

Report on the Status of Tenure at OSU

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Prepared by Promotion and Tenure Committee of the Faculty Senate
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On October 1, 2003, Bruce Sorte, President of the Faculty Senate, gave the following charge to the Faculty Senate Promotion & Tenure Committee:

- 1) Evaluate the effectiveness of tenure at OSU over the past 20 years and how it compares with similar land grant universities across the U.S. Provide an assessment of how the budget reduction process may impact indefinite tenure at OSU.
- 2) Consider the usefulness of the "Institutional Procedures and Criteria for Unit or Program Reduction or Elimination" with and without the changes which have been recommended by the Faculty Senate Executive Committee as a means whereby faculty can participate in the decision-making process for programmatic adjustments. Suggest additional changes as needed.

To address point #1 of the charge, the Committee started with the idea to gather information from three sources: 1) other universities, 2) the published literature, and 3) Oregon State University. For other universities, we started with the web sites of 6 of our comparator institutions. We looked for news releases, committee reports, university policies and procedures relating to promotion and tenure. While we were able to uncover some interesting information, we found it difficult to compare the information from institution to institution. Different titles for similar categories of faculty, different ways of reporting, etc. led us to the "apples vs. oranges" dilemma. The published literature on tenure is overwhelming and not necessarily relevant to OSU circumstances. Within OSU, we considered several vehicles for gathering information on faculty attitudes towards tenure, including a survey of faculty. However, given the tight time line and limited resources, we took a convenience sample of the faculty, which tried to include a great variety of disciplines and academic ranks. As might be expected, the anecdotes covered the spectrum from severe concerns about the challenge to tenure created by the way in which Extension handled its budget shortfall, to a lack of knowledge about Extension and, therefore, no basis to conclude that anything about tenure had changed in the last year.

Given the difficulty in taking a "data informed" approach, we migrated towards the idea that each member of the committee brings their own beliefs, experiences, and opinions to the table and that these, collectively, offer a representative view of the status of tenure at OSU. And, collectively, we are of the opinion that the handling of the Extension reductions did constitute a challenge to tenure at OSU. If tenure held

primacy over other concerns, then one would have expected that tenured professors would have the greatest employment security, followed by non-tenured and then fixed term faculty when the Extension resources were found to be insufficient to cover the current FTE. That was not the case, as some fixed term faculty found themselves “most qualified” for certain job descriptions that remained after Extension went through their FTE reduction process, while some tenured faculty found themselves with no remaining job description that matched their qualifications. We recognize that the challenges facing Extension were immense, but if Extension can make program reductions that do not place tenure as the primary criterion for retention of faculty, then we wonder about the security of tenure in other colleges in the face of similar or even less severe budget constraints.

In expressing our concerns about the challenge to tenure, we recognize that we have the luxury (and the responsibility) to focus our attention only on the question of the primacy of tenure in the face of program reductions. Protecting tenure against all other concerns may not always be in the best interests of OSU. But allowing tenure to be weakened at OSU is certainly not in the best long-term interests of OSU.

In our research and discussions, we were reminded of another threat to tenure. There is a trend across institutions of higher education in the US to place an increased proportion of the teaching effort on part-time and full-time non-tenure track faculty (see appended document). Clearly, directing resources to fixed term instructors results in fewer appointments into tenure track positions.

To address point #2 of our charge, we read and discussed the “Institutional Procedures and Criteria for Unit or Program Reduction or Elimination” with the changes proposed by the Executive Committee and compared to this to the current document. The document used currently has been found procedurally wanting in some of the recent reductions that have taken place. In other cases, it seems to have worked well. We appreciate the efforts of those involved in drafting the revisions of the document. However, we raise the following concerns:

- The document has become too detailed. There seems to be an attempt to find the words to deal with any foreseeable situation. However, each situation will be unique and will require some interpretation of the document, regardless of the level of detail in the document.
- The role of the FCG as distinct from that of the Administration is not always clear. It would be useful to reorganize the document to indicate the responsibility of the FCG as well as that of the administration, and to delineate the generally agreed-upon principles used by all. For example, shared governance would seem to be the most important principle upon which to base the document.
- In some reductions, the input from the faculty has seemingly come too late in the process to have a meaningful impact. It’s not clear that the revised document will fix this concern.

