VOLUME XXI, NUMBER 7

INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

PUBLISHED BY THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STAFF AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (NISOD), COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN • WITH SUPPORT FROM THE W. K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION AND THE SID W. RICHARDSON FOUNDATION

A Tenure Policy—Upholding Academic Freedom in Teaching and Learning

Academic freedom is at the heart of nearly every American higher education institution, and it is incorporated into many tenure policies. While tenure has become a roaring debate across the nation, faculty and administrators at Salt Lake Community College, with the support of their board of trustees, say their policy is sound, alive, and well.

At SLCC, the heart and soul of tenure is not guaranteed lifetime employment; rather, it is an academic issue. Academic freedom allows faculty to approach a subject with latitude, to teach a subject accurately, and to do both to the best of their ability.

SLCC does not try to maintain a balance of tenured and nontenured faculty, although currently it maintains the same number, with an additional 24 faculty on the nontenured track.

Many four-year institutions have seven-year tenure policies; some are shorter. Few community colleges, which concentrate on teaching rather than research, have the seven-year probationary period; but seven years is the standard for Utah.

SLCC awards tenure to faculty who show excellence in teaching, leadership, continuous professional and occupational development in their chosen fields, and excellent attitude toward their work, students, and colleagues. Professors are expected to keep students informed of changes in their fields and to involve experts from businesses and industries, or others from outside the college, to develop class curriculum.

Earning tenure follows this procedure. Each tenure-track faculty member selects a sitting committee within his or her department. The sitting committee members must be tenured; the division chair is included. During the spring of each year, each sitting committee member observes the faculty member's teaching and often reviews student comments and evaluations. The committee then decides to recommend a letter of progress or letter of concern for the faculty member to an academic dean. The dean reviews the committee's material before deciding which of the two letters to write.

Faculty members may confer about their tenure progress with a division chair, dean, vice president, or president during the process—an uncommon practice. During the last year of academic progress, the dean makes his recommendation to the vice president of academic services, who reviews it before giving the college president her recommendation for granting or denying tenure.

SLCC's policy is unique. The division chair will meet annually with the tenure candidate to discuss his or her progress. And once tenured, professors and chairs continue to meet annually to establish and review mutual goals; student evaluations continue.

SLCC's hiring process is lengthy and demanding, and approximately 95 percent of the faculty earn tenure. Faculty candidates submit the application and necessary documentation, and a search (screening) committee conducts face-to-face interviews. Then, the candidates provide an hour-long teaching demonstration, followed by two additional interviews—one with the vice president of academic services and vice president of student services, and a final interview with the college president.

According to the president, "We consider the hiring process to be a $1 million investment. Some complain it is too slow, but in our experience, it provides us with the faculty members we want most—those with a passion for teaching."

Moreover, when tenured faculty members do not keep current with their disciplines and do not improve in a measured time period, they will be terminated or will leave the college on their own. Most choose to leave on their own rather than face termination proceedings.

Tenure is not considered a status issue. Everyone is supportive of tenure candidates; many tenured colleagues help nontenured with goal achievement.

Academic freedom does not allow unethical, immoral, or absurd behavior. It provides latitude in teaching, but demands responsibility. SLCC faculty use their common sense and explore subjects using creative approaches.

The academic freedom statute provides extra security for faculty who are teaching sensitive issues—e.g.,

health sciences that discuss the once-forbidden topics of sexual intercourse, prevention methods, and body parts. A nursing professor described it well: "Tenure is the adulthood of learning...It is a time when discovery, writing, philosophizing, and research are paramount. It is definitely a time to generate new thoughts and maybe contribute to new knowledge. For me, it is a time when I am comfortable with my teaching techniques and can focus on sharing problems that are solved and new philosophies that contribute to the growth of a civilized society."

Julie Slama, *Feature Writer/Editor*

For further information, contact the author at Public Information Office, Salt Lake Community College, P. O. Box 30808, Salt Lake City, UT 84130-0808.
E-mail: SlamaJu@slcc.edu

Evaluation Contracts

I have been teaching an Introduction to Nutrition class for several years. The class tends to have a high percentage of non-science majors who are generally poorly prepared for success in science classes. On the first day of class I tell my students that they are all experts on nutrition as they have been making nutritional decisions everyday of their life and they look like they have made some good choices. Usually after the first test many students begin to feel that they are not experts because they find the class is not just about foods so much as it is about the chemistry and biology of nutrients. They begin to feel overwhelmed and fear failure. Like all teachers I ask the usual round of soul-searching questions about the apparent lack of success. Two questions interest me the most: Are they really showing what they know on the traditional objective/essay exams that I give? Could the evaluation process be a problem?

Over the past year I have begun to develop evaluation contracts. These contracts offer students some control over the evaluation process without compromising my standards of evaluation. By the time our students enter college, they have survived years of formal education, so they have a good idea which testing formats they handle best—e.g., tests, papers, research reports, or weekly assignments. All I ask my students to do is choose how they want to be evaluated. Individual Evaluation Contracts are filled out by the students after the first week of the quarter. The student chooses from four possibilities, worth a total of 400 points, from the following list—4 standard objective/essay tests (100 pts each), 1 annotated bibliography (100 pts), 1 research paper (100 pts), 10 self-studies (50 pts), and 1 dietary analysis (50 pts). Each Thursday of the quarter, I give a 20-point quiz which only lasts 10 minutes at the beginning of the lesson. These quizzes are not optional. Thus, a student decides how the majority (400 of 600 total points) portion of the grade is to be determined. The feedback from students has helped fine-tune this evaluation process. Overwhelmingly, they like it; they feel more in charge of their own success. Students who would rather take tests get a chance to do that, and those who perform better on written reports also get a chance at doing what they like best.

Early on, it was apparent that students should be offered chances for success. Students cannot change their contract in mid-quarter, but they may improve their grade by doing extra work. For example, if a student only signs up for tests #1 and #2 but does poorly on test #2, he can complete test #3, hopefully to replace the poor score with a better one. I have applied this same format of evaluation to my Human Biology class, and it works equally well there. This form of contracting makes students more responsible for what they have learned, and I can get on with the job of how best to teach this fascinating subject.

Julie H. Priday, *Associate Professor, Science*

For further information, contact the author at Centralia College, 600 W. Locust, Centralia. WA 98531.
e-mail: jpriday@centralia.ctc.edu

Suanne D. Roueche, Editor
March 5, 1999 Vol. XXI, No. 7

INNOVATION ABSTRACTS (ISSN 0199-106X) is published weekly following the fall and spring terms of the academic calendar, except Thanksgiving week, by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD), Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, SZB 348, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas 78712-1293, (512) 471-7545. Periodicals Postage Paid at Austin, Texas. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to INNOVATION ABSTRACTS, SZB 348, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX 78712-1293.
E-mail: sroueche@mail.utexas.edu