

August 13, 2015 University Assembly Speech

Last year had many challenges. We spent a lot of energy reviewing what and how we do things, and we started making choices about what is important and where we want to take UALR into the future.

Early returns indicate that we're moving in the right direction on enrollment. This gives us a breathing space to finish the important initiatives. It allows us to improve ourselves in a thoughtful manner, rather than the frenzy of the last couple of years.

However, Academia continues to face external challenges and transformative change. For the foreseeable future, the start of each semester is going to be nervous time as we review our enrollment trends. We have a breathing space, but we cannot become complaisant.

To paraphrase a statement misattributed to Charles Darwin, it is not the strongest or smartest institutions that survive, but rather the ones most responsive to change. UALR has been very Innovative over the years in how we reach our students. We've led the state in exploring distance learning. As our environment

changes, especially as rapidly as it is changing, we have to bring our most creative thoughts to find solutions and remove barriers.

An institution of higher learning is a valuable asset for the region that hosts it. We are a collective of operational expertise. The faculty spend their lives accumulating Knowledge. We're living troves of esoteric information that has been painstakingly unearthed, validated, folded, spindled, and mutilated.

When you want to know something ... sometimes you might want to invest the time yourself in figuring it out. But, much of the time, you'd prefer to hire an expert to use her knowledge on your behalf. This is much of the value of a university ... operationalized expertise. It's valuable ... it's powerful ... and, it can transform lives.

We have a responsibility to maintain, nurture, and grow this knowledge for the benefit of our community. We have a responsibility to make this expertise available as widely as we can. I've been proud to be a part of UALR ... UALR has always had this spirit that we're going to give anyone who comes to us a chance to succeed. We have worked very hard to be Accessible to those who need us.

This access can sometimes make it difficult on us, though, since the funding formula rewards institutions for graduates. Many of our students might be on their last chance or their only chance. I'm proud of UALR for resisting the pressure to restrict who we allow through our doors just to those we think have the best chance to graduate.

As faculty, we have a responsibility to the curriculum. This is our basic responsibility under the tenets of shared governance. We also have a responsibility to comment, especially on any matters that affect our ability to deliver our curriculum.

How we comment can be helpful or it can be hurtful. We're all working towards a common purpose, and we need to be Respectful in our comments. Words are powerful ... that's one reason the first amendment is first. With any powerful tool, you need to Respect the other person's point of view and pressures. Realize that most people aren't trying to mess you about. They just don't see things the way you see things.

Faculty Engage with the university through our department, college, and university committees. The undergraduate council, graduate council, core council,

and faculty senate are the most active bodies on campus, and the folks who serve on these bodies deserve a lot of credit for putting in the time and thought to do their job well.

When everything is running smoothly, it's easy to neglect our committee service. In this time of change, the place to comment, influence, and direct ... the place to engage with the university...is through our committees.

UALR is the most powerful agent for change in Little Rock. Many of us have spent our careers on the university because we want to improve people's lives. So, this year, I encourage you to get up, get into it, and get involved. Let's help UALR fulfill its promise.