

University of Puget Sound
Faculty Meeting Minutes
April 12, 2005

1. President Thomas called the meeting to order in McIntyre 103 at 4:04 p.m. Sixty-six voting members of the faculty were present by 4:15 p.m.

2. The minutes of the March 8, 2005 faculty meeting were approved as distributed. Prior to their approval Bill Haltom objected to the following statement in the minutes: "Beardsley responded that any department that coerces an evaluatee to have an open file is behaving 'illegally.'" Haltom argued that such behavior is contrary to the *Faculty Code*, but is not illegal. Bill Beardsley, assured by Finney that he did indeed use the word "illegally" and that the word appears in the minutes within quotation marks, declined to pursue a correction to the minutes.

3. There was no call for announcements, as the result of which, there were none.

4. President Thomas thanked faculty who participated in last weekend's open house in connection with Spring Campus Day for admitted students. He said this has been an extraordinary admission year; with applications "through the roof" in terms of both quantity and quality, accompanied by a mystifyingly slow deposit cycle nationwide. He said he appreciated the very effective sessions faculty had provided for prospective students.

President Thomas also thanked faculty who had worked on the Fellowships Committee assisting students applying for the various post-graduate fellowships. He said this year we have winners of Watson, Goldwater, and Mellon awards, as well as five or six Fulbrights. He said this was "quite an accomplishment." Associate Dean Bill Barry said a list of these students would be forthcoming later this spring when the final group was known.

President Thomas expressed appreciation for the faculty conversations Dean Bartanen has convened on the *Defining Moments* document. He said that this document is not intended "to have a continuing life." Its purpose is to provoke just these kinds of conversations and to lead to a strategic planning process.

With reference to the emailed invitation we received recently from the Human Resources department to learn more about the President's Office as part of the ongoing "spotlight series" of noontime brown bags, President Thomas assured us that no offense was intended by certain "leading questions," such as how many hours does the President work each day, and how many emails does the President's Office receive each day. He said that the implication that the President's Office might work harder or be busier than others on campus was unintended. And he assured us that attendance at the brown bag was not required. He, himself, would not attend.

5. Academic Vice President Kris Bartanen had no report.

6. Faculty Senate Chair Bill Beardsley reported that the Faculty Senate had received the Curriculum Committee's report recommending changes to the academic calendar and had voted to refer the recommendation on to the full faculty. He announced the Senate's intention to put the proposal on the agenda of the first faculty meeting next fall. Curriculum Committee chair Richard Anderson-Connolly distributed a handout detailing the proposed changes.

Chair Beardsley also reported that the Faculty Senate had reversed a vote by the Academic Standards Committee to eliminate the elective pass/fail grading option. He reminded us that any member of the faculty could raise the issue in a meeting of the full faculty to try to overrule the Senate's action.

Finally, Chair Beardsley on behalf of the faculty thanked faculty parliamentarian David Droge for his good effort and fine work. This was greeted by a round of appreciative applause.

7. We then continued 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 reminded us that his goal in bringing forward the issue of open vs. closed tenure files was "to get this aired." He said it was a topic that had been "simmering for many years." He responded to those who he said had expressed surprise at the pragmatic nature of his reasons for supporting the proposal, by arguing that there were indeed issues of principle involved as well. He argued that it was unfair and unreasonable for senior faculty to have access to what junior faculty have to say about senior faculty when the reverse is not also the case. He said the current situation gives rights to those who don't need them and denies rights to those who may need them.

Haltom read a statement written by David Balaam who could not attend the meeting because he was teaching at this hour. Balaam wrote in support of the proposal, arguing that concerns about open files were shown to be unfounded for non-tenure evaluations. He wrote he was "not proud" that junior faculty do not have access to what others have said about them. He urged us "to adopt the practice of being honest with one another," and wrote that "the motion promises to make evaluators more honest, or at least more careful." He argued that transparency should win out over backroom discussion.

Nick Kontogeorgopoulos spoke against the motion, arguing that because the tenure evaluation is the most important review we should not treat the tenure review just like any other review. He said we need to ensure that people will write as frankly as possible for tenure files. He argued that the time and energy that may be saved if the proposal passes is

quite small and that it is not worth giving up the current system that promotes frankness to save this time. With regard to mention at the last meeting about the litigiousness of our age, Kontogeorgopoulos argued that giving someone the right to read what someone wrote about them will not end litigiousness. He said he disagrees with the notion that the current system is broken or that there is a lack of trust among faculty. He said he trusts colleagues to be honest and thorough; that he trusts the Faculty Advancement Committee (FAC) to dismiss unfair comments; and that he trusts head officers to write accurate summaries. He argued that the proposal, if passed, would not protect people. He said that “good friends may not wish to know what you’re writing about them.” He said the current system does protect tenure candidates and that the summaries of letters do contain substantive comments. He said passing the motion would put a face to the comments, but this would not improve the process. He concluded by arguing that the motion attempts to fix a problem that does not exist.

David Droge spoke in favor of the motion. He said that no one has argued that choosing open or closed files does not work in every other evaluation situation. He argued that if tenure is the most important evaluation decision that we make, then we should decide on which side we wish to err: with open files, risking tepid letters or tenuring someone marginally qualified or, on the other side with closed files, risking the possibility that arbitrary and unsupported claims may be transmitted to the FAC, or that there may be some unanswered criticisms in the file because of an incomplete summary letter. Droge argued that the more comprehensive the file is, the better, and that it is better if the evaluatee can respond to all of the issues that are raised.

