

Statement of Gregory Brown for president of NFA state board

Background

I am a Professor in the Department of History, where I teach European and World History, with a particular focus on the Age of Enlightenment and the democratic revolutions of the 1700s. I have been a member of a faculty union since I began teaching in higher education at Hunter College in 1995 and of the NFA since I joined the UNLV faculty in 1998. In the past four years, I have served in leadership positions for my campus chapter, for the state PAC and for the state board.

In these years I have developed a proven record of accomplishment and growth as a chapter organizer; of innovation and effectiveness as an advocate for faculty and staff interests and rights at the national, state, System and campus level; and as an accessible, transparent and inclusive leader in reforming and rebuilding the NFA. Moreover, these experiences have given me a deep understanding of how the NFA must continue to reform and rebuild itself and a clear and credible plan for how we can succeed.

In these capacities, I have worked to update the NFA from being run almost entirely by a handful of faculty in their extra time, using practices that had little changed since the organization was formed in the mid-1980s. My vision is for the Faculty Alliance to be not only larger and more visible across the state but also to provide more visible and concrete services to its members and to do so in more professionalized, media-savvy and effective ways that are sustainable for the future.

Vision for NFA

We can, must and will in the next two years reverse the long-trend on most of our campuses of declining membership and limited effectiveness. We can must, and will in the next two years grow the Alliance in both depth (number of members) and breadth (to better represent all faculty -- academic, administrative, contingent and graduate student instructors); we can, must and will in the next two years continue to expand and professionalize our operations (in communications, legal defense, government relations, and individual member services) ; and we can, must and will in the next two years continue to reform our internal governance and operations more transparent, accessible and efficient. In this way, we can, must and will in the next two years provide vigorous, responsive and effective representation for Nevada's higher education faculty -- and build a platform for a sustainable advocacy body for the future.

Here, then, is my plan to build on my proven record and experience to lead the NFA into a period of active renewal and rebuilding in the next two years:

I. Member recruitment and chapter development

When I took over the UNLV chapter presidency in 2009, the NFA had been almost inactive on my campus for years -- the Alliance was largely absent from UNLV faculty leadership, was ignored by the UNLV administration, unknown to the Las Vegas press, unrepresented on the NFA state board and looked poorly upon even by most of the UNLV faculty. In the past two years, we have nearly doubled the membership (while the academic faculty itself has declined by 60 positions); we become a reliable source of information on campus news for many faculty, staff and students as well as the press; become essential leaders in UNLV's shared governance bodies (the Senate and Presidential Advisory Committee); defended tenure rights even during a curricular review; and become known for accessibility, transparency and responsiveness to members (with weekly emails, nearly daily blog posts, a contact person in each college, and member phone calls generally returned on the same day.) This dynamism and growth is unmatched among NFA chapters across the state. I have also ensured this momentum will continue by recruiting an engaged, capable and representative chapter board -- on which I will not serve -- for the coming two years.

1. Campus growth plans: accessibility, visibility, credibility, contact As state NFA president, I would work with each chapter to develop a growth plan suited to that campus -- and help provide infrastructure to achieve that growth. Based on my experience at UNLV, I believe that presenting a visible, credibility and accessible campus leadership is the first step; and effective, coordinated follow-up with prospective members is the second. To facilitate the former, I would help any chapter develop a campus communications plan and use NFA communications to support that effort; indeed, we have taken a major step forward with the advent of a new website, regular statewide email communications to all faculty (not just members), and above all, online enrollment (which has generated an average of 2 new members per week statewide since the site went live in February -- an important reversal of our general trend over the last few years of losing members.). To facilitate the second, the NFA can, must and will find it within our budget to employ sufficient part-time staff to support campus leadership that is undertaking active organizing efforts.

2. Collective bargaining drives for those campuses which seek it. This past year, as vice-president of the NFA, I proposed to the state board, and as president, would follow through on creating a Collective Bargaining Committee to provide support for those campuses whose members opt to seek recognition as a collective bargaining chapter. Last year, as vice-president, I asked the leadership of the CSN, NSC and WNC chapters to consult with their members on their interest in seeking CB status -- and if the answer were affirmative, proposed to provide NFA state board assistance in working up a budget, organizing plan and timeline. To this point, none have responded that their members are ready for such a drive. Should any campus chapters express such an interest in the coming year, such a CB Committee could help develop a budget, organizing plan, and timeline to support the campaign.

3. Greater campus autonomy Finally, based on my experience as UNLV campus chapter president, I realize that campus chapters have too little autonomy -- and thus too little incentive to grow -- in our current structure. I therefore believe that the NFA must also reform and restructuring of our governance.

II. Reform and Restructuring of NFA Governance

In the past two years, as vice-president of the NFA, I have spearheaded a number of measures that have begun our necessary work of reforming and restructuring our governance practices to make them more open and responsive to members, more efficient, and more effective; should I be elected president, this reform and rebuilding would continue.

1. Restructure but preserve our relationship with AAUP. Working closely with the other executive officers -- Scott Huber, Angela Brommel and Jim Matovina -- and consulting heavily with each campus chapter president, I helped craft the NFA's proposal to restructure our dues arrangement with the AAUP, and to devote our members' dues money to improved services in the state. Wreported in detail in the *Alliance* and online <http://unlvfaculty.blogspot.com/2011/01/nevada-faculty-alliance-state-board.html>

This plan is based on a simple, mathematical reality: AAUP dues have risen to the point that they would represent more than half our budget, in in exchange for almost no regular and specific services to our members. We have therefore, based on extensive consultation with chapter presidents, proposed to maintain our affiliation with the AAUP but retain the greater part of our members' dues to devote to member services in this state.

