

AAUP

American Association of University Professors

Academic Freedom for a Free Society

VIA FACSIMILE (504-865-5202)

June 14, 2006

Dr. Scott S. Cowen
President
Tulane University
6823 St. Charles Avenue
New Orleans, Louisiana 70118

Ms. Catherine D. Pierson
Chair, Board of Administrators
Tulane University
6823 St. Charles Avenue
New Orleans, Louisiana 70118

Dear President Cowen and Chair Pierson:

We have received a copy of the June 12 report that was issued by the Tulane University Senate Committee on Faculty Tenure, Freedom and Responsibility (FTFR) in response to the appeal that faculty members in the Department of Mechanical Engineering filed in early March against the administration's decision to discontinue their department and, as a consequence, terminate faculty appointments.

We note that the FTFR has sustained the faculty petitioners on most of the key issues they had raised in their appeal. The report rejects the financial information provided by the administration as valid grounds for discontinuing the mechanical engineering department and concludes that, necessarily, "the decision was based on other factors." The report finds that the department's "elimination served to worsen rather than resolve any condition of financial exigency that may have existed." The report further finds that the Tulane faculty was denied a meaningful role in the development of the administration's "Plan for Renewal," which formed the basis for most of the actions taken with regard to the discontinuance or modification of academic programs and the termination of faculty appointments. Finally, the report concludes that the administration has made "no attempt to place terminated faculty in other suitable positions [in the university] despite the explicit charge to do so contained in the Faculty Handbook."

The findings and conclusions in the FTFR's report appear to confirm the mechanical engineering faculty's complaints that they conveyed to our Association and that have been among the concerns

Dr. Scott S. Cowen
Ms. Catherine D. Pierson
June 14, 2006
Page Two

we have addressed in the several letters we have written to you beginning in late January. We note the committee's recommendations that: (1) "[s]ince a decision to eliminate an academic program for other than financial reasons directly involves academic and curricular issues," the administration's decision to eliminate the Department of Mechanical Engineering be referred for review to the Senate Committee on Educational Policy, (2) the department be retained pending that body's review of the decision, and (3) the administration make every effort to place the affected faculty in other suitable positions.

Unless and until the administration is willing and able to demonstrate to the FTFR that the specific action to discontinue the mechanical engineering department was warranted by financial exigency, we urge you to comply with the recommendation to rescind the decision on discontinuance, assuming that this can be feasibly done, pending the appropriate faculty body's evaluation of the educational considerations. Should you demonstrate to the FTFR that continuing the department is no longer feasible because of steps to discontinue it that have already been taken, we urge you to relocate the affected faculty in suitable positions elsewhere in the university.

Sincerely,



B. Robert Kreiser
Associate Secretary

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cc: Dr. Lester A. Lefton, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost
Dr. Nicholas J. Altiero, Dean, School of Engineering
Professor Edward C. Strong, Chair, Senate Committee on Faculty Tenure, Freedom
and Responsibility
Professor Robert M. Hill, Vice-Chair, Senate Committee on Faculty Tenure, Freedom
and Responsibility
Professor Graeme Forbes, Secretary, Faculty Senate
Members of the Department of Mechanical Engineering
Professor Parviz Rastgoufard, President, AAUP Chapter
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