

Promotion and tenure

The student role

By BOB RENO

For both faculty and students, promotion and tenure policy is an important issue, but it seems for different reasons. For faculty members their jobs are at stake, while it's the quality of their education that's of primary concern to students. The appropriate role for students in this decision-making process, as perceived by faculty and administrators, is minimal.

Actions speak louder

Although most faculty members would deny this, and maintain that they realize fully the importance of student 'input', actions do often speak louder than words, and the recent refusals of both the Faculty Senate and the College of Liberal Arts to include students even on committees to review promotion and tenure procedures (let alone be included in the actual decision-making bodies) illustrates clearly the nature of the appropriate perceived student role: "the students' place is in the classroom".

Student 'input' is welcomed, when and where it becomes useful to faculty, but 'input' is incapable of demanding response and accountability, it implies neo-colonial relationships between students and faculty, and is all in all a far cry from what we mean when we say we want an active and meaningful role in decision-making processes that determine the course and quality of our education.

It's nothing more than patent hypocrisy for faculty members to profess "openness" to the possibility of student participation in promotion and tenure decision-making, while simultaneously excluding students from participation even in debate and review of that same process.

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Objections to student participation are founded on assumptions such as that students are simply incapable of exercising sound judgement and an objective frame of mind, but we wonder on what basis faculty members can claim such objectivity while they're deciding on the future careers of their friends, enemies and colleagues?

Claim advanced

The claim is advanced that students aren't competent to judge the scholarly works of a professor, but a student in mathematics is no doubt by far and away closer to competency in the case of a math professor's scholastic achievements than one of the professor's colleagues from, say, sociology or journalism.

The "time spectrum" argument that students are only transient 'visitors' on the campus whereas faculty members live here all their lives (once tenured), giving them a greater stake in affairs, is equally unpalatable. As students we have to live with our education for the rest of our lives, and what transpires here will play a great role in determining the courses of our lives, careers and conscious development.

Are faculty members here for the purpose of teaching students, or are we, as students, merely here to give faculty and administration something to collect salaries over? The questions arising over this issue strike at the roots of our assumptions and philosophies of higher education: In whose interests is the university run? With whom should the burden of justification lie?

On Jan. 8, the Emerald cited an official AAUP (American Association of University Professors) statement on the promotion and tenure system as follows: "At its best it protects students as well as it protects faculty... The real issue is the manner in which tenure is granted, not whether or not to grant it at all... In consequence, students and taxpayers have every right to demand that tenure be granted only to superior faculty members."

Doubt viability of system

We seriously doubt the viability of a system which purports to "protect" students while at the same time it denies us participation in the process allegedly serving in the interests of our protection. Any recognition of the fact that students "have every right to demand that tenure be granted only to superior faculty members" becomes hollow and meaningless rhetoric as long as students are being systematically deprived of the means (i.e. participation) necessary to exercise that right.

When students' rights are recognized in principle, but are in actual practice accepted as valid only on faculty members' terms, they're reduced within that narrow context to mere "privileges". But we're concerned with rights, not privileges. What we want is influence and participation, not just 'input', which by its very definition implies exclusion from the decision-making system.

A note from the authors

We believe that the above commentaries are long overdue. If we look at the University as a place where we, as students, are the consumers, it seems to be ridiculously and simply apparent that we should have a voice — a strong voice in determining what we get taught, and by whom.

"Student input" is a nice term, but it is worthless. What is needed to make the University better for both students and faculty — for the whole University community — is "student influence".

Institutional commitments have in fact been made that would offer hope for an expanded student role in university governance, such as in the 1970 Novick Report on the Future of the University: "The time has come to include students in the decision-making process of the faculty that has to do with matters that affect both students and faculty members."

Also, in the 1969 Report of the Legislative Task Force on Higher Education: "Much of the student unrest and frustration on the campus today emanates from the failure of the institutional administration to respond to the students' legitimate concerns... Students, faculty and administrators should work toward the common goal of campus community betterment, and students

should be included in both discussion and decision-making."

However, there's been a general failure to act on these commitments. The role of students in actual decision-making and governance, despite the many student positions on advisory, symbolic or token committees, has remained essentially and qualitatively the same. In the area of university governance, the time has long since passed for a decisive step out of the past.

University administration and faculty have got to hold themselves accountable, or be held accountable by students, to the principles and goals underlying these institutional commitments. If we try to stop the hands of a clock in motion, the mainspring falls limp, and it ceases to perform the designated function.

The faculty role

By Cliff Zukin

For both faculty and students promotion and tenure policy is an important issue, but it seems for different reasons. For faculty members, their jobs are at stake, while it's the quality of their education that is of primary concern to students.

The appropriate role for faculty in the decision-making process must be, of course, minimal. This is not to say, however, that our distinguished educators' cries for "faculty input" fall on deaf ears. We, as students, are not opposed to "faculty input" per se. However, it must be recognized that faculty are not transients. They are usually here for more than four years and generally do not change their views to accommodate either changes in the system, or the changing views of students coming into the University system. The question becomes should we let these people pass judgment on people who are here to produce products we want to consume?

Ain't no way

A second consideration must be the faculty's competence to pass judgment on their peers, with whom they obviously have close personal and emotional ties. Stated simply, are faculty capable of making the objective decisions necessary to insure quality products for us to consume. The answer is obvious. Ain't no way.

So the problem becomes what is the proper role for faculty? To cite an AAUS report (American Association of University Students): "The system of promotion and tenure has worked well to protect faculty as well as students when faculty realized they were not professionally competent or ethically capable to make the type of decision required. Only when faculty realize that

their place is in the classroom and in their lecture notes can the system operate efficiently to the degree that it was intended."

There is, it must be admitted, another side to the coin. Some have called for the opening of the promotion and tenure process to the faculty. To quote from the Novick report (ASUO Senator David Novick), "The time has come to include faculty in the decision making process of the students that has to do with matters that affect both faculty and student members." Also, from the 1969 Report of the Task Force on Higher Education, "Much of the faculty unrest and frustration in the faculty clubs today emanates from the failure of the ASUO administration to respond to the faculty's legitimate concerns..."

Faculty Club Opened

Looking at the situation realistically, there may be some evidence to the contention that faculty are mature enough to be allowed into the decision-making process. For example, just recently the faculty opened up the faculty club to students. True, the club was losing money and would have to close if it did not take such a measure. And true our student union (financed by student fees) has been ever open to faculty. However let us not question their motives. The point to be made is that they are coming around, however slowly.

Perhaps it is time to give in to the demands for faculty input. I believe that the ASUO Senate is approaching that philosophy. Just last meeting by a vote of 26 in favor, none opposed, and 1 abstention the Senate endorsed the establishment of a committee to clarify University promotion and tenure procedures. To prove that we value "faculty input" we recommended that the composition of the committee be 3 faculty and only 2 students. (Although there may be a problem as the Faculty Senate voted to establish the same committee—but without students).

So, maybe the ASUO is finally starting to act on its commitments. After all, it must be recognized that the role of faculty in actual decision-making and governance, despite the many faculty positions on advisory, symbolic or token committees, has remained essentially and qualitatively the same.

In the areas of University governance the time has long since passed for a decisive step out of the past. We've got to hold ourselves accountable to the principles and goals underlying these institutional (ASUO) commitments. If you try to stop the hands of a clock in motion, the mainspring falls limp, and it ceases to perform the desired function.

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