

# **A MOTION TO INVESTIGATE POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS TO COLBY TENURE PROCEDURES**

Introduced by Randolph M. Jones

## **INTRODUCTION**

Colby's faculty and personnel procedures ought to (and to a large extent do) embody the principle that employees be given detailed performance evaluations together with a meaningful chance to respond to each of those evaluations. This principle is essential to providing fair and consistent treatment of employees, as well as to helping clear up miscommunications, misinterpretations, and errors in judgment or fact.

However, some of Colby's current procedures for promotion and tenure may be contrary to these principles. In particular, the current procedures do not require the P&T committee to declare to a tenure candidate formally and in detail any negative assessments of the candidate's case that have not previously been identified, discussed, or presented to the candidate. The current procedures also do not allow a tenure candidate any meaningful opportunity to respond to those negative assessments.

## **MOTION**

The faculty direct the Advisory Committee on Faculty and Personnel Policy to deliberate over, and make concrete recommendations on, whether and how to change Colby's tenure policies, procedures, and practices so that tenure candidates are given detailed descriptions of every significant negative judgment that is identified by members of the Promotion and Tenure committee, the Dean of Faculty, the President of the College, or the Board of Trustees, and that the candidates are given a meaningful opportunity to respond to these judgments before the tenure decision is finalized.

Due to the magnitude of the importance of the tenure decision and significant negative ramifications of potential problems with the process, these deliberations and recommendations should be made in a timely manner, with an initial report delivered by January 2007. The faculty also strongly recommend that the college administration and the Board of Trustees consider these issues on their own.

## MOTIVATIONS FOR THE MOTION

### ***Substantive motivations:***

Under current tenure procedures at Colby, the following undesirable scenario is possible:

- Every peer review the candidate receives is positive.
- The candidate receives a positive sixth-semester review.
- The candidate receives a positive merit review.
- The candidate receives a unanimous positive recommendation for tenure from the department committee, with no significant reservations.
- The promotion and tenure committee votes to deny the candidate tenure, with no detailed explanation of the reasons for the denial.

Throughout Colby's personnel procedures, there is a recurring theme of offering the employee a chance to respond to their evaluations. The opportunity is provided to respond meaningfully to student evaluations, peer reviews, sixth-semester and merit reviews. It is even the case that a department-level tenure committee is required to declare any "significant reservations" it finds in a tenure case for the primary purpose of providing the candidate a chance to respond to those reservations (although the term "significant reservations" is left undefined).

However, the tenure candidate in the above scenario would never be given the opportunity to respond to perceived problems with their tenure case, as identified by the P&T members. This is because the current procedures at Colby do not require the P&T committee members to "declare" their reservations to the candidate at any meaningful level of detail. As well, the procedures do not allow the candidate to respond to those negative evaluations, even if they have never been noted in any prior evaluations of the candidate's performance. This leaves the candidate in the curious position of being denied a chance to respond for the mere reason that everybody prior to the P&T members thought the candidate's performance was outstanding.

In summary:

1. Current Colby P&T committee members are allowed to create new reasons to deny a tenure candidate (that is, reasons that have never been communicated to the candidate before).
2. Those P&T members are under no obligation to tell the candidate what those reasons are to any reasonable level of detail.
3. The candidate will be given no opportunity to respond to those reasons or the negative evaluation as a whole.

It ought to be the sense of the faculty that it is not beneficial to the college or to tenure candidates for the first negative evaluation of some aspect of a candidate's performance to come from the promotion and tenure committee. Such cases would seem to indicate a failure somewhere along the line. However, this failure can only be exacerbated by not

requiring the P&T committee members to provide a thorough and detailed description of the problems and by denying the candidate an opportunity to respond to them.

It seems that most people allow that there is a potential for error in tenure deliberations. Thus, the college and the faculty should be continually striving to find ways to minimize the chances and potential impact of such errors. This motion takes an important step in that direction.

### ***Administrative motivations:***

It appears that this approach to improving the tenure procedures at Colby may not be pursued in the absence of guidance and direction from the faculty, which this motion will hopefully provide.

As many of you might be aware, I have created a web site that describes a number of problems that I perceive in the tenure system at Colby, as well as with how my particular case was handled. An important part of this web site consists of a list of recommendations for possible improvements to the tenure procedures at Colby. In the Fall of 2005 I requested to meet with the Advisory Committee on Faculty and Personnel Policy (ACFPP) to discuss these recommendations. They agreed to meet with me, but stipulated that they would only agree to discuss two of my recommendations, that I would be given 10 minutes to describe each of those two, and that I would not be allowed to talk about, or ask questions about, any other issues during our meeting.

The two recommendations identified by ACFPP did not include the recommendation that constitutes the primary subject of this motion. The committee did not allow me to ask at the meeting why they were not considering this particular recommendation. Thus, after our meeting I sent an email to the whole ACFPP committee asking for clarification about why they were considering some recommendations but not others, but none of the members gave me any response about this. Since that time, I have sent periodic emails to the chair of the committee asking for clarification, but these emails also have received no answer to that question. Thus, it appears that the best way to get the ACFPP to consider this issue is by explicit direction from the Colby faculty.

I have also attempted to discuss this issue, along with other tenure-related issues, with the President of the college. However, he has been unwilling to meet with me or to engage in this discussion. In contrast, the Dean of Faculty did give me the chance to discuss these issues in a lengthy meeting, which ultimately led to my meeting with the ACFPP. I have not attempted to discuss this with any members of the Board of Trustees.