

University of Puget Sound
Faculty Meeting Minutes
March 8, 2005

1. President Thomas called the meeting to order in McIntyre 103 at 4:06 p.m. Fifty-four voting members of the faculty were present by 4:20 p.m.
2. The minutes of the February 7, 2005 faculty meeting were approved as distributed.
3. In response to President Thomas' call for announcements, Bill Barry announced that the Mellon Foundation was exploring the idea of establishing a west coast technology center. He said that funds were available to send faculty to technology workshops around the country, and that lists of these opportunities would be forthcoming. He invited faculty to participate.
4. President Thomas reported that our trustees had a good set of meetings in February, at which he had presented his *Defining Moments* document. He said the document was still being refined, and he thanked department chairs for their helpful feedback at the recent chairs' meeting. He said the document would lead eventually to statements of strategic objectives for an upcoming capital campaign and for other purposes.

President Thomas thanked everyone who participated in the February 18, 2005 groundbreaking for the new science center, named Harned Hall. He also again thanked faculty who teach in Thompson Hall for putting up with the noise and confusion of construction.

President Thomas reported that admission and fund-raising numbers were strong and were ahead of last year. He said that Jean Kim, our new Dean of Students, would join us permanently on May 16, and that she was on campus for the remainder of the current week to meet with staff and faculty.

President Thomas reported that the search for our new Vice President for University Relations was progressing nicely, with a "long short list" of about a dozen candidates. He said most of the candidates had academic experience, and that they came from across the country. He called it a good, strong pool.

President Thomas recounted an experience he had at the spring scholarship luncheon last week that he said was typical of the many accounts he hears about our faculty from alumni and parents. He said a parent spoke about the moment he realized his son was at a special college when he discovered his son working on-line on a Saturday evening with his professor on an academic problem they had been puzzling over all week. The son was so engrossed he was reluctant to tear himself away to go to dinner. President Thomas said this wonderful incident reflected the centrality of the student-faculty relationship at Puget Sound.

5. Academic Vice President Kris Bartanen has no report.

6. Faculty Senate Chair Bill Beardsley had no report.

7. Academic Vice President Bartanen reported that she had continued to work with members of the Faculty Salary Committee on deployment of Budget Task Force salary funds for next year in the direction that faculty approved at the February 7, 2005 meeting. She said she would let us know more in the next week or so.

8. We then turned to the second reading and discussion of the proposed change to the faculty code related to open tenure files. At the December 6, 2004 faculty meeting Bill Beardsley M/S “to amend the Faculty Code by striking the words ‘Except in tenure evaluations, when letters of evaluation must be confidential,’ from Chapter III, section 4.a.1.d. AND by striking the words ‘a faculty member being considered for tenure, or’ from Chapter III, section 4. b.2.e. AND by striking the words ‘when the purpose of the evaluation is to grant or deny tenure or’ from the concluding paragraph of Chapter III.”

President Thomas turned to Beardsley, who explained the motion. He reminded us that he had brought the motion as an individual, not as chair of the senate. He recommended we use a cost-benefit approach in discussing the motion, arguing that the practice of closed files is tremendously costly. He said closed files requires chairs to spend a great deal of time preparing summaries of colleague letters, and requires the Faculty Advancement Committee to spend a great deal of time checking these summaries for completeness and accuracy against the individual letters, resulting sometimes in chairs having to redraft the summaries. He said all of this confusion introduced unnecessary risk of liability “at an almost unviable cost.” And, he said, he was not sure what the benefits of closed files really were. He said that raising the issue gives those who think there are benefits the opportunity to say what those benefits are. He said it was not clear that closed files do actually protect junior faculty, who are certainly not protected when they write promotion letters for senior colleagues’ open evaluation files. He argued that equity suggested all evaluations should be treated the same.

Matt Warning said that it seemed odd to argue to remove this protection for junior faculty in connection with tenure files just because they are not also protected in these other situations. He argued there would be less candor from junior faculty in their letters if tenure files were open.

Ross Singleton asked how many evaluation files were open. Dean Bartanen responded that she thought about fifty per cent of non-tenure evaluation files were open files, across all ranks.

