



NSU holds spring opening meeting for faculty, staff

Faculty and staff convened Friday inside the Webb Center Auditorium at Northeastern State University to hear addresses from President Don Betz and others during the Spring 2011 opening meeting.

Betz touched on several topics, including the progress of campus construction projects and the fiscal situation of NSU and Oklahoma at the start of the spring term.

"I've been asked to sit on Gov. Mary Fallin's committee on education," Betz said. "This gives NSU an opportunity to be at the table when issues are discussed and allows us to offer ideas on how we might proceed."

Fallin assumed her gubernatorial role Jan. 10 as the state's first female governor. Betz noted that the executive and legislative branches of government will be controlled by the Republican Party for the first time in the state's history.

"This is going to portend a number of shifts," Betz said. "What many are seeing in a number of indicators is a gradual economic recovery. The problem is that we have a hole. We used federal stimulus money to fund higher education and other state functions."

The funding shortfall created by the end of the federal stimulus is creating budgetary headaches for state governments across the U.S., but Betz said Oklahoma's situation may be a bit less dire than feared.

"The funding gap is significant, but it doesn't appear to be as big as we once thought," he said. "Receipts for the state are growing. There may be another \$40 million to \$60 million available, but that won't cover a shortfall that is expected to be in the hundreds of millions."

Betz said there is also sentiment among other state agencies that higher education, and public education in general, should absorb a greater share of the budget cuts.

"We will work to make sure that the interests of higher education are well-represented," he said. "I don't have to convince the people in this room about the efficacy of higher education. In a knowledge-based global economy, you can't become competitive without it. You can't get there just with technical schools or community colleges. It is the baccalaureate degree and higher that provides the bounce of entrepreneurial talent, the creation of opportunities for growth and development and makes us a stronger state."

Also included in Betz's address was an update on academic prioritization, where NSU is assessing the courses, programs and opportunities offered for education and growth. He also discussed the **merging of organizations such as the Higher Learning Commission Committee, University Planning Group and the President's Council into the University Planning Council.**

Betz also announced the first five participants in the NSU International Faculty Development Fellowship Program. This summer Dr. Amy Aldridge-Sanford and Dr. Dilene Crockett will study in Jordan, Elizabeth Keller will visit Botswana and South Africa, Dr. Jennifer Lynn Edwards will travel to Ireland and Dr. Michael Wilds will study in Thailand.

Mark Kinders, vice president for university relations, took the podium to introduce NSU's new director of communications, Thomas L. Smith. Kinders also gave a brief summary of the institution's ongoing efforts to increase sustainability and a report of preliminary figures from fundraising efforts by the NSU Foundation and the Alumni Association.

"We're nearing the record endowment we had in 2007 before the great recession hit," he said. "We have a lot of alumni and friends out there that realize the value, importance and quality of the work we do here to educate our students and

advance our region. People have been very generous toward us with their resources."

Laura Boren, dean of student affairs, discussed NSU's new policies concerning tobacco and volunteerism.

NSU has been tobacco-free since Jan. 1. The use of cigarettes, smokeless cigarettes, chewing tobacco or any product containing tobacco is not permitted on campus. Students, faculty and staff can still hold or store tobacco products.

"People are asking how the ban will be enforced," Boren said. "Our focus this spring is on awareness. We want members of the NSU community to inform each other and our guests of our tobacco policy. We don't want this to be punitive. We want to encourage and support the creation of a healthy learning environment."

Boren also announced the recent approval of a policy allowing full-time NSU employees 20 hours per year to perform volunteer work.

"Employees may allocate this time out of their normal work weeks," she said. "This can allow them to volunteer in their communities on issues that are perhaps of personal interest or university sponsored programs that support our goal of 'Making Place Matter.'"

To observe Martin Luther King Jr. Day on Jan. 17, NSU will conduct a Day of Service which will include work projects in area public schools, distribution of school supplies and participation in the annual parade in Tulsa. Classes are not scheduled and Boren encouraged faculty and staff to participate with students in the day of service.

Provost Martin Tadlock, Dr. Denise Deason-Toyne and Olaf Standley of the Broken Arrow campus library gave a brief update on preparations for NSU's accreditation review by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The commission will visit NSU in March 2012.

An online page is dedicated to the Spring 2010 opening meeting at <http://www.nsuok.edu/OpeningMeeting.aspx>. The site includes video of the meeting, slide shows used in the presentations and the agenda.

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