

February 4, 2014

Ken Howard
Chair, North Idaho College Board of Trustees,

Mr. Howard:

I am a faculty member, and I support the President's Cabinet's position on tenure at North Idaho College. I feel compelled to write to you to voice my personal concern with the "workshop" taking place next week and to urge you to reconsider. I believe that my twenty-one years of service to the College and my present role as Chair of English and Modern Languages give me a unique perspective on this issue.

While I can only describe my experiences and interactions with the faculty in English and Modern Languages, on a daily basis I witness the faculty's commitment to students and their success, and I see the professionalism with which they do their jobs. Not only do the faculty constantly evaluate the *hows* of what they do, they continually reflect on the *whys*; these practices are a part of their core responsibilities as probationary and fully tenured faculty members. In short, faculty do not take their jobs lightly, nor do they take their commitment to the College casually. NIC's tenure policy and processes, which have been developed through the collaborative efforts of faculty and administration, guarantee that both the College and faculty uphold and maintain these responsibilities and commitments and keep them relevant. Faculty take these responsibilities very seriously.

You are undoubtedly aware of the process faculty go through to earn tenure and the subsequent three-year reevaluation process that continues after initial tenure has been earned. You also know that the policy and process has been recently revised—in 2010—and updated in an effort to maintain rigor and spirit of the tenure process. Although not perfect, the collaboration between the faculty, senate, and the administration worked. It would seem that if the Board has an issue with the policy or process, I would hope you would trust those responsible to address them.

Unfortunately, the debate format of the tenure workshop creates a polarized situation that undermines the trust between the Board and the faculty, implying that established policies are somehow flawed and existing faculty with a long commitment to the college are not fulfilling their obligations. NIC faculty have little choice but to take a defensive stance toward the Board. They must defend themselves and the academic profession, for our tenure policy and process are the foundation of our professional code of ethics and values. Ultimately, for us, the tenure event creates an impossible dilemma: if we defend tenure well, we are vulnerable to the charge of elitism. If we are insufficiently humble, we can be viewed as ingrates. While the speakers against tenure risk very little, the faculty defenders of tenure are put in the position of risking their very professional reputations while assuming responsibility for the entire faculty at the college.

But more importantly, questioning the functionality of tenure is akin to questioning the values and the mission of the College. Tenure makes them operational. Take, for example, NIC's Values of diversity, stewardship, and student success. Embedded in each are intentions and values that fall along a continuum, some mainstream, some controversial. If learning were simply pouring information into a brain, then one size would fit all, but learning is about exploring disorientating dilemmas; it's about understanding different perspectives; it's not easy. Tenure, in this instance, acts like a safety net which allows the faculty to weave conflicting ideas into the broader discussion of community, employment, and education. Moreover, tenure creates a stable faculty workforce that serves the area employers by creating long-term relationships. In other words, faculty tenure ensures that the College lives, connects, and delivers its Values, Vision and Mission to the community it serves.

Although I speak only for myself, I am sure many others share my position. I urge you to reconsider presenting a "tenure workshop"; it is not needed. If there are issues with tenure, these discussions and any potential changes should follow established procedures for examining college policies.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Lloyd Duman
Chair, English and Modern Languages
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