Michel Rocchi said he wanted to hear from junior faculty today and that he wished more junior faculty had attended this meeting. He said he thought that we should take our cues from them on this. He added that junior faculty in the foreign languages department do support the proposed code amendment. Warning said he thought it was hard for junior faculty to speak up in this forum.

Suzanne Barnett, responding to the argument Beardsley had made that equity suggested that all files be open, said that equity could also be served by having all files closed. If tenure files were open, she wondered, would letter writers move from critique to endorsement? Will there be any tenure denials anymore? She agreed that it takes much effort to produce the summary letters, but said that it was part of the checks and balances in the evaluation process and involves trusting colleagues to be reasonable at the FAC level. She presented the case of a junior faculty person writing a letter for another junior faculty person and then coming up for tenure the very next year, and wondered “what is the value in their knowing the words in their letters and then recalling them for the next 30 years?” Hans Ostrom replied that the benefit was that you say and do what you feel is right openly.

Nancy Bristow pointed out that there may be significant differences across departments in the way department summaries are constructed. She said there may be the potential in some departments for summaries to include comments not expressed in the group deliberations. She said history faculty meet, share their letters orally, and then discuss points of agreement, disagreement, etc., and cannot change their letters after that. Kent Hooper confirmed that that was not at all what happens in the foreign languages department. He said letters are turned in after the group deliberation. Hooper said he favored open files.

Barnett said the collective process is important to her because the message to an evaluatee means more if it comes from the collective rather than from individual letters where criticisms can too easily be picked apart and discounted. Hooper responded that he thought the current system failed “time and time again” and that he wished for change.

Jim McCullough asked how we can assure transparency in evaluations if we allow a choice of open or closed files. If half the files are closed and half are open, he said it seems this only adds confusion. He said that the system is more equitable if all files are open or all are closed; that allowing choice just confounds the system. He said that by not addressing why some people ask for open files and others ask for closed files, we are not addressing issues of equity.

Juli McGruder said that, although department evaluation processes have all been sanctioned by the Professional Standards Committee, they are still all different, with some being more open and some more “back-stabbing” than others. She said she supported the motion.

Ted Taranovski said he was concerned about two issues: (1) the protection of the evaluator, and (2) the adequacy of the evaluation process. He said that as time goes on he finds himself thinking about this more pragmatically than theoretically. He said it may be better to have all files open so that objections to the contents of letters can be raised earlier rather than later. He said he thinks it is important to give a person the chance to object to letters “in house” rather than in a lawsuit, where letters are no longer confidential anyway. He added that trustees must agree to open tenure files if we are to have them.

Chris Kline said she was concerned about different norms of access and waiving access across departments. She said it may be that in some departments “it is not seemly” to want to

have open files. How, she asked, would we go about addressing that lack of equity? Beardsley responded that any department that coerces an evaluatee to have an open file is behaving “illegally.” Eric Orlin argued that if it’s a department norm to have open files it won’t be an obvious factor, but everyone will know the norm was violated and it will come out in the evaluations. He said it may be illegal, but it’s “unenforceable.”

Randy Bentson said we should focus our discussion on whether reviews for tenure should be different from other reviews, because that’s what the motion addresses.

Orlin argued that, while the third-year review was about feedback, the tenure review served a different purpose that justified different procedures. He said that opening up tenure files would not take into account the differing evaluation procedures across departments that Bristow mentioned earlier. Orlin said he was concerned about open files because he formerly taught at a school with open files and “it was not a healthy atmosphere.” He said that one thing that attracted him to Puget Sound was that tenure files were closed with checks in place, “even if the checks came at great cost in man power.” He said that he thinks there are enough checks in place now for a junior faculty person “to get a fair shake.”

Doug Cannon spoke to the question of whether anyone would be denied tenure if we had open files. He argued that since files for other kinds of evaluations became open many years ago, evaluations have become more rigorous, not less. He said that promotion to full professor, for example, had not become automatic, and that he did not think the tenure process would become less rigorous. Warning responded that a lot of things had changed at Puget Sound and that methodologically one could not assert that opening evaluation files had had no effect. Cannon asserted that “these other reviews *are* rigorous.”

