

From: Michael Schaefer
To: Boniecki, Kurt
Date: 8/29/2008 11:30 AM
Subject: Honors College proposal

Dear Kurt,

I find myself of two minds regarding the Honors College's request to hire and evaluate their own tenure-track faculty. On one hand, I understand and am sympathetic to the need for the college administrators to have a cadre of faculty on whom they can rely to teach their necessary courses every semester rather than having to worry constantly about borrowing instructors from various departments, and I firmly believe that all faculty should be given the opportunity to earn the academic freedom and other benefits that tenure provides. On the other hand, I don't think it's healthy for the tenure system or the university as a whole to continue the proliferation of academic units outside of departments and colleges, such as Undergraduate Studies and the Honors College; I would much prefer to see all faculty housed within departments, which can provide the most knowledgeable and fairest evaluation of their performance. I acknowledge the widespread trend toward non-departmental units that Rick Scott has pointed out, but I would observe that such units are almost always created by administrative fiat, not by faculty desire; indeed, such units are often created against the express will of the faculty due to their tendency to break down beneficial disciplinary cohesion and erode the integrity of the tenure process.

That much being said, my recommendation is that the Honors College be allowed to hire and tenure their own faculty, but only in such numbers as are absolutely necessary to teach their core courses, with other courses continuing to be taught by faculty recruited from appropriate departments, and I wish this agreement to be placed in writing in the Faculty Handbook and all other relevant documents. I am aware that the Honors College's stated position is that they wish to operate in this manner, but I would like it in writing in an enforceable document because of what I see as the inevitable tendency of any institution to aggrandize itself when given the opportunity: faculty hired into the Honors College will grow restive and advocate to teach more and more upper-level courses, the college's administrators will feel that since they now have the authority to hire and tenure their own faculty there is no reason not to expand this authority, on the grounds that they now need all their courses taught by their own reliable faculty, and soon the Honors College faculty will be totally cut off from the rest of the university—a circumstance guaranteed to decrease morale, snarl lines of communication, promote misunderstanding and distrust, and ultimately lower the quality of education afforded to the students.

Mike Schaefer