



Virginia Regional Meeting

February 27, 2009

**Location: Virginia Tech
Blacksburg, VA**

**Panel:
Scholarship in Public:
Knowledge Creation and Tenure Policy in the Engaged University**

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The Tenure Team document and this workshop are about how people can follow their passion for community action and engagement and still survive and thrive in academia. The document and workshop also are about creating a sea change in how academia thinks about scholarship and creative performance. It's all appealingly subversive.

My discipline is Human Development. I've sat in on tenure and promotion decisions for 18 years at Purdue University and another 9 here at Virginia Tech and I know well that many people have set ideas of what constitutes rigorous scholarship. Isn't it interesting that in academia the more "successful" people become, the more distant they become from those they first set out to serve? Teachers become administrators. Researchers hire assistants to collect their data. Highly successful researchers never even have to meet their subjects. Public engagement is different, though.

I have four ideas for you on how faculty can follow their hearts, do community work, and still survive in academia. Each of them captures this philosophy: Life shouldn't start after tenure. We should do what gives us joy (and that often involves what connects us to the community), but still do what we need to do to survive. I think you will like some of my ideas better than others.

1. **Do It All** – In my career, I did a lot of things that weren't smart from a P&T point of view but which were meaningful to me. I wrote a local newspaper column that I loved, but that didn't count in the P&T landscape at Purdue University. I wrote a book for the general public that didn't count either (except that my mother found copies in her Walgreens drug store in Cocoa Beach Florida. That's worth something). And I've said "yes" to a lot of international work that in and of itself, didn't count much, but was fulfilling. At the same



time, to get tenure, I did enough traditional work that counted. It can be done, but that is probably not the smartest approach for you to take.

2. **Make Your Passions Count** – That is, do the work you are passionate about, but then document it in an article, book, film – whatever artifacts count in your department. Numbers count. That’s the ballpark in most of our departments. When I was a department head, I tried to be clear about the coin of the realm – grants, articles, books – but usually suggested ways that faculty could do their work and meet their department’s expectations without losing their souls or suffocating under someone else’s expectations. I have always tried to make my own work more like play and to write and do research in the areas of my intellectual and personal passions. But I also tried to make sure that there was a part of that work that spoke to the rigid, stern-faced folks on my department’s P&T committee.
3. **Go Around the System, Not Through It --** Here at Virginia Tech, and at most universities, you must be excellent at and “go up” for tenure under either research, teaching, or service. Almost everybody goes up under research, but we’ve seen more and more people going up by emphasizing the “scholarship of teaching.” What the Tenure Team document does is provide a roadmap to move the service category from something dull and unappreciated to something we can all resonate with – the scholarship of engagement. As we become more and more clear about how to document quality scholarship of engagement, I can see more and more faculty going up for tenure under “scholarship of engagement.” The advantage of this is that we don’t have to change the minds of those P&T members who have rigid views of what research or scholarship is. We are elevating and redefining scholarship of engagement so that P&T members can stay as rigid as they want, but there is still an avenue for appreciating public engagement, one that can get you tenure.
4. **Change the System** – Then again, we could redefine research and scholarship and broaden what counts. That calls for a sea change. So, let’s talk for a few minutes about how sea changes occur.

Engineering a Sea Changes in a Culture -- I’ve become more and more interested in how an organization brings about discontinuous change – a sea change in how things are seen and done. This conference is about engineering such a transformational change. I just read Malcolm Gladwell’s book, *The Tipping Point*. He talks about what brings about sea changes in such things as clothing styles, crime in New York, even syphilis rates. Some of what he says can inform the sea change we’d like to see in academia.

Case Example 1 – We saw a sea change here at Virginia Tech a few years ago. Through an AdvanceVT grant, a lot of ground work was done on family friendly policies – stop the clock



policies for childrearing or illnesses, modified duties for a pregnant woman, flex time. Gladwell says that in every tipping point experience, a convincing person has a role. He calls this person a connector or a maven. Our maven was Provost Mark McNamee. He simply announced that we would adopt these potentially controversial policies. It just happened – bang -- a sea change.

Case Example 2 – My alma mater, Wake Forest University, prides itself on being a prestigious private liberal arts school. Students generally have high SAT scores there. I was surprised last year to read in my alumni newsletter that they have decided to make the SAT score voluntary. You don't have to take the SAT to be accepted. The author of the article stressed the point that relying too heavily on the SAT limited the breadth of excellent students that they could accept. Students are more than their scores on a particular test. The author provided a long rationale for why this was a good policy. I don't know the specifics that went into this decision. I imagine though, that there was resistance and credible counter-points that spoke against the new policy. But, following Gladwell's logic, there were probably a few mavens and conductors at the top of the food chain that people trusted and listened to and who convincingly defined the issue in a way faculty, students, and alums were ready to hear. Emotion usually trumps rational thought, so these mavens, I imagine, made a passionate case for a wider view of what it means to be an excellent applicant at Wake Forest – what counts -- and that impassioned view won the day.

That's what the Tenure Team seems to be about in terms of public scholarship. The Tenure Team document makes an excellent rational case. For the sea change to occur, though, we also need a convincing declaration from someone at our institutions that people know, like, and respect, a person with social capital in a position of influence. That person's declaration should be, "*this is the way things will be.*"

Thank you.