

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Over this past first week of the spring semester we have discovered that a small (but troubling) number of our faculty colleagues state they are fearful and anxious. Several have said they want to “lay low” and that they believe tenure, promotion, benefits, and/or job security might be denied to them if they dare speak out, sign a letter of protest, lodge a grievance about the termination of their programs or colleagues, speak with members of AAUP/FASTR, sign a union card, or speak to anyone from national American Association of University Professors (AAUP). Some construed the President’s latest open-letter response to the AAUP stating the administration and the staff would not participate in the upcoming investigation to be a warning to faculty who might otherwise choose to participate by simply sharing their experiences and perspectives with the investigators. This situation is both saddening and alarming, and makes us wonder if anyone on campus now has tenure in any meaningful sense of the word.

What is tenure? Tenure is more than a milestone in a faculty member’s career—it is much more than a badge of honor. Tenure is designed to do two critical things, vital to protecting the academic mission of a college or university: 1) it should empower faculty members who so choose to take controversial positions in their disciplines and to state those views vigorously, in the classroom, and publicly. And, 2) it should assure shared governance in which faculty can meet their *professional obligations* to openly, passionately, sincerely, and bravely disagree with the institution’s administration and Board if and when faculty members believe that they are not acting in the best interests of the academic mission, the faculty, the reputation of the institution, and (most importantly) the students.

What is shared governance? Shared governance in higher education typically has three sets of equal actors: the faculty, the administration, and the Board of Trustees, each with its own area of primary responsibility. The curriculum, academic policies, and the academic mission of the institution are owned, designed, assessed, and led by the faculty who have academic expertise and who have been hired and tenured into the institution because of that expertise. The administration’s role in a shared governance model is to provide the logistical, legal, and technical support needed to deliver the curriculum that the faculty has developed to a well-recruited, academically qualified student body. The Board of Trustees’ role is to ensure the fiscal health of the institution through oversight of the administration and its handling of the finances, regulatory environment, etc. This system is what is embodied in our much-admired (at least by Middle States) *Governance Document* and our *Faculty Manual*.

It is, therefore, clear that a strong tenure system is essential to true shared governance. Without real tenure, the faculty will be afraid to disagree with the administration if it seeks to compromise the academic mission for whatever reason; including improving the “product” it seeks to “sell.” In shared governance, faculty members *must* always be equal to the administration in power and influence at their institutions, and have primary power and control in all academic matters. Failure on the part of faculty members to exert their expertise and control over the curriculum and academic policies constitutes an abrogation of the faculty’s professional duty to the students and the institution. Faculty members should never be fearful of reprisals or dismissals from administrators for any reason

short of immoral or illegal behavior—if they are fearful, then it is a clear sign that shared governance does not exist and it must be re-established at the insistence of the faculty. If the faculty does not defend tenure, no one will.

Do you really have tenure? If you are afraid to speak out, take a controversial position, write a letter, send a public email, participate in meetings with members of the AAUP or other “controversial” groups, etc. *because* you think the administration might deny you a promotion, deprive you of benefits, will fire or fail to reinstate you—if you fear any type of administrative reprisal—or even if you simply think you must obey an “order” you perceive you received from an administrator—we would assert that you do not really have tenure, or you are failing to exercise your rights under it. Tenure should insulate you from those fears. If it does not, and if we simply accept that fear and kowtow to it, then we at The College of Saint Rose will have surrendered to the loss of tenure and will have abandoned our professional obligations to our students, the institution, and each other.

It will be only a matter of time that even the charade of awarding tenure will disappear (and those who are “tenure track” will never earn meaningful tenure at any point in their careers). Tragically, we all would then have to admit that we are simply at-will employees—clerks and servants, not faculty members. If we allow ourselves to be ruled by fear, we will be perpetually at the mercy of an administration that unilaterally issues mandates to change any or all policies and curriculum requirements, dictates syllabi contents, micromanages assessment processes and study abroad trips, creates or eliminates academic programs at will, hires evermore numbers of executive administrators unchecked, engages in opaque budgeting processes, mandates a top-down post-tenure review system, circumvents standing governance bodies, abruptly changes conditions of employment, and fires faculty whenever there are failures of enrollment management.

Unless we faculty members stand together and rise to our professional obligations to demand that shared governance and tenure be reinstated and respected at Saint Rose then we will all live in fear—and though we may keep our jobs, we will have lost our souls, sacrificed the college’s mission, and ultimately done grave disservice to our current and future students—both at this college and across the landscape of higher education.

Let us bravely unite as faculty to reclaim our rightful roles, and let us raise our voices to defend and preserve the true mission of the College. Together with our students, *we* are Saint Rose. Join with us in our efforts.

In solidarity,

The College of Saint Rose AAUP Chapter

Authored by Kathleen Crowley, AAUP Chapter President