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From the Editor

Faculty Life Issues: From Challenge to Change

Teaching is not always fun. Even the Garden of Eden had snakes. The obstacles to good teaching have many sources — inadequacies in students, faculty, and administration, but also from the culture of the institution itself.

The theme of this issue began in the Friday discussions the members of our seminar have enjoyed with faculty in every Jesuit college and university we have visited over the past several years. As it happened, topics like the core, "excellence," and the Jesuit General's recent letter were more immediately focused, while "faculty life issues" seemed disparate, pulling in different directions. For example: modes of governance, faculty unions, tenure procedures, underpaid adjuncts, hiring policies, ambition to higher office, women's progress, student-faculty relations, tension between home and work obligations, and making gay students feel at home had to be weaved together, keeping in mind the Jesuit character of the institution, increasingly diverse, as a *raison d'etre* of this magazine.

Several essays concern governance; the insistence that faculty voices be heard grows louder every year. And a president determined to raise the college's academic profile may find a faculty senate resisting changes that will require faculty to publish more without a reduction in their teaching load. And how fair are the procedures for tenure? In the six years prior to the tenure decision, has the faculty member been given a semester off to concentrate on a publishable article? The articles here don't raise all these questions; but perhaps the conversations which follow publication will bring them up.

Other than being fired, no experience is more harrowing than the fight for tenure. At Fordham in 1970 student leaders occupied the administration building and called a student strike to protest the denial of tenure to a popular English professor. The administration replied by restructuring the campus government, creating a campus council with administration, faculty, and student membership; the professor, still denied tenure, died a few years later. In the recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Nov. 11) a communications professor, Al Auster, writes that he has been denied tenure four times at three schools — because of ill will between two departments, a "nest of vipers" at another institution, and failure to fill out some paper work at his current home.

Each issue invites four students, recommended by a local professor, to either speak to the readers on behalf of their peers or simply write about what's on the top of their minds. This time I suggested that each say something the faculty should hear about student expectations of their teachers. Two themes stand out. First, they want a personal relationship between the teacher and the student, not just the sit in class, take the notes, and take the test standard impersonal routine. At least two mentioned teachers who did not know the names of their students! On the one hand, this is an occasion to be shocked; on the other hand, I've know more than a few students who could not tell me the names of their professors. Second, they want to be challenged. Recent literature on higher education documents universities where faculty require students to neither read nor write on the level decent standards require.

Our cover, though exaggerated, depicts the physical and emotional tug between the obligations of a parent and those of a university professor embodied in the same person. Should there be different contracts for faculty depending on their domestic responsibilities? A three or four course load for the single 35-year-old male English professor training for a marathon and who is working on a novel which might be published some day, compared to a two-course load for a single mother psychology professor who has to drive her five-year-old daughter to school every day and pick her up every afternoon? And how many Jesuit universities have day care for both faculty and married students?

Faced with these problems, universities generally appoint committees to study them and report. These reports lead to new institutions like Georgetown's program for gay students, or new configurations of senates at Scranton and Spring Hill, or an office to train faculty in Jesuit spirituality at Marquette, or structured dialogue at Xavier. Ignatian programs multiply, so that today lay faculty of various faiths have experienced some adaptation of the Spiritual Exercises more than was ever dreamed of in the days when Jesuits owned and dominated Jesuit schools.

For the cover, I thank photographer Mark Wyville, who has done other *Conversations* covers; Fordham Professor Gwenyth Jackaway; sophomore Brendan O'Malley; Aidan Heaney, son of Thomas and Pauline Heaney our designer; Kerry Weber, associate editor of *America,* and Jose R. Guzman of the *America* business office who played student roles; and Frank Turnbull, S.J., who generously provided the John LaFarge Lounge for the cover drama. ■

RASsj

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