In our discussions, we wondered if the processes used in state governance might not provide a model for how to proceed. A legislative statute provides a mandate to a state agency, but it is then up to the agency to implement the mandate. The agency must defend its implementation plan, and ultimately the implementation itself, to the legislature. In the case of program reductions or eliminations, we might imagine something similar to the statute—a succinct document that indicates who has responsibility for reductions and eliminations and the principles that are used to make the reductions. It is then up to the administrator responsible for the reductions or eliminations to devise an implementation plan and to defend the reasons for the reductions or eliminations, the criteria used in making the decision, etc. The administrator would need to defend the plan to the faculty, most likely via the FCG. Much of the information currently included in the reduction/elimination document could be placed as appendices—as useful guidelines for selection of criteria, values, etc. Admittedly, this idea is rough, but we wanted to share it with the Executive Committee to see if resonates.

Appendix: Published information about Tenure

This information was collected by Loretta Rielly, Library Services and member of the Promotion and Tenure Committee

Since most of the publications that address tenure are from the AAUP there's a great deal of redundancy and understandable defensiveness. The concerns are:

- Financial expediency rather than financial exigency is driving personnel decisions, with an increase in the number of part-time, non-tenure track positions and a decrease in full-time positions.
- Business models and attention to external customers detracts from the educational and research missions.
- Academic freedom provides protection for voicing ... and
- Shared governance and faculty oversight of the academic mission of the university.

The June 2001 report of the NEA Higher Education Research Center Update finds that "increasing use of part-time faculty members, most of whom are not tenured, is undercutting the tenure system. The evidence for an increasing number of non-tenured full-time faculty members is more equivocal."

AAUP website: <http://www.aaup.org/> <<http://www.aaup.org/>>

Useful excerpts:

OSU Promotion and Tenure Guidelines: Criteria for Granting Indefinite Tenure

Tenure ensures the academic freedom that is essential to an atmosphere conducive to the free search for truth and the attainment of excellence in the University. But in addition, tenure also reflects and recognizes a candidate's potential long-term value to the institution, as evidenced by professional performance and growth. Tenure sets universities apart from other institutions. Faculty are not merely employed by the University but are the educational and research programs of the University; tenured faculty are the community of educators who create institutional stability and an ongoing commitment to excellence. Tenure, therefore, will be granted to faculty members whose character, achievements in serving the University's missions, and potential for effective long-term performance warrant the institution's reciprocal long-term commitment. The granting of tenure is more significant than promotion in academic rank.

Mary Burgan, "A Profession in Difficult Times," **Liberal Education**. Fall 1999.
[Tenure and governance] are the practical instruments for the achievement of truth, of freedom, of professional autonomy, and of community.

ISU AAUP, "White Paper #1--Tenure." No date.

Data compiled by AAUP: the proportion of full-time professors working on contracts rose from 19 percent in 1975 to 28 percent in 1995, while the proportion of those on the tenure track fell from 29 percent to 20 percent. Part-timers now make up an estimated 42 percent of instructors in U.S. colleges and universities.

