Faculty Senate Newsletter, Holiday 2010

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Faculty Senate Meets New HRM Chief A. G. Monaco

The sullen mood that has hovered over our budget-plagued campus for months gave way to more than a few rays of sunshine with the arrival in early November of A.G. Monaco as the new head of Human Resources Management. “A. G.”, who combines a cowboy-worthy swagger with northeastern assertiveness and Einstein-level thinking, has vowed to do his utmost to shake up the benefits, retirement, and work conditions on the LSU campus and to help the Faculty Senate export similar happy revolutionary programs to our sister campuses around the state. Alert to the statewide nature of benefits, retirement, and labor issues, A. G. remains confident that rationality and even profusion may be brought to our shamefully inadequate benefits packages. In a series of two meetings—first with the Faculty Senate Executive Committee and then one-on-one with Senate President Kevin L. Cope—a. g. proposed ideas outnumbering all the fruit starts in Johnny Appleseed’s pouch. Top priority has been assigned to three initiatives: detaching professional retirement programs from state bureaus and from the unfunded liabilities that go with them; creating a faculty-related annex to the Faculty Senate Monthly Newsletter to package important “HRM” information that pertains to faculty and that is cast in educated layperson’s language; and accelerating the hiring, recruiting, and advertising processes. And much more! The Faculty Senate has high hopes for A. G.

Benefits Crisis Continues: Amendment 6 Succeeds, OGB Waffles

The continuing war over benefits and retirement took two more unfortunate turns during November. First was the passing of Amendment 6, which requires a two-thirds vote of the legislature to institute any actuarially significant changes to state-related retirement programs. Amendment 6 creates an even higher barrier to reforms but also will likely trigger reactive pressure to detach professional retirement programs from state bureaus. Meanwhile, Office of Group Benefits (“OGB”) chief Tommy Teague responded to Senate President Kevin L. Cope’s letter, prompted in turn by Frank Cartledge’s Senate Resolution, requesting a reversal of OGB’s decision not to extend health insurance eligibility to adult college-attending children until July 2011. Teague’s answer was a model of governmental non-responsiveness. The letter, which will soon appear on the LSU Faculty Senate web site, explains that the OGB is only an enforcement body and that the state had made laws that prohibited the enhancement of eligibility requirements for persons in the aforementioned category. The idea that a state office charged with benefitting faculty members should also advocate for them has apparently never occurred to Jindal appointee Teague.

Statewide “IT” Privacy Policy Under Discussion

Regular readers of the Newsletter know that Faculty Senate Vice-President Pratul Ajmera has done a great service for LSU faculty through the development, with the help of a large committee, of a campus IT privacy policy. The recent flap at the University of New Orleans over the retention of email in order to comply with state archives and records procedures has prompted System- and statewide concern not only about the privacy of electronic information but also about the extravagant variations in policy from campus to campus. While those at LSU, for example, enjoy the protections of Ajmera’s excellent policy, colleagues at the medical campus in New Orleans (“LSUHSC—NO”) live under an opposing policy that brutally warns employees to expect no privacy whatsoever and that any and all information may be confiscated or inspected at any time. Discussions with LSU System officials concerning the possibility of an IT privacy policy for the entire LSU System have progressed to the point that the matter is now under consideration by LSU System General Counsel Ray Lamonica.

UNO Launches Letter-Writing Campaign

The University of New Orleans University Senate has launched a letter-writing campaign. A new web page provides an array of template letters that could be adapted for almost any campus or any legislator. Have a look at http://senate.uno.edu (click on HELP UNO upon reaching the main page).

President’s Message

Those who watch the operations of the administration from the outside are easily tempted to regard the basis of administrative action as the will to power or a taste for conspiracy or a lust for publicity. To be sure, all these passions flow through the administrative nervous system. The inside experience of the academic approximation of power, however, reveals a far different prime directive: fear. Readers of Shakespeare’s tragedies and history plays know the story all too well: a person with formidable talents who may or may not be suited to rule a domain and who falls through one circumstance or another into an influential position only to find that the crown is heavier than expected and that what once looked like minor obstacles now look like glaring goblins ready to lurch, lounge, and otherwise terrify. “Administration” is, of course, an abstraction. Seldom can the systemic fear in “the administration” be tracked down to one person, yet it is always there, everywhere, always in one or the other of the cabinets in the tangle of buildings that runs around the northeast quadrant of the central campus.

