UW-RIVER FALLS FACULTY SENATE RESOLUTION ON
TENURE AND SHARED GOVERNANCE
Approved by the Faculty Senate
June 10, 2015

WHEREAS the Faculty Senate at University of Wisconsin-River Falls is alarmed at the Joint Finance Committee’s rush to delete state statutes that ensure tenure and shared governance throughout the University of Wisconsin System.

WHEREAS Tenure and Shared Governance are not individual “benefits” or “privileges.” Tenure and Shared Governance make it possible for faculty to fulfill the University’s statutory mission to -

“.... develop human resources, to discover and disseminate knowledge, to extend knowledge and its application beyond the boundaries of its campuses and to serve and stimulate society by developing in students heightened intellectual, cultural, and humane sensitivities; scientific, professional, and technological expertise; and a sense of purpose. Inherent in this broad mission are methods of instruction, research, extended training, and public service designed to educate people and improve the human condition. Basic to every purpose of the system is the search for truth.” [WI 36.01 (2)]

WHEREAS Tenure and Shared Governance are essential cornerstones on which this discovery and dissemination of knowledge, and service to the people of Wisconsin depend.

WHEREAS we strongly endorse the UW-Milwaukee Faculty Senate Resolution of June 2, 2015 which advocates specific actions to support and promote the academic and fiscal viability of all UW campuses.

WHEREAS we strongly endorse “Statement by the [Public Representation Organization of the Faculty Senate at UW-Madison] PROFS in response to the [Joint Finance Committee] JFC action on the UW System Budget” June 2, 2015, which explains how tenure contributes to the quality of the UW System and how the elimination of tenure may risk accreditation and professional censure leading to a loss of faculty, students and financial support. (access at: www.profs.wisc.edu)

WHEREAS we strongly endorse the Change.org petition which accurately explains the connection between the UW Mission, academic freedom, and tenure and shared governance, and calls on the Board of Regents to fulfill its responsibilities to all the people of Wisconsin. We extend these concerns to Omnibus Motion points 12 and 34-39. (copied below)

AND WHEREAS we note the deep concerns about the JFC Omnibus Motion voiced by faculty, students, and alumni across the state and beyond. There is good reason for this, as encapsulated in clearly explained statements by PROFS, the UW-Milwaukee Faculty Senate, and the Change.org petition.
THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED on behalf of the UW-River Falls faculty we request that members of the state legislature vote against provisions in the Omnibus Motion points 12 and 34-39 adopted by the Joint Finance Committee on May 29, 2015, which eliminate and redefine statutory provisions for tenure and shared governance, and which explicitly permit dismissal without just cause or due process. We do also ask the Board of Regents, System President, and Chancellors to oppose points 12 and 34-39.

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UW-Milwaukee Faculty Senate Resolution:

Resolution to the UW-System Board of Regents for its June 4-5th meeting at UWM

The Faculty Senate of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) strongly endorses the “Statement by PROFS in response to JFC action on the UW System Budget” (see www.profs.wisc.edu). By its actions, the Joint Finance Committee (JFC) sends a chilling message to residents of the state of Wisconsin that it is not important for our collective future to support a strong public University in Milwaukee. This view cannot be further from the truth. The actions of the JFC critically undercut the academic and fiscal viability of UWM and other campuses in the UW-System and, as a result, will compromise the future for Wisconsin residents in the rapidly evolving, knowledge-based world of the 21st century.

For these reasons, the Senate calls upon the Board of Regents and UW-System officials to publicly condemn the huge budget cuts to the System and the accompanying, unprecedented attack on tenure, indefinite status for staff, and shared governance by the JFC. We further call upon the Board of Regents and UW-System to work with us and the public to reverse these actions during full legislative body deliberations on the budget.

Change.org petition

“As Regents, you have been entrusted by the people of the State of Wisconsin with the primary responsibility for governance of the University of Wisconsin System. When you accepted this responsibility, you agreed to sacrifice substantial personal time and energy to represent the public interest through preservation and enhancement of educational quality and prudent stewardship of University assets (Res. 6476 adopted 7/16/93). The most fundamental asset possessed by the University was not built with bricks and mortar, but with fearless inquiry, experimentation and debate. It is our human intellectual capital, the breadth and depth of knowledge and spirit of innovation possessed by our faculty, staff and students, upon which our University is built and from which the public interest is served.

In the Omnibus Motion adopted by a 12-4 vote of the Joint Finance Committee on May 29, 2015, the Board of Regents is to be granted new authority, which even if not exercised, by its very existence will create a chilling effect upon the research and teaching activities of our faculty and staff. Specifically, language in point 39 of the motion states that the “… Board
may, with appropriate notice, terminate any faculty or academic staff appointment when such an action is deemed necessary due to a budget or program decision regarding program discontinuance, curtailment, modification, or redirection, instead of when a financial emergency exists as under current law.” Our fear is that this language is so broad and imprecise that it would allow for programs of academic inquiry and instruction (or even individually targeted tenured faculty within programs) to be terminated on the basis of political whim and convenience.

Tenure granted under such conditions is not tenure at all. Our statutorily protected tenure, which was once considered to be among the strongest guarantees of academic freedom in the world, will now be considered worth less than the paper upon which it is written. The mere existence of such authority directly devalues our University’s most fundamental asset, and frankly, puts it up for fire sale – piece by piece and person by person – to peer institutions, who will not hesitate to draw away our current faculty and future recruits. We are gravely concerned that we stand at the brink of an inexorable death spiral.

To protect the spirit of fearless inquiry, to further mutual trust between the faculty and the Board of Regents, and to send a clear signal that you are champions of the Wisconsin Idea, we call upon you to formally adopt policy binding yourselves to exercising the new authority granted in point 39 of the Omnibus Motion to layoff or terminate faculty specifically and only “for just cause and with due process” or in case of “financial emergency.” To fail to bind yourselves in such a manner would be to advertise to the world that tenured faculty at the University of Wisconsin can, and will, be terminated for unjust cause and without due process.

We appeal to you today at a critical time in our University’s history. At perhaps no other time since the trial of Richard T. Ely in 1894 has the University faced such a threat to its core principles and to its very existence. In the committee final report exonerating Professor Ely, UW President Charles Kendall Adams wrote:

“As Regents … [w]e feel that we would be unworthy of the position we hold if we did not believe in progress in all departments of knowledge. In all lines of academic investigation it is of the utmost importance that the investigator should be absolutely free to follow the indications of truth wherever they may lead. Whatever may be the limitations which trammel inquiry elsewhere we believe the great state University of Wisconsin should ever encourage that continual and fearless sifting and winnowing by which alone the truth can be found.”

These words were written not only to the Regents of 1894. They were written to all Regents to come – and to none more urgently than you”