

# Baylor University Faculty Senate Newsletter

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November 1998

Comments from Senate Chair Daniel B. McGee:

## Misconceptions About Tenure

The tenure system in American higher education is widely debated and unevenly administered. A variety of justifications for and criticisms of the concept and practice of tenure are presented. I would like to focus on what appears to me to be mistaken notions about the purpose and practice of the tenure system.

Tenure has emerged as a procedure designed to promote freedom and honesty on the part of professors in their inquiry and research, their teaching of students, and their extramural statements and actions. The history of both intramural and extramural pressures that silence or distort the honest opinions of professors led to the conclusion that ways must be found to neutralize such pressures in order to maintain the integrity of the academic task. Therefore tenure is one part of the academic structure that should contribute to the challenging task of searching for and speaking the truth as best one can.

Failure to see clearly this purpose leads to the misconception, especially by many outside of academia, that tenure serves primarily to guarantee professors' employment until retirement age. The primary and immediate beneficiary of tenure should not be professors but rather those whom the scholar/teacher serves. Students should feel confident that their professors are being honest in the sharing of information and opinions. The general public should have a high degree of confidence that the voice from academia has not been shaped by either a desire for approval or a fear of reprisal. It should be noted at this point that the academic profession is not the only one that seeks structures that encourage honest professional judgments. We see similar efforts in the medical, judicial, accounting, and other professions to protect the integrity of the professional task.

Another misconception is that tenure should be defined primarily in terms of academic freedom. I believe that it is better understood in terms of academic responsibility. The goal is not to free the professor from responsibilities but to free them for fulfilling their responsibilities to students and society. This means that there needs to be a carefully structured and effective system of collegial self-governance that holds everyone accountable. It would be easier for professors to abandon responsibility for what they do and say by yielding to whatever is politically correct or expedient at the moment. The really tough job is to struggle at the task of being true to what your scholarly understanding reveals. Tenure is designed to give professors that opportunity and responsibility.

Some think of tenure as a professorial rank reserved for only the academic elite. The tenure system allows for a probationary period in which a faculty members' competency for the academic task is evaluated. After a reasonable period (the standard is seven years) if a faculty member is retained to continue their academic responsibilities, the tenure system should protect and encourage them in their task. Without that protection, students and others cannot be assured that they are receiving the most honest judgment possible from that professor. There is a sense in which lecturers who serve a significant portion of the student population are the ones most in need of tenure protection. The percentage of a university's faculty that is tenured can be a very good measure of that university's commitment to academic excellence.

A final misconception is that a tenure system is all that you need to achieve a high level of academic excellence and responsibility. No system of rules and procedures alone ever assures the kind of behavior you might want from those who function within that system. Without the proper "habits of the heart" and the dispositions of the mind, systems can become hollow shells within which the letter of the law is followed while the intent of the law is violated. I think that I have seen the purpose of tenure violated as often by fellow faculty members as by administrators and interests external to the university. The only threat to tenure is not forces external to the faculty. As faculty members we should match our efforts at securing a trustworthy tenure system with efforts at self-examination and mutual encouragement aimed at developing those habits that hold us and our colleagues responsible for the challenges of the academic profession.

### **Comments from Donald Schmeltekopf, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs:**

#### Baylor and the Carnegie Classification of Colleges and Universities

I am pleased to write again for the Senate Newsletter. Two years ago I wrote about the importance of good communication within the Baylor University community and cited as one example the development and subsequent publication of the Faculty Handbook. Last year I commented on the "Scholarship Expectations" policy which was issued in its final form in February 1998. I suggested in that brief essay that the new expectations regarding scholarly/creative activity were part of a larger context of enhanced aspirations for the University as a whole and, in fact, were grounded in several decades of gradually increased research activity in a variety of departments and academic programs. As a result of the new policy statement, it should now be clear to all tenure and tenure-track faculty members that hiring, promotion, and tenure decisions will include scholarly activity, as defined in the Boyer model, as one of the important criteria considered.

This year I would like to comment on Baylor's status in the Carnegie Classification of Colleges and Universities. As most of you know, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching categorizes all colleges and universities in the United States that are degree-granting and accredited by an agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of

Education. Essentially, these categories--not rankings--range from associate of arts colleges (community colleges), to baccalaureate colleges, to master's or comprehensive colleges and universities, to doctoral universities, to research universities. Baylor is in the doctoral category. This category has been defined as follows: "These institutions offer a full range of baccalaureate programs and are committed to graduate education through the doctorate." Doctoral institutions, however, are subdivided into Doctoral I and Doctoral II institutions. Doctoral I universities award at least 40 doctoral degrees annually in five or more disciplines. Doctoral II universities award annually at least ten doctoral degrees in three or more disciplines or 20 or more doctoral degrees in one or more disciplines.

Baylor is currently a Doctoral II institution, and we are committed to becoming a Doctoral I institution as soon as possible. However, let me emphasize that the fact that we are categorized as "doctoral" does not mean that doctoral or graduate education is our dominant activity. Baylor, as is probably the case with all other doctoral universities, has as its primary purpose the support of our baccalaureate programs. In fact, as a doctoral institution we are clearly distinguished from research universities, which place a higher priority on research and receive annually at least \$15.5 million in federal support from grants, contracts, and the like.