Of what is this diffuse fear? Most salient is the fear that we all face, that of the passage of time. In its most altruistic mode, the administration fears that the progress of the last two decades might be reversed on its watch (forgetting that the folks who have repeatedly come in and out of power over those same decades have also been involved in more than a few blunders) or by its successors. In its most Shakespearian mood—when thinking about the partitioning of the kingdom for future generations—the administration in its corporate mind and body shivers at the release of power to those who have reached the same age and experience as they had when they first aspired to the throne. A report issued by the LSU System in 2006 noted the graying of the administration and the necessity to cultivate talent in succeeding generations, yet, so far, the grip on power (and, occasionally on post-retirement salaries or late-career raises) has not eased. The second origin of fear—what might be regarded as “Winter’s Tale Syndrome” rather than the aforementioned “King Lear Syndrome”—revolves around the superior record-keeping of our time. There is a reason that LSU is so slow to come up with a history of itself or to provide adequate support for archives, and that is anxiety about what the record of the regime might reveal. Then we can mix in a variant strain of “Macbeth Syndrome”: the fear that the next generation might have been so well schooled in cutthroat tactics that it is better to hold on to that heavy old crown than to let down one’s guard for even a moment. Oh, and, yes, let us not forget that lost thirty-eighth play, “The Tragedy of Jindal the Great,” characterized by a fear that some or other servant of the state apparatus might send down word that someone had been less than compliant in enforcing the latest madcap scheme from the statehouse. And then there is “Hamlet Syndrome”: the fear to do anything at all less it set off some unidentified calamity.

If an analogy to the writings of the Bard of Avon can lead us to so many sources of fear, think how many others must abound!

What the administration most needs, as it attempts to follow through with something, is a big dose of its own favorite anodyne, assessment. How many of these fears have produced any of the worriedly anticipated consequences? How often has fear produced anything at all? Take, for example, the anxiety surrounding budget crisis planning. Is it really the case that faculty members won’t engage in flight to other jobs simply because impending cuts to their programs have not been announced? Does anyone imagine that flight is not happening already, at least to the extent possible? Perhaps what our chieftains need, as they unwrap their holiday gifts, is a reminder that the key to a permanent legacy is more likely courage than anxiety.

With all good wishes,
Kevin L. Cope, Faculty Senate President
Administrador in the Spotlight
Bill Nunez, Chancellor, LSU at Eunice

LSU at Eunice Chancellor Bill Nunez is not what you’d expect of the head of one of Louisiana’s top two-year colleges, and that’s a good thing. Quick-witted, quick to laugh, Nunez’s boisterous demeanor is infectious, a fact made clear by the ease with which faculty, staff, and students approach him. Over lunch, one student saunters over to our table and asks the Chancellor to play Santa during the annual holiday party.

Of course, being Chancellor of LSUE encompasses a lot more than donning a red suit and black boots when the occasion calls for it. Like many leaders in Higher Education across Louisiana, Nunez has had to deal with continued budget cuts by the state. Eunice has already lost $2 million over the last two years and faces a further $2 million cut in 2011-2012.

Nor is the impact reduced state support may have on Higher Education simply about raw numbers. Financial shortfalls may jeopardize Eunice’s Diagnostic Medical Sonography program. Eunice is one of only two institutions in the state to offer the DMS certificate. Nunez worries about the impact being unable to maintain the DMS program would have on the state. Eunice would not only produce fewer qualified medical technicians. Doctors and patients would also be less able to non-invasively diagnose illnesses and plan treatment that is appropriate and affordable. This issue could be compounded by pending federal law that would require all technical diagnostic services to be performed by registered technicians in order to qualify for reimbursement. “I don’t know if anyone understands this,” Nunez says with some emotion.

