spent most of the week out of state as a member of a SACSCOC onsite review team. While the specifics related to the college being reviewed are confidential, I think you might get some value from a recent inside perspective of the process.

Monday was a travel day and an opportunity for committee members to finalize review of documents and scheduling of interviews. A few weeks before the visit, committee members received several documents from the institution and from SACSCOC: the Compliance Report, the Preliminary Report of the Offsite Reaffirmation Committee, the institution's Focused Report (response to any preliminary findings of noncompliance), and the assignments for the onsite team. Standards with which the institution has been determined to be compliant typically require no further action. The

US Department of Education requires onsite review of several standards. The majority of the onsite work centers on standards with which the offsite committee has determined the institution to be noncompliant and review of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP).

Tuesday morning, some members of the onsite committee visited remote sites. Over lunch, the committee met for introductions and to get organized. That afternoon, the committee met with the Institution's Leadership Team. Later, the institution's QEP Leadership Team presented an overview of the plan including the rationale, the institution's capacity to execute the plan, the major topics and expected outcomes of the plan, and the intended consequences of the plan for the college. That evening, the onsite committee held an executive session to debrief.

Wednesday morning, committee members met with administrative officers on remaining compliance issues. We then conducted focused group discussions pertaining to the QEP. One group explored the QEP in terms of focus and assessment. The group I chaired explored the institutional capacity and campus involvement. Lunch meetings were held with a portion of the committee meeting with members of the governing board, others meeting with students, and the remainder meeting with faculty. That afternoon, the committee met to finalize any issues of compliance and continue evaluation of the QEP. The committee chair, the SACSCOC VP, and I then met with the college's president to give a preliminary report on our work. The remainder of the evening was spent on the QEP.

Thursday morning, the committee met for one last executive session to finalize the reports on compliance and the QEP. We traveled to the college where the committee chair presented a very brief overview of the committee's compliance work. The QEP lead reviewer then presented a detailed overview of our review of the QEP. This portion of the presentation was open for discussion; the compliance portion was not.

The behind-the-scenes work of the committee was fascinating. We talked, sometimes with significant passion and conviction, through issues related to compliance/non-compliance/weakness. We focused on constructive criticism when appropriate. We spent a great deal of time gaining a full appreciation of the evidence and narrative provided by the college. The process works.

First thing after returning to the office Friday, I met with Dale Wohletz on some pending work around campus. Then, Carl Jones and I met with Eric Gilmore of the Demon Bookstore. Laurie Morrow from NWLTC dropped by to discuss some ideas related to workforce development. Jerry Pierce, Greg Burke, Roxanne Freeman, and I participated in an entrance conference with representatives of the Legislative Auditor's office for their work on NCAA matters.

Later Friday morning, I was delighted to visit with the steering committee for the Diversity Center. Frances Conine organized an exemplary group of students, faculty, and staff to discuss the purpose, design, and operation of the center.

At lunch, several Natchitoches area high school counselors joined Jana Lucky, Curtis Penrod, Steven Niette, Christina Lake, Taylor Whitehead, and I for a discussion about NSU offerings. Chris Maggio, Jana, and the recruiting team host these luncheons across the state during November. Fortunately, Jana allows me to speak first, giving me the opportunity to steal just enough of the message from each person that follows...

After lunch, I visited with Dr. Brenda Destro from Senator Bill Cassidy's office. Senator Cassidy is planning a research conference in February. Dr. Destro, on the Senator's behalf, was collecting feedback from various constituents regarding ways to ensure the conference addressed relevant matters.

Friday afternoon, Drake Owens and Jill Bankston presented an overview of the strategic advancement plan. We talked about our advancement efforts in general. We also discussed specifics related to ongoing and potential campaigns. As you know, alternative methods of revenue generation are an increasingly important part of our financial model.

Saturday morning was Scholars' Day at NSU. More than 90 students gathered in the Student Union Ballroom to hear from Scholars' College faculty and staff. Steven Niette coordinated the event that included the gathering, campus tours, Q&A sessions, scholarship information, and a student panel. Attendees were also able to attend classes taught by Scholars' faculty to current Scholars' College students.

After the visit, Tonia, Alexander and I traveled west to Huntsville to watch Demon Football. Thank you to those who were able to make the trip, and

thank you also to those who attended Senior Day for Demon Volleyball. Our student athletes appreciate support from our faculty and staff more than you know.

Please contact me with any questions, comments, or concerns.