



# Faculty Forum

*From the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning*

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

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## **Service: If We Don't Do It, Who Will?**

For a long time, there has been a good deal of informal discussion at WCU regarding the role of "service" in the AFE/TPR/PTR process, much of it suggesting that service is of minimal importance in relation to scholarship/creative activities and teaching. The Faculty Senate, through the Collegial Review Council, is working on what will be a major revision of the broad university guidelines for the whole AFE/TPR/PTR process. The language in the current, working draft (which has been tentatively approved by the Senate) states:

Faculty members at Western Carolina University are expected to be effective teachers, to be practicing scholars in their disciplines, and to provide meaningful service to the university and the community. The particular mix of these activities expected will vary as a function of departmental missions and the role of the faculty member in the department. Tenure-track or tenured faculty members should be active in all three areas.

This is, essentially, the "three legged stool" that has been a part of Western's stated AFE/TPR/PTR process for many years. I do not suggest that being good teachers and creative, productive scholars is not important, but what happens if we focus only on these two legs of the stool and minimize/deemphasize service? The implications as we move forward may be graver than we realize. Service, of course, can refer to a wide range of activities including advising, community engagement, student recruiting, departmental and/or college committees, administrative assignments, faculty governance, and any number of other activities which are a part of the role we all should be playing as citizens of the campus and community. If we suggest that these activities are of little or no importance, it seems to me we are suggesting that it is not important for each of us to be an active participant in our academic community. That seems an unwise choice.

When we restructured the Faculty Senate a few years ago, we established that there are three areas of major concern to the faculty and that we wish to exert considerable influence in them. These are curriculum and academic policy, general working and environmental conditions, and tenure, promotion, reappointment and evaluation. The idea was (and is) that faculty should have the strongest voice in these areas as they are of the greatest concern to us. In approving and accepting this restructuring of the Senate, the university administration has acknowledged that these are the areas in which the faculty's

voice should have significant influence. If, then, we suggest that service on the committees and councils which deal with these areas lacks importance, what we are really saying is that we do **not** wish to exert influence in these areas, that we will be happy to have others (the administration) making the decisions regarding them.

Is this true? Do we really want non-teaching members of our community to be developing academic policy and determining all aspects of curriculum? Do we not wish to at least have a say in making decisions on such things as pay raises, the control of intellectual property, recruitment of new faculty, searches for major administrative positions, etc? Do we have no interest in the standards and processes by which our work (and, hence, our continued employment) will be evaluated and rewarded? **I don't think so!** These concerns form the major portion of the work of faculty governance and, hence, of a significant portion of the service area we have been discussing. We said that we wanted to at least have input in these areas, that they are **OUR** job! And our jobs, and job satisfaction, depend on them.

If this is true, we are saying that service **DOES MATTER!** If **that** is true, then who should be engaging in that service? There are only two major groups of faculty on this campus who **can** do this: tenured and tenure-track. It appears that some tenured faculty, who make the decisions regarding who will be allowed to join their ranks (by engaging in service on tenure and reappointment committees), wish to discourage tenure-track faculty from "wasting their time" on service and suggest that only teaching and scholarship should be of value in the tenure and promotion process. This clearly says that service doesn't really matter, at least to them.

It does not seem unreasonable to suggest that untenured faculty should perhaps focus their non-teaching efforts on research and other scholarly activity. But that should not be taken to suggest that these folks should be allowed to ignore service or even that, perhaps, service should not be their major emphasis. If we discourage service for untenured faculty, it is then up to the senior (tenured) faculty to perform those service activities which are important to the life of our university.

We, the faculty, can either do this work or let someone else do it. If we want faculty to do it and we don't want junior faculty "wasting their time" on it, there are only two options left: 1) we, senior faculty, spend some of our time and energies (probably an increasing portion as our seniority increases) doing it; or, 2) we abdicate our influence and judgment to others with a different perspective (and less specific disciplinary expertise) than we have. I see no other options.

I think it **IS** our job. The decisions **WILL** be made. **IF WE DON'T DO THIS WORK, WHO WILL?** The implications are very clear. If we don't consider them, we are likely to end with a situation we won't like. We **can** make the changes to see that this work is valued. It **IS** our right and our responsibility. I believe we **must!** It is **OUR** job!

**Richard S. Beam, Communication, Theatre & Dance**

# *Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning*

This is a response to Richard Beam's, "Service: If We Don't Do It, Who Will?," (2/1/07)

Richard Beam's item is challenging and thought provoking. It is tempting at times to give up the Jeffersonian legacy and hire professionals to do the work of faculty governance, yet the problem is that we would no longer have faculty governance or, for that matter, tenure. Would academic culture deteriorate in favor of administrative culture without service through faculty governance?

Administrative culture would mean administrators define the issues and what is important at a university. Also, are scholarship and service sometimes integrated? For example, those holding national offices in professional associations have responsibilities for national journals and meetings where academic scholarly papers are presented. What is the price for faculty governance and academic freedom and scholarship? I have recently felt a lot better about the current faculty senate simply because it has been a check and balance on administrative culture. I spent three years in administration and tried to think of myself as a faculty member and I resigned to return to the faculty. I can say with the certainty of experience that nothing would have worked well without the concepts and practice of faculty governance and the check and balance of faculty influence. A university corporate culture, in my opinion, will neither protect scholarship nor academic freedom and so we must thank those who take the time to meet in committees, serve in the faculty senate, or enable scholarship and journals to continue through service in associations and service to the larger community.

**Gordon Mercer, Professor and Director, Public Policy Institute**