Nunez’s concerns for the future of Higher Education in Louisiana, as well as for how cuts may affect its people, have deep roots. A native of New Orleans, the Chancellor can trace his family back to Don Vincente Jose Nunez, the Army Treasurer at whose home the fire of 1788 that destroyed much of what people today call the Vieux Carré or French Quarter began. Nunez smiles at the misnomer, since homes and businesses were rebuilt under Spanish rule. “It’s really a Spanish quarter,” he states succinctly.

Nunez’s career in Higher Education began at LSU, where he received a B.S. in Zoology and Chemistry and a M.S. in Microbiology and Microchemistry. He also holds a Ph.D in Immunology-Microbiology and Biochemistry from the University of North Texas. After stints in other systems, including at Indiana University, Nunez returned to Louisiana with his family because he felt he could make an impact in the state where he was born and raised. “It was important that I come back home,” he comments. Despite the fiscal challenges that are threatening its programs, Nunez finds reasons to smile about the quality of education students of LSU at Eunice are receiving. LSU Eunice boasts the highest retention and completion rates among two-year colleges in Louisiana. Eunice’s Undergraduate Research Summer Institute, an LSUE Foundation sponsored program that Nunez established when he became Chancellor, gives students the opportunity to collaborate with professors on research in their respective disciplines.

In addition, students who score low on the ACT are automatically enrolled in the university’s Pathways to Success program. Designed to help these students adjust to the rigorous academic workload expected of them for the duration of their college education, Pathways to Success has been a very successful program. Students enrolled in the program complete their first English composition course 93% of the time, far above the national average of 64%. Pathways to Success was also recognized by the National Academic Advising Association as an award winning program as recently as 2008.

Nunez stresses that programs like the Undergraduate Research Summer Institute and Pathways to Success illustrate LSU’s commitment to educating students from diverse and sometimes less fortunate backgrounds. “It’s our mission to work with this population,” he comments. “There’s no other way to describe it.”

Nunez’s mission to serve St. Landry Parish as a center where someone reading it will understand the key role of faculty in the framing of legitimate as well as effective solutions to the challenges facing academe.
I don’t much care for chain restaurants, and I have a definite aversion to all-you-can-eat buffets, largely because they encourage even more overeating than most of us would do anyway. But the Texas de Brazil Churrascaria (the Portuguese noun means something like “steakhouse”) is neither an ordinary chain nor an ordinary buffet, and I’m prepared to give it a somewhat qualified recommendation.

There are two ways you can dine here. You can pay a flat fee of $24.99 and help yourself to anything in what they call the “salad area”: a slight misnomer, since, though you can indeed find lettuce and anything else you’re likely to want in a salad, you can also find a good deal more—smoked salmon, black beans, sushi, lobster bisque, grilled mushrooms, boiled shrimp, cold meats and cheeses, and Greek olives, to name just a few examples. The quality of the food is pretty high, certainly higher than what buffets usually offer. The potatoes au gratin, in particular, are among the best I’ve ever tasted. The restaurant’s claim that it is “a steakhouse even vegetarians love” has some merit.

Still, if you’re at all carnivorous, I recommend paying the higher fee of $42.99, which entitles you to everything in the salad area plus the roast meats that are the real specialty of the Texas de Brazil. Attentive servers walk continuously around the dining room, carrying big skewers on each of which is some kind of meat that has been well-seasoned and slow-cooked over an open flame in the style of southern Brazil; and, if you turn your plate card with its green side up, each server that comes by your table will offer to cut you a generous piece (you turn your card with its red side up whenever you’ve had enough for the time being). There’s a considerable variety, and I’ve found all the meats creditable, though I would rank the lamb and the Brazilian sausage well above the chicken or pork. But the real glory of the place is the beef, most notably the flank steak, the top sirloin, and the filet mignon, all of which can compete with the fare at any steakhouse known to me. If, by the way, you’re concerned that in practice it might be difficult to attract the servers’ attention and get as much meat as you want, worry no more. In my experience the only problem has been just the opposite: when my card was showing green, I’ve sometimes felt that I hardly had time to eat, what with all the nice people offering me a piece of this or another slice of that.

