

## Written Tenure Standards: It's Time

It's now officially late April 2007, two months after the AACSB site team left Hattiesburg, and little progress is being made on USM's problems that the team highlighted in its report.

One of the most problematic issues is the identified lack of articulated tenure standards. In the AACSB Team's meeting with untenured faculty, it became clear that nobody at USM knows what level of achievement is sufficient to earn tenure. The AACSB Team stated as much in its report. Still, no meaningful discussion has begun in the CoB as to how this problem will be addressed.

It seems that tenured faculty are content to follow George Carter's lead and use tenure as a "club," a weapon to beat untenured faculty with. None of the old guard wants articulated standards, because an "uncollegial" individual might be able to meet or exceed such standards. With legal representation available to junior faculty, the mere act of providing set standards in writing would eliminate the possibility of the tenured group using the collegiality attack to outweigh scholarship and instruction in the evaluation of untenureds.

In that way, the CoB is quite like some of the infamous social fraternities on college campuses nationwide. Without articulated membership standards, fraternity pledges are left to scrub floors with toothbrushes, perform demeaning tasks for the initiated brothers, and participate in illegal activities, all in the hopes of avoiding "blackball" procedures. The AACSB Team identified this parallel within the CoB and stated that the uncertainty must be removed.

Still, two months later, no steps have been taken to place in writing any tenure standards. How many refereed publications are sufficient? What level of performance in classroom instruction is necessary? How will activities be judged? Answers seem not to be forthcoming from CoB leadership. Tenured faculty seem to be playing a game of Chicken with AACSB, betting that AACSB will back off on its demands that certain issues be addressed.

Times are changing in academia. The old system of tenure as an exclusive club is harder and harder to defend to the

public, and groups like AACSB see the old way of thinking as a threat to future well-being; the public doesn't like to see Ivory Tower elitists telling hard-working achievers that the achievers don't belong in the club.

Let's be clear. Each and every untenured faculty member must be given written, reasonable tenure requirements for teaching, research, and service. Those already in the system must receive written requirements that are achievable in their remaining tenure windows. Future new hires might have standards ratcheted up, but all individuals hired in a given year must operate under the same expectations, regardless of field. Tenure standards must be consistent with AACSB's principle of continuous improvement.

The old guard fears an objective tenure system, because an objective system would inevitably lead to achievers achieving and then demanding rewards. Such a system would upset the Ponzi scheme that is the CoB's rewards system.

Now that Doty's gone from the Dean's suite, things that were not possible before are possible now. If the CoB is ever to be good, Alvin Williams must build his legacy on the next 12 months rather than on the past 27 years. Written, consistent tenure standards are a necessary step.