

University of Puget Sound
Faculty Meeting Minutes
December 6, 2004

1. President Thomas called the meeting to order in McIntyre 103 at 4:04 p.m. Thirty-six voting members of the faculty were present at 4:10 p.m.

2. The minutes of the October 25, 2004 faculty meeting were approved as distributed.

4. President Thomas wished us well as we finish the fall semester. He invited faculty to his home on Monday, December 13, 2004 between 4:00 and 6:30 p.m. for a reception to celebrate the season. He also reminded us of the Thursday, December 16, 2004 all-campus faculty and staff holiday celebration reception between 2:00 and 4:00 p.m. in the Wheelock Rotunda.

President Thomas thanked Professors Ron Fields, Bill Kupinse, Douglas Sackman, and George Erving, who spoke at Puget Sound Night at the Tacoma Art Museum on November 17, 2004. He reminded us that the third and final Dean of Students candidate will be on campus tomorrow, December 7, 2004, and will make a presentation and answer questions in the Rotunda between 3:30 and 4:30 p.m.

President Thomas reminded us that we are breaking ground for the new science center in January, as reported in this morning's *Tribune*. He added that we had a good fund-raising fall term, with \$1.8 million in grants in October alone. Two of the grants are challenge grants, requiring that we raise \$2.4 million to meet the challenges. He thanked faculty, especially those in the sciences, for bringing this project to fruition.

President Thomas reported that our trustees have asked that at the February board meeting the administration present a vision statement for the future. In addition to the consultations with faculty that President Thomas and Dean Bartanen have held this fall, President Thomas invited us to send directly to him our thoughts on vision and how the university is unique and special. He said he expected the vision statement to continue to reinforce the six strategic goals established several years ago. In addition, now that we are solidly identified as a national liberal arts college, we will seek to do other strategic things that foreground our distinctiveness. He said we are not seeking to model ourselves after any other college; that we wish to establish what is unique about ourselves. He thanked, for example, faculty who are members of a work group to consider creation of a health and human sciences cluster of departments; Bruce Mann and others working on the center for research on strategic issues initiative; faculty working on a vision for the natural history museum; and those working on developing relationships with our cultural institutions downtown.

3. In response to President Thomas's call for announcements, Nancy Bristow acknowledged the good press our student athletes have received lately and added that less well known was their drive the week following Halloween that raised 1600 pounds of canned food for local charities. President Thomas added by way of reminder that tomorrow at noon we will

celebrate our women's soccer team and their terrific season, losing only narrowly in the national championship finals.

Suzanne Holland asked if anyone else besides her had had their paycheck garnisheed for failure to pay a parking ticket on time. No one present apparently had. Bill Haltom pointed out that this was a question, not an announcement, and suggested that the minutes could record that Holland had announced that she was displeased that her paycheck had been garnisheed in this manner. The secretary declined, however.

5. Academic Vice President Kris Bartanen reported that we have received the first acceptance of an offer for a tenure-line faculty position for the 2005-2006 academic year. She added that so far she has signed eighteen requisitions for 2005-2006 tenure-line positions, signaling a full search agenda in the months to come.

Dean Bartanen reported that conversations are in progress with the Mellon Foundation, which is interested in establishing on the west coast a center for technology and teaching, to extend their existing initiative. She said that faculty could expect to see information about program opportunities in January.

6. Faculty Senate Chair Bill Beardsley reminded us that the faculty senate has started two Blackboard discussion groups. One facilitates discussion of the student teaching evaluation process and forms. The other is a suggestion box.

Chair Beardsley reported that the Faculty Senate voted to establish an *ad hoc* committee to find facts, both quantitative and qualitative, about the tenure and promotion process. He asked that faculty interested in serving on this committee let him or any faculty senator know.

7. President Thomas then turned to Chair Beardsley to make the first reading of the proposed amendment to Chapter III of the Faculty Code. **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.”**

Keith Maxwell asked Beardsley to explain the effect of his motion. Beardsley said he made the motion as an individual, not for the Senate. He said the effect of the motion is to open the right to every person being evaluated to read letters in the file. He added that anyone can waive that right. He said that currently everyone has the right to an open file except for those up for tenure. The motion extends that right to everyone, including those up for tenure.

Suzanne Barnett asked what had prompted the motion. Beardsley responded that throughout his sixteen years at the university open files have been discussed and suggested in the Faculty Senate and elsewhere but that nothing has ever been done. He said he made the motion in the

spirit of raising the question—do we really want to do this? He said that faculty should discuss it and that he was prepared to argue in favor of it.

David Tinsley said he was concerned about issues of power and confidentiality. He said that currently instructors and junior faculty participate fully in the evaluation process. If files are open, he asked, what effect would this have on the participation of those of lesser power? Is this something we want to end?

Beardsley suggested we frame the debate around costs and benefits. He said the current practice has great costs in terms of time and controversy and is potentially a source of liability because of inaccuracies in the written summaries of individual letters. He asked what the benefits of the current practice are, and whether protecting junior faculty and instructors outweigh the costs. He said the current practice was odd in that, while the letters of junior faculty and instructors are closed in tenure cases, they are open in promotion cases.

Bristow argued that the motion would in fact give junior faculty the same power as senior faculty. She said that, while the letters of junior faculty are open to senior faculty when the latter are up for promotion or evaluation, the motion would open the letters of senior faculty to junior faculty when the latter are up for tenure.

Tinsley asked Beardsley if he foresaw passage of the motion resulting in any change in the enfranchisement of faculty in the evaluation process. Would the number of faculty who can participate in the process change, he asked? Beardsley responded, no.