The wine list, however, is a genuine problem. It’s extensive but unreliable; you can’t order a wine new to you with any confidence that it will be good. The wine is also wildly overpriced. It’s perfectly fair for a restaurant to charge double what a bottle would cost in a store, but Texas de Brazil seems to feel that even tripling the normal retail price is often insufficient. During my latest visit I decided to have a single glass, and wound up paying $10 for a stingy portion of just barely drinkable shiraz. You might do better to bring your own bottle, though then you’d have to pay a hefty $20 corkage fee.

Even aside from the wine (and the equally expensive hard liquor), you might well feel, when you get your bill, that the fare is really a bit overpriced; and you will almost certainly feel that you’ve overeaten. Even so, the quality of the food, the efficient service, the interesting and unusual format, and the festive (but not noisy) ambience all make the Texas de Brazil a good bet for a special celebratory dinner on a night when you’ve decided to forget about counting the cost in either dollars or calories. With the holiday season coming up, keep it in mind.

The Texas de Brazil Churrascaria in Baton Rouge is located at 10155 Perkins Rowe; phone: 766-5353. Reservations are a must and are most conveniently made on the website, http://www.texasdebrazil.com/.

Faculty to Benefit from Graduate School Realignment

Although the Faculty Senate and its constituents have benefited enormously from coverage by local news outlets, newspaper coverage is occasionally too brief. Admirably eager to improve our state funding prospects by showing that the University is seeking efficiency, the local media overlooked several aspects of the restructuring of the Graduate School that will prove to be a convincing case against membership. Faculty members who have fallen onto the bad side of chairs or colleagues will be hired and will proceed to full membership when promoted and tenured unless the units with which they are affiliated make a convincing case against membership. Departments and colleges will determine membership in the graduate faculty membership, with which mandates the election rather than the appointment of members of the Graduate Council. Second, the updated Graduate School will depend on departments and colleges to determine membership in the graduate faculty membership, with which mandates the election rather than the appointment of members of the Graduate Council. Third, the new mandate to the Graduate School to the Dean to take on a new role as a voice for graduate education in a state that defines “workforce development” all too narrowly and that regards undergraduate education as more practical than advanced study. With the assistance of the Vice-Chancellor for Research and Economic Development, the Dean of the Graduate School will magnetize public support for postgraduate education and will devote more time to promoting the highest level of higher education and rather less time to overseeing paperwork or monitoring managerial details.

LSU Faculty Senate President Addresses LSU in Shreveport Faculty Senate and LSUHSC—NO Faculty Council

Over the last three years, LSU Faculty Senate officers have darted across the state in the academic equivalent of John McCain’s “straight talk express,” traveling to the faculty governance bodies on the many campuses in the LSU System in an attempt to build communication networks, to cooperate on issues of statewide concern, and to fortify faculty authority over institutional policy. Early in November, Faculty Senate President Kevin L. Cope accepted the invitation of Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center in New Orleans Faculty Council President Scott Rubin to address the LSUHSC—NO faculty officials. Talking about the special situation of medical and professional schools in a complex university system, Cope explained the importance of clinical faculty members to preserving faculty authority and to improving faculty working conditions. The visit was especially noteworthy in that it opened a dialogue with the most prosperous and yet most disenfranchised segment of the academic community, medical professionals and researchers. (continued page 4)
Shreveport Faculty Senate and LSUHSC—NO Faculty Council (continued)

Near the end of November, Cope also accepted LSU in Shreveport Faculty Senate President Mary Jarzabek’s invitation to address the LSU Faculty Senate, continuing a tradition begun in 2008. Although a small campus, LSU marshaled out nearly thirty faculty members and administrators to discuss common concerns (including benefits, retirement, and work rules) and to reaffirm the integrity of the faculty governance project across the state. Of special interest in this talk was the array of issues other than the budget with regard to which all LSU System faculty need to remain vigilant in times of budgetary stress. Whether most concerned with “IT privacy” or benefits and retirement, faculty members should not let the enormous distraction of the budget open unobserved opportunities for the usurpation of faculty authority in other areas.

