September 2, 2011

Dear Colleagues in the Faculty Senate,

The faculty of the College of Education (COE) requests your approval for a divergence from the university policy (4310) that addresses representation of nontenured faculty members and of students on a college promotion and tenure committee. The tenure-track faculty approved this request by an official vote of a quorum of the faculty on August 24, 2011: 47 (Yes), 1 (No), and 0 (Abstain).

In particular, the COE faculty seeks two modifications to university policy on the composition and voting rights of a college committee: 1) to change the status of nontenured faculty member(s) to an ex officio (non-voting) capacity; 2) to eliminate student representation. University policy stipulates that nontenured faculty members and a student representative have “one equal vote” along with the other committee members (BSU 4310, Section II.B). The background and rationale for our request are presented in the following paragraphs.

For at least 15 years, the COE P&T policy required the committee to be composed of approximately two-thirds tenured and one-third nontenured faculty members. Beginning in Fall 2010, the faculty began examining the composition of the college P&T committee, and during Spring 2011 the faculty approved the P&T Task Force’s recommendation to revise the COE policy to limit the P&T committee to one voting nontenured member (with the provision for additional nontenured members to be added on a non-voting basis). In a P&T Forum opinion poll conducted in May 2011, a quorum of the faculty voted 38-6 in favor of having nontenured members serve in a non-voting (ex-officio) capacity on the P&T committee and 35-7 against having nontenured faculty serve as voting members. In an open discussion, faculty members stated that serving on the P&T committee as a nontenured member was a very valuable learning experience, but that they did not feel comfortable voting.

The COE wants to limit the participation of nontenured members to ex officio status on the P&T committee for two main reasons: (1) Nontenured faculty members are the most vulnerable to negative reactions that might follow an unfavorable college committee recommendation; (2) In the past, nontenured faculty members have not made substantive contributions to the deliberations, and we suspect that this is directly related to reason #1. Thus, even though committee deliberations are confidential, the perspective of nontenured faculty has not been represented during committee discussions. In sum, our culture values elections and the right to vote because they help ensure equality of membership and the proper use of power. For nontenured faculty members on the COE P&T Committee, however, the right to vote has been perceived as a disadvantage rather than an advantage.

Like nontenured committee members, student members of the college P&T committee tend to say little and may be vulnerable to potential negative consequences. During the review of the COE P&T policy, many faculty members questioned the appropriateness of student representation on the college P&T committee and voiced opposition to a student serving on the committee. Students are highly unlikely to have an adequate background in scholarship to make
an independent, informed judgment about a candidates’ evidence of scholarship. In addition, serving on the COE P&T committee also involves a major commitment of effort and time (8-15 hours just in meeting time), which is a lot to ask of students in the last part of fall and spring semesters. Finally, student voices are well represented in each candidate’s P&T Portfolio through the three years of statistical summaries of student evaluations and two courses’ worth of narrative student comments from the evaluations.

If our request is approved by the Faculty Senate and the State Board of Education, then the COE plans to make the following changes to the composition of the college P&T committee, as reflected in the Track Changes below from the relevant section of the College of Education Promotion and Tenure Policy and Procedures (revised 5/1/2011). Please note that the COE consists of 7 departments and has 66 tenure-track faculty in the 2011-2012 academic year. Please also note that the changes below ensure that at least one nontenured faculty member will serve on the committee:

2.2 The final composition of the committee shall consist of one (1) faculty member from each department and one (1) student (see Section 2.4). The committee must include one (1) tenured member from each candidate’s department, and one (1) non-tenured (ex-officio) member, and one (1) student representative. At least two (2) members must hold the rank of Professor. Each tenured member of the committee has one (1) equal vote on all matters.

After the official college committee has been appointed and before the first meeting convened by the dean, each department chair may nominate to the Dean one (1) non-tenured faculty member to serve in an ex-officio capacity to the COE P&T committee. Ex-officio members are not voting members and are bound by the rules of confidentiality.

2.4 The dean should request the name of a student representative for the college committee from the Associated Students of Boise State University. This student member will serve a one (1) year term.

Thus, a clean copy of the changes to Section 2.2 would appear as follows:

The final composition of the committee shall consist of one (1) faculty member from each department. The committee must include one (1) tenured member from each candidate’s department and one (1) non-tenured (ex-officio) member. At least two (2) members must hold the rank of Professor. Each tenured member of the committee has one (1) equal vote on all matters.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this request.

Jamie Armstrong
Chair, COE P&T Task Force