Why should Baylor seek to become a Doctoral I university? The first reason is that such a step supports our mission. Baylor is committed to excellence at the undergraduate, graduate, and professional levels, as our mission statement plainly declares. Our mission statement also affirms that "Baylor seeks to fulfill its calling through excellence in teaching and research, in scholarship and publication, and in service to the community, both local and global." Thus we fulfill our mission by having a full range of strong baccalaureate programs and a **select** range of strong graduate and professional programs. And at this point in our history it is graduate education and its accompanying research and scholarship that now need some extra attention and shoring up. One demonstrable measure of success in this regard is the Carnegie Classification of Colleges and Universities. The goal of moving from the Doctoral II classification to Doctoral I can provide focus and give direction to our pursuit of academic excellence generally and in graduate education specifically.

A second reason is that strong doctoral programs can dramatically enhance both the academic quality and the academic reputation of a university, in the undergraduate and professional areas as well as the graduate. Without exception, the universities ranked as the top 50 national undergraduate universities by U.S. News and World Report possess strong doctoral programs. Additionally, the various rankings of top business schools, seminaries, and law schools show that they are typically found at universities with highly regarded doctoral programs. But strong doctoral programs do more than simply enhance a University's reputation. They can also contribute substantively to improving the academic quality of undergraduate programs. Top ranking high school seniors are attracted to schools with academic reputations based primarily on their doctoral and professional programs. Once they are enrolled, undergraduates can participate with graduate students and faculty members in research projects, a type of active, participatory

learning that should be the hallmark of a Baylor undergraduate experience. Graduate students who take their education and their academic discipline seriously can be role models for undergraduates in ways that faculty often cannot.

A third reason we are committed to becoming a strong Doctoral I university is to enhance our intellectual leadership in the academic community and the wider culture. Baylor has traditionally been recognized for the achievements of its graduates, especially at the undergraduate and professional levels. The achievements of our graduate students have not received the same degree of notice. A strong graduate program, especially at the doctoral level, would change this, thus enabling more of our graduates to have an influence in higher education, science and technology, religion, corporate and political life, and culture. And enhanced and strong doctoral programs would facilitate the work of the faculty both in relation to the achievements of their students and their own research and publication. Our influence as a Christian university would reach a new level, one that Baylor has never attained before.

And there are yet other reasons for Baylor to achieve and maintain the Doctoral I classification. For example, this classification will assist the University in its relationships and academic affinity with peer institutions in the Big 12 Conference, all of which have classifications as Research I or Research II in the Carnegie taxonomy. Fortunately, the next Carnegie review of the status of institutions is scheduled to take place in 2000, and at this time, because the University has met the current criteria for several years consecutively, in all likelihood Baylor will receive recognition as a Doctoral I university. The achievement of Doctoral I status is more than a singular goal; such a step for Baylor will help propel us to a new level of excellence called for in our mission statement, by our constituencies, and by our own sense of purpose.

### **Senate & Faculty Communications**

One of the objectives of the Faculty Senate during 1998-99 is to maintain close communication between the members of the Senate and the faculty members we serve. The purpose is to enhance a two-way flow of information and ideas between the faculty and the Senate. Each college / school / unit has developed its own method of accomplishing this goal. Because the College of Arts and Sciences is quite large, each Arts and Sciences Senate member will be communicating closely with specific faculty groups, as indicated in the following table.

Linda Adams:	Political Science
Robert Baird:	Philosophy and Church and State
Rosalie Beck:	Religion
Anne Bowery:	Communication Disorders and Honors Program
Nancy Chinn:	English

William Jensen: Visual and Theater Arts  
Philip Johnson: Modern Foreign Language and Classics  
David Longfellow: History and Oral History  
Jay Losey: English and BIC  
Daniel McGee: general liaison  
Sara Stone: Journalism, Communication Studies, Telecommunications  
Joan Supplee: Sociology, Social Work, Anthropology, Environmental Science  
Charles Weaver: Psychology, Math, Aviation Studies  
Ray Wilson: Biology  
Joe Yelderman: Geology  
David Young: Chemistry, Physics

**Dates of future Senate meetings for 1998-99:**

Meetings begin promptly at 3:30 p.m. in room 303; Cashion Academic Center, Hankamer School of Business.

December 15, 1998	March 16, 1999
January 19, 1999	April 20, 1999
February 16, 1999	May 11, 1999

**Important Dates:**

President's Faculty Forum: Thursday, February 4, 1999; 3:30 pm; Bennett Auditorium

President's State of the University Address: Wednesday, April 21, 1999; 3:30 pm; Barfield Drawing Room, BDSC

Faculty Senate Website: <[http://www3.baylor.edu/~Fac\\_Senate/senatehome.html](http://www3.baylor.edu/~Fac_Senate/senatehome.html)>

Check the website for minutes, meeting dates, membership, and other important information. Thanks to John Thorburn for maintaining the website.

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