

May 20, 2014

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to follow up on the important discussion last Friday at the Faculty Senate's open hearing on issues related to CNTT faculty. I valued the opportunity to hear from so many of you last week on the topics of faculty titles and other important issues, such as workload arrangements, voting rights, and promotion guidelines as they relate to our CNTT colleagues.

I am proud that UD is a national leader in beneficial working conditions for non-tenure-track faculty. Aligned with the standards recommended by the national AAUP, we include non-tenure-track faculty in structures of elected governance. After an initial period of multi-year contracts, our CNTT colleagues enjoy unparalleled job security in the form of long-term rolling contracts, as well as other benefits, such as sabbatical leave, that are seldom available to such faculty in other institutions. These are key elements that highlight our institutional values.

We now need to clarify, reinforce, and enhance standards on workload, voting rights, and expectations for the promotion of continuing non-tenure track faculty. As noted in my April 25 letter, we must "collectively recognize the valuable work that all of our faculty members do," while recognizing that "the nature of that work varies."

The Senate has also been asked to hold a special meeting by the end of the semester to consider two resolutions regarding CNTT faculty members that were presented at the very end of the last regularly scheduled Senate meeting on May 5. One of those resolutions would amend the FACULTY HANDBOOK to require that all CNTTs receive the same rank titles - assistant professor, associate professor, and professor - commonly reserved for tenure-eligible faculty, and that the use of the so-called "modified titles" presently designated in the FACULTY HANDBOOK (instructional, clinical, public service or research faculty) be prohibited in the future.

The use of unmodified titles typically signifies that those holding them have undergone an extensive, nationally-based peer review tenure process, a process unparalleled in its rigor, as faculty carrying tenure or nearing that decision will attest. Our institution should not utilize policies that in any way erode the significance of tenure or that could lead to confusions about the rigor of tenure review at UD.

To this point, in a recent Academic Program Review of one of our departments, the external reviewers (from Duke, the University of Virginia, Bryn Mawr, North Carolina State, and Monterey Institute of International Studies/Middlebury College), in discussing the roles of CNTT and tenure-eligible faculty members, described themselves as being "perplexed - not to say troubled - by the easy slippage that occurs between categories of employment at UD and the confusion that arises from such slippage."

Moreover, higher education benchmarking organizations have indicated that conflating tenure-eligible and non-tenure-eligible titles disadvantages UD in comparative analyses and rankings. At the same time, members of our faculty - not limited to CNTTs - feel that CNTT faculty members are disrespected and seen as second-class citizens. However, the proposed resolutions do not address those issues.

The solution, I believe, is to empower a group of faculty members and administrative leaders to examine all aspects of the CNTT experience at UD. Consequently, I propose that the Faculty Senate set aside action on the two resolutions and instead join with me in forming a commission to investigate, analyze, and make recommendations on the role and status of CNTT.

Similar commissions have been formed over the last decade at many universities across the country, and UD can learn by studying their reports and by examining our CNTT faculty's own perceptions of their professional lives here. A careful study by an appropriately constituted commission that could examine this issue thoroughly and thoughtfully would be much more helpful than a hastily prepared resolution.

This proposed commission should review national reports on the role, naming, and status of CNTT faculty (including reports issued by the national AAUP and universities such as Boston University, the University of Texas, the University of Maryland, and the University of North Carolina, to name a few). In addition, the commission should consider such matters as the impact of titling protocols on UD perception by external organizations and constituencies, and, most importantly, make recommendations on how we can best clarify the standards and procedures for the promotion of CNTT faculty.

The very essence of shared governance is respect flowing in both directions - from administration to faculty and from faculty to administration. Together, as a University community, we must address all the issues underlying the questions raised about our CNTT faculty. I know that our collective wisdom will help us resolve these issues in a measured, responsible, sensible and respectful way.

Sincerely



Domenico Grasso

Provost