



## The Associated Students of Whitman College

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*From the Office of the President*

To the Faculty:

The Associated Students of Whitman College (ASWC) recognizes that granting a faculty member tenure is one of the most important investments that the College can make. Tenure demonstrates that a faculty member has excelled in the areas of teaching, research, and service and will continue to do so. ASWC believes that the faculty Personnel Committee does an outstanding job of evaluating the merits of candidates in these areas; however, we also believe that course evaluations alone cannot speak to the many dimensions of being an excellent instructor.

Course evaluations are distributed at a time in the semester that is incredibly stressful for students, which often makes it difficult to complete them in a thorough and thoughtful manner. Course evaluations also ask limiting questions and rely heavily on numerical metrics to judge the teaching abilities of professors, aspects of the current system that perhaps do not adequately reflect the impact that professors have on the lives of individual students. In addition to exploring ways to improve course evaluations, both in terms of student participation and in content, ASWC believes that additional methods of student input should be implemented.

Eleven out of twelve of Whitman's comparison schools have some mechanism by which students provide input into the tenure evaluation process beyond course evaluations. At most schools, this increase takes the form of letters of evaluation for faculty. Thoughtful letters written by students on behalf of specific faculty members not only allow students to be more invested in the future of the College, but also allow a much more nuanced perspective into the advising and mentoring abilities of the candidate. Please see the attached document for a more detailed outline of what ASWC is proposing.

The faculty at Whitman are second to none. Most Whitman students can name multiple professors who have had a meaningful impact in their lives, challenged them in the classroom, and expanded their perspectives. Our proposal to increase student input is designed to ensure that those professors continue to educate Whitman students for generations to come in order to continue the tradition of teaching excellence. On behalf of the student body, thank you very much for your consideration of our proposal. We welcome any comments or questions that you may have.

Sincerely,

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## **Associated Students of Whitman College Tenure Proposal**

As mentioned above, eleven out of twelve of Whitman's comparison schools have a process beyond course evaluations by which student input is solicited during the tenure evaluation process. The most effective way that this is done is through letters of evaluation that students write on behalf of candidates. Below are a few models from our comparison schools that ASWC recognizes as effective options for Whitman:

### Recommended Model: Kenyon College

At Kenyon College, the equivalent of the Personnel Committee reviews course evaluations submitted by all students. Additionally, the committee solicits letters from "ten students, with mailing and e-mail addresses, chosen by the member" and "ten students who have enrolled in courses taught by the member since the last review, selected by the Provost. At least eight letters are required to complete the dossier, at least two of which must be from students selected by the Provost" (Kenyon College Faculty Handbook, Section 2.4.5). This approach allows students who have worked closely with the professor to comment on that professor's mentoring and advising abilities, while simultaneously giving other students who have had the professor for one or two classes a chance to expand upon their experiences with that professor. Additionally, this policy is in place for every promotional step that the professor takes. In order for students to fully understand their roles in this process, we would also recommend that the Provost meet with the selected students to explain the importance of these letters.

We believe that this model is the best for Whitman for the following reasons: it allows for an expanded profile on the mentoring and advising capabilities of the professor, and it can further explain themes or trends found in course evaluations that the Personnel Committee would like to further explore.

### Other Models: Colorado College, Macalester College, and Union College

Colorado College, Macalester College, and Union College all employ similar evaluative methods, soliciting input from close advisees of the professor and students who have had a class or two with them. Colorado College allows candidates to submit names of recent alumni who they feel can comment on their teaching ability and to suggest students or alumni "who are acquainted with the candidate because of a mentoring relationship, a shared research project, or a joint service on a College committee" (Colorado College Faculty Handbook, Section VII). Macalester College solicits letters "from present and former students... especially if the students have had several courses from the professor, if the students have additional professional knowledge of the professor's field, or if the students have worked especially closely with the professor" (Macalester College Faculty Handbook, Section 3). Macalester includes ten to twenty student letters in the candidate's dossier. Union College's process is completely random, and the tenure committee "solicit[s] letters from the students selected and interview[s] the students individually" (Union College Faculty Handbook, Section 3).