2. Upgraded communications internally and externally I led the first step of this plan this spring, when I researched, proposed and oversaw an overhaul of our electronic communications strategy. This has been described to members in the *Alliance* and visible to members who consult nevadafacultyalliance.org, [facebook.com/NevadaFaculty](https://www.facebook.com/NevadaFaculty) site or twitter.com/NevadaFaculty.

We created a professional email communication system which has enabled us to send emails to all state faculty, press, state legislature and system government several times a week. This program has been a great success. The next step will be to better integrate our electronic communication with our print communication, to maximize the readership and return to NFA of the *Alliance*.

Another important goal for the coming two years would be to more actively solicit and more regularly publish contributions from around the state. This spring, I have asked repeatedly for member contributions to publish on the NFA site news blog <http://nevadafacultyalliance.org/News> and we have had some excellent contributions. However, some chapters have not contributed content to this point so I would work to facilitate their contributions so that we can publish their chapter-specific news or ensure their chapter views are fully represented in NFA communications. (Note that the Facebook page is one that receives most of its content in the form of an RSS feed from the UNLV chapter blog; I have not had success to this point in helping other chapters establish their own blogs and then feed them to the Facebook site and would work to ensure this is achieved as state president.) Much of this work began on my own initiative, but the initial cost of setting up Facebook and Twitter accounts is null. So I would readily work to help chapters establish their own and integrate them with the state communications effort.

3. A more efficient and effective state board and executive committee

We must look carefully at the amount of time and money we currently devote to our own governance.

Here again we can improve our business practices to become more efficient and effective -- making use of desktop conference software, the state board can meet more regularly at less cost to members.

As a model for how I would hope to oversee this more effective and efficient governance, I can point to my work since 2007 as chair of the southern endorsement committee of the PAC. During that time, we regularized the work of the endorsement committee and were able, through the hard work of the committee members, to expand our scope while also becoming more effective in pressing our issues - - we interviewed or received written questionnaire responses from candidates for nearly all offices in southern Nevada (including statewide officers). We also became more actively involved in supporting higher-education-friendly candidates for state and federal office. These actions have helped generate much greater visibility for the Faculty Alliance and for faculty concerns -- and also encouraged some of our members to become more involved in the Alliance.

This spring we took the first step to update our by-laws, largely through the hard work of Angela Brommel. We also began to follow our by-laws more fully, for instance forming at my suggestion a Government Relations Committee to coordinate our statewide positions and advocacy. Not all campus presidents responded to the request to nominate members, so that is another area on which I would follow up as president to seek full input from each campus.

As president, I would also form a by-laws committee to study and propose a redefinition of executive officer roles, to ensure a clear task for each member. That is, just as we currently have a Legal Defense Chair and a Government Relations Chair (ie Lobbyist) and a Treasurer with clear roles, we ought to consider if we should change the outdated office of “secretary” to a vice-president for communications and assign the current office of “vice-president” a specific task, of overseeing member services and organizing. Ideally, each of these individuals would have some part-time staff support as well as an active committee of members to ensure input and to prepare future leaders for the NFA.

We must also move away from the “lone-cowboy” model in crucial areas of our operations. The NFA has been very well served by the heroic efforts of certain individuals but this is not a sustainable model for the long-term, and we must ensure that future leaders are cultivated (and we must consider whether staff or professional assistance is affordable for us) in crucial areas such as Legal Defense and Government Relations.

These changes would require extensive consultation, but I believe they are necessary for us to consider carefully and implement over the next two years to put the NFA on a more efficient and secure footing for the future.

III. Active engagement of NFA in the System : Defense of Faculty Rights

I have been actively involved throughout the now four-year higher education budget crisis on the UNLV campus and at the System and state government levels in advocating for faculty interests and defending faculty rights. In the spring of 2010, I was elected by the UNLV Senate to chair the Presidential Review Committee, a joint faculty/administration review panel, which reported to the president on that round of budget cuts including termination of programs. It is significant to NFA members to know that the Committee recommended, and the president enacted, nearly 75% of the cuts to administrative and support areas; moreover, we ensured decisions on program terminations were made on sound academic criteria. Finally, we recommended and the president enacted a redeployment (rather than lay off) of all tenured faculty in those departments and as many as possible untenured faculty of the 30 academic positions terminated. In the current round of budget discussions on our campus, we are again advocating for administrative and academic reorganizations over program terminations and faculty layoffs.

As a result of this work, I was asked to serve on an AAUP committee charged to review and revise the recommended best practices for program review and exigency, which has enabled me to speak on behalf of Nevada faculty concerns to the AAUP and also have a basis of knowledge for assessing the System's practices in light of current national trends and best practices.

I would therefore as President seek to combine this experience with the constructive relationships I have developed with several Regents and the Chancellor to ensure the NFA's distinct voice and mission remains present and becomes more influential in the Nevada System of Higher Education. While I believe Faculty Senates are better venues for addressing curricular issues, the NFA must be pro-active in bringing new ideas for strategic planning to the System to ensure that not every economic downturn for the state becomes a financial crisis for academic programs and faculty -- and to ensure the full Board better understands the risks to the System (financial, political and academic) of encroaching upon tenure rights.

Conclusion

Throughout the past two years, I have worked very hard to provide NFA members -- at UNLV and across the state -- vigorous, intelligent, responsible and above all responsive leadership and advocacy that would keep faculty informed and provide the basis for faculty engagement. I have worked diligently for the past two years and, with your support, as president for the next term, I would seek to bring to fruition the necessary renewal and rebuilding of the NFA to ensure intelligent, effective engagement by faculty on each campus-- and would continue at all times, to offer accessibility, transparency, consistency of principle, and an open ear to my colleagues.