Faculty Governance Gather in Alexandria for Summit

December 4th is a date that shall live in the Louisiana version of eternal memory. On that day, faculty leaders from campuses and systems across the state gathered on the campus of LSU in Alexandria to discuss the situation of faculty statewide and to plan action to protect faculty prerogatives and improve faculty working conditions. Organized by Faculty Senate President Kevin L. Cope with the assistance of LSU in Alexandria Faculty Senate President Elisabeth Elder, the Alexandria convocation was the first to address the challenges to faculty on any and all campuses. The thirty or more leaders who assembled ranged over topics such as the institutional basis of the budget and related problems; the possibility of unionizing the faculties in our state; and the actions that individuals can take even without institutional support. Guest included the presidents of the Faculty Advisory Councils for three higher education systems (the LSU System, the University of Louisiana System, and the Southern University System) as well as Faculty Senate Presidents from a dozen campuses and a delegate from the LCTCS system; Save UNO founder Steven Striffler; op-ed columnist Ravi Rau; and a delegation from the Louisiana Association of Educators, the statewide chapter of the National Education Association. Delegates to the meeting convened for nearly six hours about benefits; compensation; collective bargaining; administration responsiveness; funding for higher education; cooperative action; breaking down inter-campus and inter-system barriers; and, of course, future courses of action. The delegates resolved to meet again in mid-January so as to take advantage of momentum and to be ready to speak with a common voice once the legislative session begins.

GUEST COLUMN

By Steve Striffler, Founder, Save UNO

After nearly a decade at the University of Arkansas, I arrived at the University of New Orleans in the Fall of 2008. I was not alone. State coffers were relatively full due to high oil prices and dozens of new faculty started that semester. There was a real sense that UNO was moving forward. How long ago that seems! During the next two years, as Louisiana higher education absorbed over $300 million in cuts, not only did the new hirings stop, but UNO eliminated close to 150 positions, cut entire programs, and watched its ability to offer an affordable education to working people slowly erode. [Incidentally, nothing like this has happened to higher education in Arkansas, a poorer state with no oil money].

At UNO, the crisis produced a variety of reactions. Faculty and staff continued to work hard, but did so within a broader climate of fear that was produced both by the possibility of job loss and by the fact that many of Louisiana’s political leaders do not see the fiscal crisis as something they created and therefore can fix (i.e. Stelly), but rather as an opportunity to steer even more resources away from our colleges and universities. For Governor Jindal, cutting higher education and gutting public services is the plan; the economic recession simply provides the cover.

This fear can paralyze. The dismantling of publicly-funded higher education often appears more like a steamroller to avoid than a battle to engage. However, at UNO, as it became clear that the cuts to our budget were potentially never-ending and threatening our core mission, students, faculty, and staff began to organize, mobilize, and take action both individually and collectively. SAVE UNO formed at the beginning of 2010 (www.saveuno.org), held a large “Jazz Funeral” for UNO in March, and then began reaching out to other groups across the state to fight for higher education. We realize no one institution can fight this alone. The fruits of these efforts came in the form of Education NOW!, a coalition that includes university organizations from across the state, and that organized the very well-attended “Rally for Higher Education” in Baton Rouge on November 10th.

We are just beginning, and need more involvement from larger numbers of faculty, students, staff, and alumni, especially from LSU. The real battle will be in 2011. Governor Jindal will submit his budget early next year and the legislature will need our support, our pressure, to summon the political will to adequately fund higher education. This will not be easy, in part because some within our political establishment are working overtime to demonize higher education as inefficient, wasteful, and bloated. We must continue to write, to call, to visit both our legislators and journalists – to use the truth to remind them what is important, vital, and unique about publicly-funded higher education. We also ask you to join us, this time in even larger numbers, for a second rally to defend higher education on the Capitol in the Spring.

Revised Grading Policy Statement Online

For several months, the Faculty Senate Executive Committee has consulted with the Office of Academic Affairs concerning the revision of PS–44, the policy governing grades and grading authority. The extant version of PS–44 errs on the side of concision and, as a result, provides little guidance with regard to a variety of increasingly important grading issues such as standards for multi-section courses or the grading effects of statewide student retention and graduation drives. “PS” statements are revised on a cooperative basis through a process involving the faculty representatives, administrators, and attorneys. The draft version of the new PS–44 is available for inspection and comment on the Faculty Senate web site.