James F. Slevin, "Preserving Critical Faculties," Liberal Education, Summer 2000. Educators have to be both aware of and free of a concern with their students' pre-existing needs and their institution's goals, in order to make any difference to either. Educators also have to be free of the needs defined by those outside the academy, whose demands and pressures all too easily reduce the significant consequences of education into outcomes designed to meet narrowly-defined corporate needs, thereby diminishing the possibilities of genuine learning and the intellectual life. Not simply sustaining but encouraging this freedom is why tenure matters. (p. 3-4 on print out)

The protection of academic freedom--indeed, the active and positive encouragement of dissent--is the heart of the college and university, though unwelcome at the diploma market. Efforts at change that lead to the elimination of this protection (like the hiring practices just described, often rationalized as better serving the mission of the institution by giving it "flexibility") are destructive and need to be actively fought. (p 5)

Tenure, we might argue, supports first and foremost the values making possible the intellectual work of those it protects. Any changes we propose are intended to strengthen the support for the values underlying that work, even as these changes take into account a wider range of places where the work happens and needs protecting.

In fact, I would go one step further and argue that expanding the domains where tenure-

earning intellectual work can be done (to include, in serious ways, teaching and service) is crucial to **preserving** the underlying values of knowledge creation, exchange, and questioning. These values are increasingly endangered because, for example, as non-tenure-line **faculty** assume the duties of teaching, the vigor of their questioning and the courage of their dissent can be suppressed--and so their integrity compromised. In short, we need to expand the domains of tenure-earning **faculty** work in order to stay the erosion of the central values of academic life. (p 6)

Cites data from 1998 AFT report:

-- While the total number of full-time **faculty** grew marginally and slowly--49 percent between 1970 and 1995 (2 percent per year)--the number of part-time **faculty** has increased dramatically, 266 percent (10.6 percent per year) over the same period. At this rate, part-time **faculty** will outnumber full-time by the academic year 2001.

-- At least 43 percent of American **faculty** are now part-time, up from 38 percent in 1987. Only 57 percent of **faculty** are full-time. In the community colleges, only about 37 percent of **faculty** are full-time.

-- In 1995, 51 percent of the new full-time **faculty** appointed did not receive a tenure-eligible position, meaning they became short-term, year-to-year instructors. Newly appointed full-time **faculty** in 1995 totaled 3,772 fewer than in 1993, an 11 percent decrease. In comparison with 1989, the decline in new hires is even sharper: 10,372 fewer new appointments were made in 1996--a 25 percent difference.

-- The proportion of full-time **faculty** on term contracts grew from 19 percent in 1975 to 28 percent in 1995. During this time, the number of full-time instructors on the tenure track decreased by 12 percent.

SOURCE: "The Vanishing Professor" (American Federation of Teachers, Washington, D.C. 1998)

Ernest Benjamin, "Some Implications of Tenure for the Profession and Society," AAUP Professional integrity includes not only ideological autonomy but the right to exercise academic judgment. It is the latter which those who seek to manage faculty would constrain. Consider the following: "Changes in how the faculty regard themselves and their institutions lie at the heart of the restructuring process. What faculty are being asked to do is return--in effect, to give back--a portion of their independence and ability to define their own tasks and performance standards. [*Policy Perspectives*, Pew Higher Education Research Program, February 1993, Vol. 4, No.4; p. 9A.] (p. 5 on printout)

Higher education without tenure would in time become a system of training schools whose instructors were neither educators nor scholars. For the notion that one can improve the university by destroying tenure ultimately presupposes that one can maintain the university without attracting or sustaining the teacher-scholar. On the

contrary, tenure alone enables faculty to preserve their professional integrity and the creative conflict essential to the advancement of learning amid the intensifying institutional constraints of contemporary higher education. (p. 6)

James T. Richardson, "Tenure in the New Millennium," National Forum. Winter 1999. America needs to attract its best minds to the academic profession, something that will continue to happen only if such individuals think they can have productive, secure careers. Academia without academic freedom will not seem attractive to those whom our society needs to contribute to its future knowledge base and maintain our system of higher education. The hour is late for rethinking what we are collectively doing and allowing to happen to higher education in the United States. I hope it is not too late to change course and move again toward the protection of academic freedom as a hallowed value, with all the good things that flow from such a decision for our democratic society. (p. 5 on printout)