Eric Orlin reported that, during a conversation last week among about 25 untenured faculty, a straw poll was taken in which 16 voted against the current motion, three voted in favor, and six either abstained or hadn’t made up their minds yet. Orlin declined to speak for the group on the issues, saying the group represented a diverse collection of opinions and views.

Orlin then stated his own opinion on the motion. He opposed the motion, arguing that it would not lead to better tenure reviews. He said we cannot legislate honesty and that, while open files may force people to be more careful, that would not necessarily ensure the best protection for the evaluatee. He argued that letters that may be couched in “careful language” could put a burden on the FAC to figure out what the letter writer really intended. Or “backchannel” means of orally communicating could come into existence, leaving no trace of the issues for the candidate to address. Orlin said that he trusts the FAC to do a careful job of screening the letters and that he worried about driving the discourse away from the letters.

Bill Breitenbach spoke in support of the motion, arguing that, because the *Faculty Code* belongs to all faculty, we should not be unduly influenced by the views of untenured faculty. He said that the code seeks to protect the evaluatee and that mischaracterizations may or may not emerge in ways that can be challenged by the evaluatee. He said he was not concerned about protecting untenured letter-writers so much as protecting the evaluatee. He said that evaluatees need to be able to see what is being said about them at the time they are up for evaluation.

Hans Ostrom, in response to Orlin's worry that open files might drive the discourse off the written record, asked members of the FAC whether or not this seemed to be the case in open file situations. Juli McGruder responded that the FAC has procedures for both open and closed files and that if the FAC is tending to disagree with the department recommendation, the FAC may invite departmental representatives for conversation. There is already in place, therefore, a procedure to meet to negotiate. She said sometimes this is necessary when departmental documentation is unclear or when there is no department recommendation at all. Dean Bartanen added that if the FAC needs additional information or is tending to a decision contrary to the department's recommendation, the FAC can ask department representatives to visit with the FAC. She said this is in no way "backchannel" communication; that such conversations must take place within FAC meetings, not outside them, and that the evaluatee knows about them.

Ted Taranovski said that, while the tenure decision is certainly important, there is a risk of elevating it to too high a "make or break" level. He argued that the third year evaluations are also important and that the tendency to postpone criticism until tenure is unwise. He argued that if we cannot be truly candid before tenure, we have no business being candid at tenure.

Ross Singleton asked about the ongoing review of the faculty evaluation process he understood the Faculty Senate had begun. Beardsley responded that the senate had created an *ad hoc* committee for this purpose that had not reported back yet. Ostrom reported that the *ad hoc* committee had met a couple times already, but that the committee was not addressing the open vs. closed files issue *per se*.

Doug Cannon said he "was moved by the specter of eliminating the summaries" of letters because the summaries were time consuming to create and were not good "disguises" of who said what. He said he had thought the motion would reduce a good deal of that work and was surprised therefore to learn that 50% of those who do have a choice choose closed files. He said he thought better of an impulse to propose to amend the motion to eliminate closed files altogether and instead appealed to us never to choose closed files. He said tongue in cheek that a better alternative was to choose an open file and then to elect never to review its contents in the Dean's Office. He said it was in fact a burden to read a closed file, requiring a trip to the Dean's office, and that the "collective view" was available to those who choose open files by reading the department recommendation and the FAC letter. His argument was that those who choose open files can have the same essential advantages as those who choose closed files. He said closed files create the illusion that what is written is known only to the FAC, when in fact what is written is known to everyone except the evaluatee. Cannon closed by arguing that closed files do not protect junior faculty who speak negatively about evaluatees in meetings.

Haltom said that most of the time most of the comments in the department summaries do not get close enough to what was actually said in meetings to give the evaluatee cause to respond. Haltom said this is because those who write the summaries must balance two considerations: they must communicate sufficient information to the evaluatee and they must leave the file

confidential. He said that if the summaries reveal individual letter writers' identities, the head officer is betraying those whom the head officer is supposed to protect in a closed file. He said that we should remember when we talk about open files that an open file means the evaluatee can go to the Dean's office and there read the colleague letters in the file.

Doug Sackman, who attended the meeting last week of untenured faculty, said that the arguments discussed then were not as strong in support of the motion as have been articulated today. That meeting dealt more with pragmatic arguments about saving labor and not so much about the principles involved. He said he had favored the motion before last week's meeting, had then "sat on the fence" for a while as a result of that meeting, and now once again favored the motion based on today's discussion. Tamiko Nimura added that the vote in last week's meeting had simply been a straw poll of less than half the untenured faculty and may not have represented the majority view among all untenured faculty.

Ostrom M/S/P to close debate. The motion to end debate passed on a voice vote. Several faculty called for a paper ballot. The main motion then passed with 40 in favor, 26 opposed, and one abstention.

Suzanne Barnett asked what would happen now. Beardsley said that in accordance with written procedures in the code for amending the *Faculty Code* the proposed amendment passed today would be sent to trustees for consideration at their May meeting.

Taranovski M/S/P to adjourn and we did adjourn at 5:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John M. Finney
Secretary of the Faculty