LSU System Quietly Backs Away from Pennington Surcharge

Those who read the fine print in our large-type local newspaper may have noticed that the LSU System quietly proposed to extract an extra 1 1/4% from LSU’s budget in the event that higher education received the full 32% cut. That low-visibility surcharge on LSU would have siphoned over to the Pennington Biomedical Research Center, an institution conceived to draw vast grant support but stymied in its attempts by the reluctance of granting agencies. Under pressure from Student Government Association activists and LSU administrators as well as from a cartel of LSU-friendly LSU System Supervisors, all of whom wondered whether such a cash diversion project rose to the venerable status of legality, the LSU System has now backed away from this scheme as quietly as it entered upon it, determining to “find another way to respond to the issues associated with Pennington.”

Dining Services Revamps Catering Menu

For some years, the catering menu for Dining Services has been either invisible (in the case of Faculty Club catering) or confused and amalgamative (in the case of the LSU Union arm of the catering operation). A few weeks ago, Dining Services quietly revised the main catering menu, which is distributed through the Union catering division. Along with a more orderly taxonomy of treats has come an array of new delicacies such as the Asian Chicken Salad and Portobello Mushrooms in Tortilla Party, some of whom wondered whether such a cash diversion project rose to the venerable status of legality, the LSU System has now backed away from this scheme as quietly as it entered upon it, determining to “find another way to respond to the issues associated with Pennington.”

System Statistics Offer Different Perspective on Graduation Rates

LSU lately has taken a bad rap for the overall low graduation rate of Louisiana college students. Although it is true that our 61% six-year graduate rate exceeds any institution in the state by a substantial margin, the economic consequences of not graduating more students give reason to reflect. New statistics from the LSU System office suggest that the lost revenue from student attrition may reach as much as $46,000,000.00 per year, an amount roughly equal to a 23% cut in the state appropriation to LSU. Student retention drives, unfortunately, tend to increase inflation pressure on grades, a problem that the Faculty Senate hopes to address in the emerging revision of PS–44.
ART REVIEW
Treasures, Errors, and Oddities: The Art of the LSU Campus

While critiquing the architecture of LSU in our October 31st issue, rowing Newsletter connoisseurs encountered an array of allied artistic treasures. Although LSU remains extremely spare when it comes to ornamenting the campus with the products of brush, pencil, chisel, and saw, our occasionally colorful University has nevertheless amalgamated a scattered gallery of both charming and appalling aesthetic efforts. As a holiday retreat, our rambling reviewing offers this guide to the aesthetic diversions flung around our lovable hodgepodge of a campus.

Experienced followers of the administration know that, however powerful local grandees may seem, all things that are implemented, whether or not good and useful, flow from the LSU System office. So it is that at the not-so-grand, atrium-centered palace on the Lake-shore—seemingly designed through an architectural collaboration by Yogi Bear, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Charlie Macleod—we encounter what might be called the “National Portrait Gallery of the Rustic Lords,” an ensemble of portraits of past LSU System Presidents. Among these heroical portraits in lifelong expediency hangs, most notably, the neo-Reynoldian portrait of Dean, Provost, Chancellor, and System President William Jenkins, an object d’art that has given rise to considerable speculation owing to the untitled red book that the former chief executive is brandishing. Efforts at identification of that book have given rise to three schools of interpretation: those who suspect it to be Chairman Mao’s aphorisms; those who suspect it to be a copy of Dantean; and those who, influenced by Da Vinci Code author Dan Brown, detect certain Rosicrucian symbols carefully tucked into the folds of the binding. For those with less taste for mystery, a short walk to the adjoining gallery, the Jack Andonie Museum, will lead to a far more transparent exhibit composed of the relentlessly smiling faces of coaches, golden girls, and anyone who might plan on winning. This relentlessly happy hall includes a curious doll museum, allowing the muscular colossalism of athletics to be counterpointed by sweet and soft playthings collected by one of our delicious donors. The theme of the great and small is played out in the entrance to this singular facility, where a huge bronze tiger guards a miniature statue of an alumnus from the golden age of football—a metalized alumnus who now, like some figure in Dante’s Inferno, is condemned to squat forever in seeming anticipated of a blitz from an unseen defensive line.

