

As I gaze out my window overlooking Squirrel Park and see a campus alive with people and activities on a warm spring day, I am reminded of a time more than twelve years ago when our institution faced a bleak future.



It was a cold December day. The president, Dr. Stanley Lott, had called a meeting of faculty and staff. Rumors about the meeting circulated for days—the president was resigning; the college was closing; more cuts in faculty and staff, budgets, salaries were looming; all of the above?

It was none of the above. The president had called the meeting to announce he had appointed me the chief academic officer (CAO). He then asked me to speak. As the newly appointed CAO, I directed my remarks to the faculty. I began with: “I accepted this appointment because of what is right with Chowan. And what is right with Chowan are the faculty. We are a well-qualified, dedicated faculty and staff who always make students our first priority. We have given beyond normal expectations because we believe in and care deeply about our institution and the success of our students.”

I then promised to: “build on what is right with Chowan by serving as an advocate for faculty and students, as a voice for fairness in all matters relating to faculty and students, ensuring that, as the college moves forward, issues of the faculty and students’ welfare and well-being get the attention they deserve.”

I then asked the faculty: “to join me in a proactive effort to continue to identify what is right with Chowan and develop an academic vision that builds upon these areas.”

I concluded with: “So let us build a shared and compelling vision and communicate that vision throughout the college community and beyond. Let us stop focusing on what is wrong with Chowan. Let us stop apologizing for who we are. Let us lift up our heads and let our voices be heard and our vision be clear, which is to make Chowan a better place.”

I remember thinking then, and I still think now, that my remarks were over the top. But, we did it. The faculty members who are still with us from those doom and gloom days— David Ballew, Bert Wyatt, John Davis, J Brabban, Patsy Taylor, Gladys DeJesus, Tom Eisenmenger, Linda Hassell, Georgia Williams, Gath Faile, Tom Whitaker, Carolyn Modlin, Tom Whiteman—joined with the staff to keep the hope of Chowan alive.

It took some help—trustees willing to stick with us and a new president, Chris White, willing to come lead us. But, we did it.

We still face challenges today. We always will. We always have — since 1848. Our history tells us, though, that as long as we join together to work to-ward a common goal—”which is to make Chowan a better place,” Chowan will survive, always.