Dean Bartanen expressed two concerns: (1) the norm notion that had been raised. If everyone were as comfortable writing whatever they felt like writing as several faculty had indicated that they were, then there would be no problem; but to the extent that some faculty were uncomfortable writing frankly, open files may in fact move the point at which people become candid from the individual level to the FAC level. (2) Junior faculty have spoken about feeling pressured to write in a supportive way and have expressed concerns about how what they write would affect them in their own evaluations. If there is no mechanism for junior faculty to opt out of an open system, “we’re putting them in a difficult place.”

Nila Wiese worried about what might happen to junior faculty if they are very honest in what they say about senior faculty. She said she was worried about retaliation if there was nothing to protect her. Hooper argued that it was an illusion to think that people don't know what one has written, even in a closed file situation. He said junior faculty should have concerns about whichever system they’re functioning in, but that misinformation was more difficult to correct in a closed files environment.

David Droge recollected that mandatory closed tenure files was something that trustees had insisted on, and was not something that came from the faculty. He said that our role as faculty may therefore be that of advocate, if trustees are still skeptical about open files. The

question is, he said, what has changed since the original decision? Are trustees more open to the notion of open files? Have people changed? To what extent is our decision based on our own view of what's best and to what extent do we need to think about the case that trustees will need to hear before they will accept this amendment?

Bill Breitenbach said he was beginning to suspect that "candor" refers to a willingness to be more negative. If this is so, then he speculated that open files might push people to be more honest than they would otherwise be

Peter Wimberger said that the motion seemed to be a referendum on trust and that it seemed we had lost trust in each other. If open files will restore trust, he said, then that's a reason to have them.

Taranovski reported that thirty years ago it was assumed that the university could deny tenure "for any reason whatsoever," whereas tenure now seems to be viewed more and more as an entitlement. He said the academic culture has changed everywhere, not just at Puget Sound, and that faculty are more litigious now. He said that we need to consider whether changing the system is going to benefit the tenure process, and whether trustees will agree. He argued that if making the change "will save angst, cost, and problems for the institution," then it may be worthwhile.

Finney reported that, in response to Dean Bartanen's March 2, 2005 email offer to junior faculty reluctant to speak on this issue that they could contact Finney who would report their views at today's meeting without attribution, he had heard from two junior faculty, one in favor of open files and one opposed. The person in favor of open files believed that transparency throughout the evaluation process was a good idea. This person recognized there were pros and cons, but on balance felt that the benefits outweighed the potential negative effects. Person number two was very much in support of closed files for tenure. This person's feeling was that open files leave junior faculty vulnerable when participating in the tenure evaluations of more senior colleagues. This person believed that the benefits of being able to evaluate a colleague anonymously and confidentially outweighed the benefit of an evaluatee's being able to read the letters in his or her tenure file.

Bob Matthews M/S/ to end debate. The motion failed on a hand vote.

Keith Ward said that much material is reviewed beyond the individual letters and he wondered if perhaps we were emphasizing letters so much that we might be missing the larger process.

Doug Cannon M/S/vote reported later "to table the motion until the next meeting."

Rocchi asked Cannon why he made the motion to table. Cannon responded that he wanted more discussion over a longer period of time than can be provided by the few people at today's meeting. Warning asked why there were so few junior faculty at today's meeting. Mark Largent said that there were five times more untenured faculty at today's meeting than there were at the previous meeting when this was discussed. Dean Bartanen reminded us she had specifically written to all junior faculty inviting them to attend today's meeting.

David Tinsley asked what our hurry was in deciding a matter this important. He said the Faculty Senate was discussing all parts of the evaluation process and that he supported Cannon's motion to table. He said he was interested in seeing how open tenure files meshed with other areas of the evaluation process that were just as crucial if not more so. Bob Matthews agreed that we were not yet ready to come to a conclusion

McGruder M/S/P "to close debate on the motion to table." The motion to close debate passed on a voice vote. The motion to table then passed on a voice vote.

Bill Haltom M/S/P to adjourn and we did adjourn at 5:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John M. Finney
Secretary of the Faculty