Great universities never lack for hospitality, and so it is that the Cook Hotel and the attached Alumni Center present visitors with welcoming views. The entrance to the Alumni Center is enhanced by a magnificent sugar cauldron fountain neatly deposited in a modern rectangular pool that refrains from the dusty plantation kitsch impulse that characterizes most Louisiana homes. A step into the Alumni Center brings the visitor to the epic portrait of Ld Cook, who strikes a pose mixing magnificence with casual ease as he leans upon an Arco gas pump in unrepentant celebration of the accomplishments of oil. This bit of amusing, easygoing, comically tolerable arrogance stands in contrast to the deadly serious Ld Cook Room in the same facility, where display case after display case recounts the political and other achievements of a “player” who knew how to use his money to get to the decision makers. This otherwise burdensome room is softened by a delightful nineteenth-century Louisiana brown cotton quilt, reminding us that some nice and honorable people worked in those oil fields from which the abundant fountain of Ld Cook’s wealth sprang. Wandering across the driveway into the Cook Hotel presents a view of still greater contrasts, all on the theme of the Tiger. Down the hallway on the lobby level, a somewhat humbler cousin of Mike the Tiger presents himself for a sensitive portrait that guards the men’s room. A still skinnier cousin provides the upholstery for the hottest seat in the Ethan Allen Gallery.

Down one rung on theadministrative ladder from the System-related buildings, the rabbit-hutch complex that comprise the administrative mall of Boyd Hall yields more than a few serendipities. As the stroller ambles past the entrance to the Chancellor’s office, his or her eye will be arrested by a wonderfully naive oil-paint collage of LSU Buildings wrapped up like Greek Dolmas in magnolia leaves and superintended by a transcript of the Alma Mater scribbled in gold paint. This “Alma Mater Codex” (possibly intended as a guide to chancellors who have come and gone too quickly to buy a campus map) is the access point to a new gallery that has popped up in the Office of Academic Affairs, where Provost Jack Hamilton has revealed a Medici-like inclination to splatter the walls with unpredictable arrays of paintings, rather in the matter of dynastic Venetian connoisseurs. The Office of Academic Affairs conference room, for example, has now become the de facto “Knute Heldner Gallery,” offering the first dedicated exhibition of the sentimental, neo-impressionist paintings of this Scandianavian semi-Van Gogh, who seems to have enjoyed daubing shrimp boats, fishermen, and the other subject matter endemic to the Louisiana edition of Field and Stream. Even more ebullient is another new “OAA” gallery: the display of allegorical, technicolor-palette paintings that have, like abalone on a comely rock, colonized the Provost’s personal office, an office which, thanks to excellent placement and lighting, can be seen far and wide. Of special interest is a joyfully nightmarish scene in which books fly from a storm-beleaguered ship into hands rising from a turbulent sea. Could it be a darkly allegorical comment on the new Flagship Agenda?

Presambulating further into the campus, wanderers naturally incline to the ever-opening doors of the Middleton Library, a repository of some of the strangest artifacts ever to fall from Parnassus. What looks at first glance to be a mentally-disturbed cost rack turns out to be a mid-twentieth-century exposition of the elements and the sciences by a gentleman-painter in Alabama who seems to have been privileged with a vision of the unity of nature that has eluded Plato, Aquinas, and Einstein but that may, with considerable luck, be decoded by this paean to the philosophical power of coat hangers. Each landing in the Middleton staircase gives us reason to ask more questions. Is the silver grate on the first deck (continued page 6)
of the staircase an evocative study in the interaction of aluminum with ferociously cold fluorescent light? In what universe do we find the astounding enlargement of the biological that interposes between floors two and three? While these items stimulate conversation—is it art in that renowned genre, “faculty spouse art”?—it also lets us give thanks that most of the Middleton is devoted to rotating exhibitions of more cheerful material.

A library is a haven for curiosity, leaving us to ask: How may we interpret the new display in David Boyd Hall, representingsuitcases help together by plumbers’ plungers? Is this LSU’s comment on the pains of travel during this time of TSA searches and tumbling public hygiene?

