

Subject: Comment on TFPR Document

Date: Saturday, April 9, 2016 at 12:23:49 PM Mountain Daylight Time

From: Dean Saitta

To: Arthur Jones, Kate Willink

Hi Art, Kate—

I'm not sure that I'm going to be on the Senate next year, so I just want to share some concerns about the Senate's direction based on the discussion of the TFPR document. I mentioned some of these to Kate before the last meeting. The bottom line is that I think the Senate, in its effort to promote a "One Faculty" ethos—when as a practical matter we aren't One Faculty—is selling out the institution of tenure and inadvertently paving the way for more "fear" and less innovation and risk-taking among faculty.

I appreciate the work that went into the document and I was prepared to vote for it after the initial discussion. However, I changed my mind with time to think between the last two Senate meetings, and given the several expressions of fear we heard at the last meeting. We've heard about this fear before.

I think it was a mistake to morph this from a "tenured faculty performance review" document to a "one size fits all faculty development" document. Faculty performance review and faculty development are different things. Faculty development has different dimensions and consequences, as the discussion of the proposal's 1b and 2b options made clear. "One size fits all" doesn't work in the particular APT world in which we live.

It's clear from the Provost's comments at the February 26th Senate meeting that our academic leaders have been unable to persuade the Board of the benefits of tenure. They likely never will. However, a TFPR document focused on tenured faculty activities across the career span would have given the faculty an opportunity to make their own case for tenure's virtues, perhaps in some new and compelling ways. This, in addition to clarifying what we value in tenured faculty, how we might better support and utilize the talents of tenured faculty across their career span, and why a commitment to tenure doesn't necessarily erode the "flexibility" that institutions require in order to adapt to a volatile higher education environment. I still think that we still such a document. At the very least its creation would send a strong message that tenure is as "vital" and as "critical" to academic freedom as the TFPR Committee's cover letter suggests that it is.

I suspect our contract faculty will map on to the document that the Senate passed in a variety of ways. I suspect that the vast majority will applaud it. So, I'm likely in the minority, but if I'm a contract faculty member in anthropology rather than a tenured professor I'm wondering why—if it's a "One Faculty" development world—I'm on a contract while others enjoy the job security, academic freedom, and freedom from fear that comes with tenure.

If I'm an administrator or a board member looking at the near-unanimous result of the vote, I'm wondering why we need to have tenured faculty at all if the Faculty Senate believes that there's no real need, from a faculty development standpoint, to distinguish between contract faculty and tenured faculty. The document passed by the Senate essentially "disappears" tenure. That, I think, is a terrible thing.

I think we will continue to hear expressions of fear among the faculty until we move to an APT world in which all faculty are either tenured or tenure probationary (with “tenure” taking a number of different forms). That’s what I believe the Senate should be working towards. Where fear exists, innovation, risk-taking, and academic freedom inevitably suffer, and it's the institution that loses. If mine is too utopian an idea, then we should at least be realists and understand that no amount of One Faculty, United Faculty, or Equal Faculty rhetoric is going to make up for the fact that our faculty live in very different worlds and experience very different existential realities. Our policies and practices should acknowledge this fact instead of covering it up.

Cheers,
Dean

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