While other institutions in Whitman's comparison group have implemented additional procedures to solicit student input in faculty evaluation, ASWC believes that the Kenyon Model would be the most effective in expanding student input in the faculty evaluation process.

ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF  
WHITMAN COLLEGE  
STUDENT SENATE  
SESSION 2015 SPRING TERM

IN THE SENATE  
RESOLUTION SRS15.2

WRITTEN BY: Emily Bowen '18, Dana Casterella '17, and Jack Percival '16  
SPONSORED BY: George Felton '15, Dana Casterella '17, and Emily Bowen '18

*A Resolution Supporting the Expansion of Student Input in the Tenure Evaluation Process*

WHEREAS Whitman College is committed to providing an excellent and rigorous liberal arts education for all of its students; and

WHEREAS the College's dedicated and talented faculty strives to uphold this standard of excellence by offering a broad, deep, and multidimensional curriculum; and

WHEREAS the College prides itself in fostering strong and collaborative relationships between faculty and students; and

WHEREAS the Princeton Review consistently ranks Whitman in the Top 20 on the lists "Professors Get High Marks" and "Most Accessible Professors"; and

WHEREAS the Faculty Code cites teaching as "the most important criterion for faculty excellence"; and

WHEREAS the Associated Students of Whitman College (ASWC) firmly believes that the College should continue to recruit and retain outstanding faculty members who meet the College's standards of excellence; and

WHEREAS ASWC believes that current methods of student input in the tenure evaluation process do not fully capture student opinions of professors' teaching abilities; and

WHEREAS the faculty code currently specifies that "pre-major and major academic advising will [also] be expected to reflect excellence, as will other non-classroom work related to student learning, such as supervision of independent studies, senior thesis work, and independent research with students"; and

WHEREAS course evaluations do not account for the mentoring and advising abilities of professors, despite its inclusion in the teaching criteria for determining tenure; and

WHEREAS at an ASWC Town Hall meeting on December 10, 2014, 91% of students in attendance said that expanded student input in the tenure evaluation process was necessary, and 95% said that they would participate in an additional evaluation of the professor; and

WHEREAS eleven out of twelve of Whitman's comparison institutions have expanded the role of student input in their tenure models; and

WHEREAS increased student input would also help to highlight the crucial element of service that faculty members of underrepresented backgrounds provide to students of those same backgrounds.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Associated Students of Whitman College (ASWC) fully endorses the model proposed in the appendix to this resolution that would increase student input in the tenure process through letters of evaluation; and be it further

RESOLVED that ASWC strongly urges the Whitman College faculty to adopt the amendment to the Faculty Code Chapter I, Article IV, Section 4 proposed in the appendix of this resolution to further demonstrate its commitment to faculty excellence; and be it further

RESOLVED that ASWC exhorts the Personnel Committee to give greater weight to student voices during the tenure evaluation process.

Distributed to:

George Bridges, President

Kathleen Murray, President-Elect

Pat Spencer, Provost and Dean of the Faculty

Professor David F. Schmitz, Chair of the Faculty

Professor Bruce Magnusson, Chair of Division I

Professor Nicole Simek, Chair of Division II

Professor Mark Beck, Chair of Division III

Faculty Personnel Committee

Whitman College Faculty

Whitman College Board of Trustees

Whitman College Board of Overseers

Whitman College *Pioneer*

Whitman College Archives

## Appendix to Resolution SRS15.2

Proposed amendment to the Faculty Code Chapter I, Article IV, Section 4:

*D. A candidate for tenure or promotion to professor will provide a list of the names of five current or former students, with mailing and email addresses, to the Provost and Dean of the Faculty. These should be students with whom the professor has had a close mentoring or advising relationship. Additionally, the Registrar will provide the Provost a list of major advisees, current or former, who have also enrolled in courses taught by the member since the last review. The Provost will then select a variety of students from these two pools to write evaluative letters of the candidate. A minimum of five student-written letters are required to complete the file, at least two of which must be from the list of students provided to the Provost by the Registrar.*

*E. With the exception of letters by external reviewers solicited as part of a candidate's initial file, the Provost and Dean of the Faculty shall notify the candidate of the source of any letter in his or her file before that letter is considered by the Personnel Committee. (04/17/13)*