Heading east from the Middleton along the quadrangle, we encounter the Middleton murals, those once-condemned but now heralded exercises in American-style Soviet realism that remind us of the artistic potential of sugar cane and that seem to anticipate Bobby Jindal’s claim that underemployed professors should learn to work oil rigs in their spare time, when not, as the murals suggest, lounging under magnolia trees. Perhaps the chemical component of these murals was in some way helpful in creating the taxidermy displays in the closed north reading room of the Hill Memorial Library, where an assortment of odd creatures celebrate the art of preservation by remaining perpetually posed in putative natural postures. Exiting from Allen Hall, the neo-italianate lobby of that most tasteful of campus structures, reeling in surprise when we see evidence of a continuity of effort by a long-term connoisseur at our high-turnover University. Despite the Doge-on-a-Gondola look of the Manship interior, every vertical facade seems to explode with more colorful if somewhat inexplicable visions from, apparently, the 1970s schools of pre-Soviet-breakdown eastern allegorical frenzy. While the Manship school teaches the merit of the cool voice found among fact-touting journalists, the walls of the Manship suggest rather a psychological gagster that spews to the ceiling some unknown insight more ancient than Ararat’s ark. Artful archeology abounds not only in the house that Jack built. A visit to the Howe-Russell complex reveals faded placards and dusty dieramas commemorating a vision of caveman times that would be worthy of the old Time-Life evocations of early “man.” Far better, in the land of Geology, is the courtyard strolled by friendly dinosaurs whose charming color mix would make Barney the Purple Dinosaur turn green with envy. The two dinosaurs—let’s call them “Rainbow” and “Boney”—look up to a herculean photographic display of geology students and scholars in action that tell the good side of petrochemical purveying and that give the aforementioned Allen Hall murals a run for their money.

What LSU does best is athletic art. Our reserves make the canon of Leroy Nieman look like chicken scratching. Most readily detectable by visitors would be the array of bronze tigers that prowl the area around Mike’s habitat and the main entrance to the stadium. Muscular, direct, and splendidly thoughtless, these creatures achieve the open confidence seen in the sculptures of the heyday of Greece and Rome. They make everyone feel god about being a predator. A little more difficult to find is the gallery winding around the Bill Lawton conference room positioned along the hip of Tiger Stadium, a chamber now used more often for classes than for athletic tasks but nevertheless surrounded by gallery after gallery of sports art. Long ambulatories include joyous and bright paintings displaying vigorous youths doing everything with a football that can be done and doing it better, in the land of Geology, is the courtyard strolled by friendly dinosaurs whose charming color mix would make Barney the Purple Dinosaur turn green with envy. The two dinosaurs—let’s call them “Rainbow” and “Boney”—look up to a herculean photographic display of geology students and scholars in action that tell the good side of petrochemical purveying and that give the aforementioned Allen Hall murals a run for their money.

Tip of the Month: “Louisiana Hwy. 1.”

Looking for that Christmas, Hanukkah, or Kwanzaa gift for the guy or gal who has everything? The University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press has scored the publishing hit of the gifting season with the release of Anne Butler’s and Henry Cancienne’s Louisiana Hwy. 1. This coffee-table book, which will move from lap to lap faster than a log in the downstream current of the springtime Mississippi, renders, in words and pictures, the countless cultures that abut Louisiana’s longest road. Running from the Mississippi Delta to the Arkansas border, Louisiana Hwy 1 offers a rolling review of all of American history, from the sponge-like coastal-industrial landscape of post-Acadian Port Fourchon to the cabin culture north of Bossier City. In uncluttered prose, Butler discovers novelty after novelty, from the seasonally appareled Schwing Gorilla of Plaquemine to the vestiges of the Louisiana Maneuvers barracks to the quaint history of Marksville, all the while capturing the appealing melancholy of a byway that once offered everything but that now transfers the surpluses of memory as improved by the nimbus of historical imagination. One of the first books to tell the whole history of Louisiana in an appealing, multimedia way, this array of discursive pictures will help the world understand the depth of our richly superficial, valiantly visual, picturesque culture.