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File

December 2, 1947

To : President Frederick Burkhardt
From: Peter F. Drucker.

Re: Proposed Faculty Tenure Plan.

You asked for comments from the faculty on your memorandum of December 1st, and I therefore take the liberty of submitting a few thoughts.

(1) I enthusiastically support your proposal. Certainly the faculty tenure should not be perpetuated automatically, especially as the present faculty structure is to a large extent the result of a prolonged period of "emergencies". At the same time, you cannot possibly be expected to make such a large number of vital decisions right at the start of your tenure of office here.

(2) I also think that the proposed method of postponing all but the most obvious negative decisions for a year is fair and equitable.

(3) I would, however, like to suggest for your consideration one amendment which, in my opinion, would not change the substance of your plan to any appreciable extent, but would avoid the repercussions on faculty morale - already pretty jittery after the last year - which, I am afraid, might be quite serious. (And it is not always the people who have the most reason to feel insecure who do actually feel the lack of security strongly; some of our most valuable faculty members are apparently born with it. There are ~~obviously~~ Murray McGuires outside of the Superintendent's office too.)

What I would like to suggest for your consideration is to leave unchanged the proposed plan under which all contracts will be reviewed between now and next Fall. However, I would see great merit in a plan under which faculty members who have been here more than five years, who, in other words, have had at least one three-year's contract, would not be fired out of hand as of July 1949 but would

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be given one year's notice, so that they actually would leave College at the end of the academic year 1949/50. The decision, however, would be taken and announced next Fall, and those people whom you decide to re-appoint would receive a three-year's contract then, or whatever tenure will be worked out, to run from August 1949.

There are three reasons for this suggestion:

a. You asked the people who have had three-year's contracts to give up something, for which, I think, they deserve some consideration.

b. All the thinking about tenure which has been going on here for the last few years, including a plan worked out by Lewis Jones which he was ready to submit to the trustees, as far as I know, centered on a tenure system under which people with long years of service would be given more adequate notice than six months, so that my proposal would fit in with the trend of thought current here for the last few years.

c. One of the major criticisms of our tenure system has been all along that it failed to give a man sufficient time to look for a new job, since academic appointments are by and large made more than six months in advance of the new year. What we have had in the past has been that faculty members given such short notice have simply taken off the last four or six weeks of their teaching year to hunt for a new job, etc.

May I in this connection, add some additional suggestions for whatever system of tenure we choose to adopt in the end. First, that it provide an adequate period of cancellation of a contract. The dilemma between our absolute necessity not to have any permanent tenure, and the legitimate faculty desire for some security can only be resolved by some such device as an indefinite contract for people with more than five years of

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service here, subject to two or three years' cancellation. Second, I would strongly suggest that the President review each faculty member's performance with the man each year - a practice which is standard in all other organisations where there is tenure but not permanent tenure. The reason why we do not have it is simply that in academic institution with permanent tenure the periodic regular performance review is not practised and not needed. As a result, the majority of the people at Bennington whose contracts were not renewed, especially people who had been here for several years, were not given any previous warning and had "no idea" that they were not doing a satisfactory job, in many cases, I think, validly. At the same time there are people here who are doing a really first class job and who are beset by doubts about it, and who would need and appreciate reassurance. Under the old system appointment or re-appointment not only came out of the blue sky, but no differentiation was made between a re-appointment made in spite of grave doubts in a man, and re-appointment as a vote of confidence. In several faculties, to mention only the science faculty, this is one of the many reasons for whatever ails them.

I hope that this does not intrude upon your time and attention, and I should be grateful to have your reaction.

PS There are two arguments for my proposed "amendment" which I intentionally omitted since they look at the problem from an entirely different angle; but I think they are not entirely unimportant. First: my "amendment" would create approximately the condition which you would normally i.e. without the war-time accident of one expiration date for all three-years contracts, have had to deal with. Secondly rather than limit your freedom of action my "amendment" gives you more actual mobility should you find that you need it; you could hardly refuse to renew a year from now more than a comparatively small number of contracts - the others would all have to get three-year appointments. My way you could, should you find it necessary, go in for a large-scale revirement of the faculty without creating unmanageable problems of replacement, continuity and morale as the change would be spread over two years.