

Resolution on Post-Tenure Review

The University Faculty Senate of Florida State University is committed to the principles of academic freedom and the institution of tenure as a defender of academic freedom. Academic freedom is fundamental to the success of Florida State University and to higher education in general as an essential incubator for democracy. Since its 1940 *Statement on the Principles of Academic Freedom and Tenure*, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has emphasized that procedures for evaluating faculty should not be used “to weaken or undermine the principles of academic freedom and tenure” and that disciplinary sanctions be imposed only with adequate peer review and due process. National adherence to these principles for the better part of the last ninety years has helped to make higher education in the United States the envy of the world, and is reflected in the Civil Discourse Statement that the BOG has adopted and asked us to endorse.

However, the procedures outlined in the Board of Governors’ (BOG) proposed regulation threaten academic freedom by weakening the foundations of tenure. In direct contravention of AAUP principles, it shifts the burden of proof from the institution to the individual--relieving administration of the need to show cause for dismissal and obligating tenured faculty members to prove why they should be retained. Moreover, in concert with the internally referenced statutes, it is potentially punitive. In its Statement on Core Principles, the AAUP explains that

“The academic freedom of faculty members includes the freedom to express their views (1) on academic matters in the classroom and in the conduct of research, (2) on matters having to do with their institution and its policies, and (3) on issues of public interest generally, and to do so even if their views are in conflict with one or another received wisdom. In short, faculty must be free to teach, engage in research, and participate in institutional governance without fear of punishment or repercussions because their legitimate academic activities are politically controversial or unpopular.”

The proposal targets exactly this freedom, and it is potentially viewpoint discriminatory by incorporating statutorily heightened scrutiny for controversial topics of instruction and ill-defined admonitions against faculty “indoctrination.” Finally, it is redundant and unnecessarily costly because the University already has post-tenure review procedures that enable it to discipline and remove tenured faculty for cause.

Firm protections for academic freedom, including tenure, attract the best faculty to Florida, which has been recognized as having the top state university system in the nation. Weakening the institution of tenure will harm universities across the state, undermining our ability to recruit and retain the best researchers, teachers, and mentors to our students. This damage to our mission and our reputation will negatively affect student success, university rankings, and post-graduate employment opportunities.

Be it resolved that the Faculty Senate of Florida State University opposes the BOG’s proposed regulation on post-tenure review as it stands and urges the BOG to reconsider its proposal. We ask the BOG to amend the proposal to ensure the critical protections of faculty evaluation and the fundamental fairness that due process ensures. We call on the BOG to honor the important tradition of shared university governance by working together with faculty across the state in safeguarding academic freedom through a fair and robust system of tenure.