From: Dean Saitta

Sent: Thursday, March 21, 2013 7:29 AM

To: Linda Olson; Douglas Hesse; Johns, Scott; proflut; Frederique Chevillot; John Hill; Don McCubbrey; Megan J. Kelly; Alvaro Arias; Arthur Jones; Richard Leaman; Sylvia Hall-Ellis; Tiffani Lennon; Reichardt, Chip; Potts, George; Claude d'Estree; Martin Quigley; Linda Kosten; Best, Arthur; Dean Saitta

Subject: Thoughts on APT from AAUP

Dear all,

Thanks for including me in conversation the other day. It was quite interesting and raised many important issues. Here's some follow-up in the interest of fulfilling my professional obligation to present an AAUP perspective. Y'all can decide whether the comments have any immediate philosophical import and/or practical utility.

We all seem to agree that tenure is the best way to protect—from interlopers and meddlers within and beyond the institution—academic risk-taking and innovation in the classroom. Tenure is certainly the best way to ensure freedom and security of faculty participation in academic governance and strategic planning. Tenure best supports academic entrepreneurialism, if that’s language that trustees in the corporate world can better understand. For trustees in the legal world tenure is also reasonably seen as the academic equivalent of partnership in a law firm. We’re not talking about some strange breed of animal here that lacks analogues in the "real" world.

It’s worth noting that we recently had an empirical test of the health of academic freedom on this campus. It’s called Arthur Gilbert. It was a very easy test. Yet, all administrators and nearly all faculty failed it. Two independent, national watchdog organizations (FIRE, AAUP) agreed about this widespread failure. That’s why I’m not convinced that 3, 5, or even 7 year contracts at DU would give recipients the kind of protections for academic innovation and boundary-pushing that’s required to build a great university. Maybe such contracts would offer security in disciplines like business, math, and engineering. But those disciplines should not be the touchstones for conversations about the kind of faculty employment system that best protects academic freedom. The social sciences, arts, and humanities should be the touchstones. If faculty in those areas are protected, then so is everyone else. Moreover, 5 and even 7 years is not a long time for faculty members with families or who are contemplating families. It goes fast. It involves future planning. We seem to have a commitment to faculty and their families. Given the current state of academic freedom on campus (and there are stories to be told other than Gilbert’s), why would faculty members with contracts of any length take risks in teaching and governance that would threaten the minimal job security that they have?

The other day I mentioned that we seem to be playing defense with respect to tenure rather than offense. Defensiveness seems to be producing strategies aimed at preserving
job security and freedom—such as it is—for a privileged minority of tenured professors instead of expanding security and freedom for all. If the Trustees don’t “get” tenure then perhaps our academic leaders aren’t working hard enough to sell them on it. As mentioned the other day, I’m OK with flexibility in faculty hiring if institutional mission and strategic plan support it. But it seems we’re nowhere near a decision on mission and strategic plan that would require significant faculty flexibility. It could be that greater faculty stability is desirable given DU’s configuration, niche, and aspiration to offer the best residential education that money can buy. Until mission and plan is settled in a way that makes good sense I’m going to urge the AAUP chapter to favor a system that will offer as much freedom and security for the greatest number of academic risk-takers, boundary-pushers, innovators, and entrepreneurs as possible.

In the aftermath of Tuesday’s meeting I’ve been brainstorming a faculty appointment model with Scott that distinguishes two major types. One is a Tenure-Eligible appointment (including Lecturers) in which appointees (a) negotiate the mix of teaching, research, and service by which they are to be evaluated in light of academic unit needs while keeping faith with the scholar-teacher-practitioner view of faculty work that’s implied by the university’s vision statement, (b) become tenure-eligible after 7 years of service in a way that may or may not involve changes in pay, rank, or professional expectations, and (c) agree to undergo comprehensive pre-tenure, tenure, and post-tenure developmental reviews at either 3 or 5 year intervals. The second type is a Non-Tenure Eligible appointment (Professors of Practice; Adjunct Professors) that fills academic needs as circumstances warrant under conditions that are desirable for both the faculty member and the institution. If the numbers work out in a way that allows us to strike a healthy balance between stability and flexibility then I think this alternative should be discussed.

Thanks,
Dean

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