

An Essay on Collegiality

Collegiality is a word that is bandied about the College of Business (and, in fact, Academia as a whole) and (when necessary) can sometimes serve as a fourth category for tenure, promotion, and raise determination, alongside the standard pillars of teaching, research, and service. But what is collegiality, and how should collegiality fit into the Academic System?

What is Collegiality?

The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition, defines collegiality as "Shared power and authority vested among colleagues [1st Definition]." What is truly interesting is the second definition offered by the same source: "Roman Catholic Church. The doctrine that bishops collectively share collegiate power."^A A key phrase in either definition is that collegiality requires "shared power." The true (dictionary) definition of collegiality, however, is not the definition applied in the College of Business at USM.

In the College of Business at USM, collegiality is a malleable concept, changing to suit momentary needs. An individual may be labeled "uncollegial" by administrators or administrators' sycophants if the individual questions authority, bucks the system, fails to blindly follow orders, or takes action that may upset the *status quo*. Collegiality is most often defined as friendliness, willingness to subjugate oneself to the *status quo*, and being a "go along to get along" kind of person. Notice that none of these applications fits the true definition of collegiality. True collegiality is shared power. CoB collegiality is surrendered power. Only individuals who surrender power to administrators are collegial. Those who fail to surrender power are automatically uncollegial.

Collegiality and Academia

A Google™ Internet search for "collegiality" yields 2,400,000 hits, so the topic is apparently not uninteresting to the larger academic community. In fact, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has issued a statement on collegiality as part of its Redbook.^B The premise of the statement is that collegiality is being used [abused] by academic administrators as a way to subvert the standard pillars of teaching, research, and service. The existence of such a statement by such a body should send a clear signal that the use of collegiality as a requirement for

tenure, promotion, and raises is an issue of growing concern among academics who value Academic Freedom and Shared Governance.

Quoting from the referenced statement, the AAUP states that:

Few if any responsible faculty members would deny that collegiality, in the sense of collaboration and constructive cooperation, identifies important aspects of a faculty member's overall performance. A faculty member may legitimately be called upon to participate in the development of curricula and standards for the evaluation of teaching, as well as in peer review of the teaching of colleagues. Much research, depending on the nature of the particular discipline, is by its nature collaborative and requires teamwork as well as the ability to engage in independent investigation. And committee service of a more general description, relating to the life of the institution as a whole, is a logical outgrowth of the Association's view that a faculty member is an "officer" of the college or university in which he or she fulfills professional duties.

Understood in this way, collegiality is not a distinct capacity to be assessed independently of the traditional triumvirate of scholarship, teaching, and service. It is rather a quality whose value is expressed in the successful execution of these three functions. Evaluation in these three areas will encompass the contributions that the virtue of collegiality may pertinently add to a faculty member's career. The current tendency to isolate collegiality as a distinct dimension of evaluation, however, poses several dangers. Historically, "collegiality" has not infrequently been associated with ensuring homogeneity, and hence with practices that exclude persons on the basis of their difference from a perceived norm. The invocation of "collegiality" may also threaten academic freedom. In the heat of important decisions regarding promotion or tenure, as well as other matters involving such traditional areas of faculty responsibility as curriculum or academic hiring, collegiality may be confused with the expectation that a faculty member display "enthusiasm" or "dedication," evince "a constructive attitude" that will "foster harmony," or display an excessive deference to administrative or faculty decisions where these may require reasoned discussion. Such expectations are flatly contrary to elementary principles of academic freedom, which protect a faculty member's right

to dissent from the judgments of colleagues and administrators.

A distinct criterion of collegiality also holds the potential of chilling faculty debate and discussion. Criticism and opposition do not necessarily conflict with collegiality. Gadflies, critics of institutional practices or collegial norms, even the occasional malcontent, have all been known to play an invaluable and constructive role in the life of academic departments and institutions. They have sometimes proved collegial in the deepest and truest sense.^C

Finally, the AAUP statement concludes:

Committee A accordingly believes that the separate category of "collegiality" should not be added to the traditional three areas of faculty performance. Institutions of higher education should instead focus on developing clear definitions of scholarship, teaching, and service, in which the virtues of collegiality are reflected. Certainly an absence of collegiality ought never, by itself, to constitute a basis for nonreappointment, denial of tenure, or dismissal for cause.^D

So collegiality is a trademark of doing one's job well. If an individual is a good researcher, a good teacher, and performs good service (by reasonable institutional standards), then his or her collegiality can and should only be judged as (at the least) acceptable. Being agreeable, friendly, or loyal should not enter into the equation, and a willingness to dissent should not be punished as uncollegial.

Conclusion

The inclusion of collegiality as a distinct requirement for promotion, tenure, and raises appears to be in direct opposition to the spirit of Academic Freedom as outlined by the AAUP, as the practice has a tendency to introduce undue leverage that academic administrators may use against faculty members. Further, discussions of collegiality in tenure, promotion, and/or raise proceedings are improper, as collegiality is spanned by teaching, Research, and Service, the stated performance areas for these processes. Whether one consults a dictionary or the AAUP, one thing is clear: collegiality is not properly defined in terms of friendliness, hospitality, willingness to subjugate all power to administrators, or willingness to carry out orders. It is properly defined in terms of the pillars of Academia,

shared power, and the spirit of Academic Freedom and Shared Governance.

Commentary

Those who use the club of collegiality to suppress debate, discussion, or dispute are, in essence, violating Academic Freedom. Those who purposely misuse and abuse the concept of collegiality are violating Shared Governance by definition. Further, it should be clear that the true and appropriate definition of collegiality is an integral part of an academic's job. Quality teaching, research, and service are important to the institution in which academics serve. The act of adding a false component (i.e., friendliness or subjugation to the *status quo*) to collegiality represents an attempt to turn Academia into a Country Club. A quality academic institution should have a clear picture of its place in the world and purpose for being. The heart of this purpose will always be teaching, research, and service, and quality academic institutions do and will continue to seek individuals who will advance the institution through those pillars.

At the College of Business at USM, collegiality has, in the past 18 months, been used to (1) oppose hiring of one individual because his personality didn't fit in as well as a less-qualified candidate, (2) act as primary support for a bid for promotion to Professor because the candidate was a nice guy, and (3) spearhead a movement to threaten dissenters who questioned the normal decision-making and merit raise processes into complying with the flawed *status quo* in the College of Business. None of these activities can be sanctioned under the AAUP statement discussed above. An interesting side note to all of this is that those in the College of Business who favor a false collegiality would actually fair better under a true definition of collegiality.

Shared power isn't just a one-way street with faculty always giving and administrators always taking. Shared power requires administrators to place real decision-making authority in the hands of faculty. Unfortunately, administrators in the College of Business are unwilling to cede control, as control is their lifeblood.

At institutions where promotion and tenure are granted based on a falsely defined collegiality, administrators seem to flourish and achievement takes a backseat to friendships. At institutions where promotion and tenure are independent of false collegiality, an individual's value is more closely approximated by his or her market value than his or her chits in the system. Simply stating that an institution believes in shared power,

Academic Freedom, or Shared Governance isn't enough, though. An institution that fails to empower its faculty to advance without gamesmanship is a farce. An institution that fails to provide clear and rational guidelines for faculty advancement is a farce. An institution where being a "good old boy" is enough (or even a requirement) to ensure advancement is a farce. It seems clear, then, that in the interest of Academia, those who administrate such institutions should be swiftly discharged.

^A <http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=collegiality>

^B From "On Collegiality as a Criterion for Faculty Evaluation," found online at <http://www.aaup.org/statements/Redbook/collegia.htm>

^C Ibid.

^D Ibid.