Barnett said that for her the issue turns on the interests of the individual on the one hand, and the interests of the collective on the other. Evaluatees with open files could dismiss the comments made in individual letters, whereas currently in closed files they must pay attention to the collective as expressed in the summaries. She said that, for letter writers, it is a matter of writing for the individual versus writing for the collective.

Holland said that under the current process she finds it difficult as a head officer to write separate summary statements of the letters and of the department evaluations.

Michel Rocchi said that Bristow's comment had put his mind at ease about the rights of junior colleagues, but he worried that they may still be in jeopardy before they get tenure. He added that passage of the motion would provide a benefit to the department chair, who would no longer have to summarize the individual letters. And while passage of the motion would not make much difference to senior faculty, he said he wanted to hear more from junior faculty about how they perceived the motion would affect them. Alyce DeMarais responded that she felt it would be good to be able to see all of the comments that were in the file.

Eric Orlin expressed a concern growing out of his own experience with open files at another institution. He said that there what was said in the letters was not actually the substance of a decision; that real feelings were transmitted through verbal, informal channels. He said that open files had the ironic effect of making the evaluation process less transparent, not more.

Rocchi responded that because our faculty code is unique, it is difficult to compare what we do here and what is done elsewhere. He said we have to decide for ourselves what to do.

Julian Edgoose pointed out that we as faculty value the fact that student evaluations of us are confidential. He said the same principle should also apply to faculty evaluations and that he did not understand the value of open files. He worried about what happens politically in an open file system. Walter Lowrie said that the current tension between closed files for tenure (insisted on by trustees) and open files for other evaluations, reflects an institutional ethos in which open files are considered to be less reliable than closed files. He said that the motion hits at a peculiar problem for us here in the sense that open files are fine for promotion but not for tenure.

Beardsley said that he did not want to take the analogy with student evaluations very seriously. He said that tenure is an extremely important institution and that it is our responsibility to honestly and fairly evaluate our colleagues for tenure. He said that tenured faculty neither need nor deserve closed files.

Doug Cannon argued that summary letters are close to extended selections of individual letters these days rather than being true summaries, and that this creates “a certain transparency.” He said that individual opinions become known anyway through rumors, etc. When we recognize the security that tenured faculty have, he asked, what “stays the hand” of the tenured faculty who wants to write a negative letter? Cannon argued that the adverse consequences of open files are exaggerated and that the cost of having closed files is “bureaucratically very high.”

Holland argued that the motion protects junior faculty by making everything visible, but that it does not protect junior faculty when writing a letter for another junior faculty member also coming up for tenure, because someone who is junior will become senior. She said this was a problem.

Christine Kline asked when one typically might waive the right to see a promotion file currently, and Beardsley responded that it is a matter of one’s personal comfort level and whether one wants the message to come from the collective or from individuals, to use Barnett’s language. He added that, while formerly it wasn’t unusual to waive the right of access, it is rare now.

Wayne Rickoll said, with regard to the argument that closed files promote more honest evaluations, that it is also possible to get a dishonest evaluation from a closed file. He argued it is not necessarily the case that you get fairer evaluations from closed files. Barnett responded that the Faculty Advancement Committee (FAC) does not stop its reading with just the summaries but also reads every letter in the file so that misrepresentations of the kind Rickoll worried about would be detected. Alva Butcher added that the FAC spends much time making certain that summary letters that are not representative of the individual letters are modified.

Bill Breitenbach argued that evaluations serve two purposes: professional development and evaluative. He said it is unfortunate when individual letters rich in suggestions for improvement do not reach the evaluatee. He said this struck him as being peculiar since so much time and energy is invested in these helpful letters.

Tinsley wondered if we were looking at the real cause of most of the problems. He said that, even with open files, a department's collective decision would still need to be represented by the chair in a written summary. Tinsley suggested that we may be looking in the wrong place for where most of the problems are. Holland said that the motion does not mandate open files; it simply allows for them. President Thomas pointed out that the motion in fact makes all files open unless the right of access is specifically waived.

Jac Royce, returning to the comparison with the student evaluation system, said that what is different is that you can read the student evaluations and comments even when they may be unfair, whereas in a closed tenure file individual comments are inaccessible. She said it was odd to think that colleagues would not be honest and would not be willing to say the same things to her face that they would put into writing. Edgoose responded that he worries about the inconsistency underlying the two systems for student evaluations and faculty evaluations. He argued that "we should be consistent across the board."

Rocchi said that if the motion passes, we may want to think about the appeals process. He said that we do not yet have much experience with the new appeals process introduced to the faculty code just this year and that it may need to be reexamined if it is to work properly in an open file environment.

Maxwell said that in the current closed file situation there is no system of accountability for the letter writer. Is that a good situation, he asked. Barnett responded that there is in fact accountability because an extreme letter is not going to stand if it is seen to be extreme as colleagues deliberate over all the letters together. She added that the value of closed files is not so much a matter of honesty as it is of audience. She said that positive or critical comments could be obscured by a preoccupation with words and coverage in individual letters that are open. Rickoll said that departments have different rules of deliberation and that it is possible to write a letter that is never raised in deliberation.

Holland asked if anyone had experience of it being considered bad form actually to go to the Dean's office to read the letters in an open file. Rickoll responded that it was not bad form in the biology department.

Cannon said that the views of junior faculty on this motion are important and that he hoped there would be a way for them to be expressed. He noted that junior faculty seemed to be reluctant to speak. Orlin reminded us that comments can be posted anonymously on Blackboard. Barnett said she doesn't want to put junior faculty on the spot and wants to hear from recently tenured faculty also.

At his last faculty meeting of his long and distinguished career at the University of Puget Sound, Professor of History Walter Lowrie M/S/P to adjourn and we did adjourn at 5:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John M. Finney
Secretary of the Faculty