

**American University of Beirut  
Minutes of the University Senate  
Special Meeting of Friday 1 February 2008**

Present: A. Abdel-Rahman, A. Abdul-Malak, H. Abu Khuzam, A. Al-Kutoubi, G. Araj, K. Bitar, N. Cortas, J. Dargham, M. Darwish, R. Dean, L. Farhood, I. Hajj, P. Heath (chairing), K. Hindi, H. Huijer, N. Hwalla, M. Jurdi, M. Khawaja, M. Kisirwani, A. Lyzzaik, L. Musfy, G. Najjar, N. Nassif, M. Nimah, O. Obeid, I. Osman, S. Sadek, S. Seikaly, B. Shayya, F. Sleiman, R. Smith, H. Zurayk.

Absent: A. Abdelnoor, A. Al-Alaoui, N. Darwiche, H. Diab, M. El-Sabban\*, R. Haddad, S. Jeffrey, S. Kenney, R. Khaulil, S. Maamari\*, M. Obeid, J. Radulski, M. Salameh, J. Waterbury\*.

(\* = regrets notified before meeting or on leave)

Call to order: The meeting was called to order at 2:02 p.m.

1. *Approval of minutes.* The minutes of 25 January 2008 were approved as corrected.

2. *Discussion of Tenure Proposal (continued).* Provost Heath said that the President had asked him to chair this special meeting in order that discussion of the tenure proposals be free and frank. He made various introductory remarks concerning the complexity of the issue: the costs involved in providing the necessary research environment for faculty, especially through reducing teaching loads; the uncertainty expressed at different levels over the best path towards unfreezing tenure; and the implications of more stringent promotion criteria. A senator said that it was indeed important to consider success rates in promotion since he was afraid that the present proposal would lead to a small number of tenured professors; he feared also that without incentives for retirement senior faculty would become too aged; both cases spelled the death of the university. Another professor questioned the view that seemed to him prevalent in the two FAS town meetings that tenured faculty would be less productive.

A Proposed Senate Statement on the Report of the President's Taskforce on Tenure, dated February 1 2008 but circulated to senators before the meeting, was then introduced. The senator introducing the statement regretted the President's absence since, in his presence, there was no reason for discussion not to be free and frank. Although critical of the Taskforce Report, the senator appreciated both the courage of the President in initiating the process and the hard work and good faith that had gone into the report's preparation. The proposed statement, arising from a meeting in the FEA at which members from other faculties were present, represented the concerns of many in the university, and he hoped that it would be incorporated in the minutes. He then went through sections B and C of the statement point by point, and almost word by word except when the chair asked him to be brief.

B. Textual remarks:

1. Under Paragraph II.9 of the Report, the Taskforce "recommends that a system of transition be designed carefully, *not only to be equitable*, but also *to be seen to be equitable*", and makes reference to this effect to Section IV, dealing with 'transition'. As it is made clear in Section C of this statement, the proposed transition does not meet either objective.
2. The same paragraph, referred to in B.1 above, concludes with a belief on the part of the Taskforce that "the interests of the institution demand that the tenure enterprise proceed, even if faced by *some opposition*". It is not clear what the Taskforce means by "some opposition", as opposed to major opposition. If "opposition" has been expressed anywhere, it has not definitely been in regard to reviving the tenure system, but rather to doing so with a transition that is not viewed by the majority within the full professors group as equitable.
3. Notwithstanding our disapproval, as expressed below, in relation to paragraph IV.1.c of the Report, under which the Taskforce recommends that the rights and duties of a full professor who has not applied for tenure, including participating in the appraisal of promotion and tenure cases, remain unchanged, it is not clear what the implications are for the case of the rights and duties of a full professor who fails to gain tenure.
4. Under paragraph IV.2 of the Report, the Taskforce recommends that the university, with the help of the board of trustees, form a college of external evaluators for judging all applications for tenure. Yet, the

following critical elements are not addressed or clarified: (a) what a full professor would need to submit for the purpose of this evaluation, (b) the channel (chairs, advisory committees, deans, BOD, etc.) through which any such submission would be processed until it reaches the college of evaluators, (c) clear and elaborate criteria of scrutiny, and (d) background and profile of envisioned evaluators.

C. The following arguments are presented in support of our disapproval of the Taskforce recommendations pertaining to the transition system for the case of full professors who are in post when the tenure system is reinstated [documented under paragraph IV.1.c and other related sections of the Report, as the case may be]:

1. One of the main recommendations by the Taskforce, under paragraph II.2, calls for tenure to be granted on promotion to associate professor. It is a common belief that such granting of tenure, as justly proposed by the Taskforce, would be based on the strengths that the candidate has demonstrated in research and teaching, among other relevant criteria, thereby warranting promotion to associate professor while giving solid indications of the prospects to succeed in the promotion to full professor. This belief is largely confirmed by the Taskforce statement under paragraph 'Scheme 1/A. Research/Main criteria' of Appendix B, requiring: "evidence of original and independent research, resulting in a sustained output of high-quality research publications, *with evidence of a capacity to attain an international reputation*":

**Full professors, currently in post, have been promoted to full professor not on the basis of "evidence of a capacity to attain an international reputation" but rather on the basis of "evidence of having attained such a reputation".**

2. Following the point raised in C.1 above, the granting of tenure to full professors, currently in post, is long overdue, and such granting is viewed by many to have been *held back* by the institution. By examining the very same criteria proposed by the Taskforce, under Appendix B, for the granting of tenure, the first question to surface is one of:

*What aspect(s) of tenure has(have) not been examined when the promotion decisions to full professors were made throughout the various levels of the institution's governance structure?*

3. Subjecting full professors currently on board to a tenure review is in many ways similar to subjecting the few full professors who were granted tenure prior to the tenure freeze coming into force to a post-tenure review. This is a practice that the institution does not have in place, nor does the Taskforce recommend that it be instituted. This is more true than one may want to accept, on the basis that both the administration – by practice – and the full professors – by conviction – have regarded the promotion to full professor as THE step to acquiring a 'virtual tenure', or better said a 'quasi tenure', status. This 'quasi tenure' status has earned its name from the fact that the 'tenure system' had been put on freeze when 'tenure' was indeed due.

4. The Taskforce recommendation, under paragraph II.2, that awarding tenure be granted on promotion to associate professor rather than to full professor is reported to be based on, among other considerations: (a) protecting early those who pursue unpopular or contrarian lines of enquiry, thereby enhancing academic freedom, and (b) giving the self assurance necessary for effective university governance. Again, another question to surface is one of:

*How may it be assured that the evaluation of tenure for full professors, who have been in the professorial track for a minimum of 12 years and up to 20 years and beyond, will be made in seclusion from their performances along the two above-mentioned considerations, which are rightly, thoughtfully, and fairly accounted for by the Taskforce.*

5. It further carries that, upon unfreezing the tenure system, junior faculty will be afforded a fair chance of seeking and acquiring long-term career security, while the proposed transition recommendations could at least unfairly put to question the career paths of full professors in post, at such an untimely stage of their academic careers.

After going through the proposed statement he made the following motion stated in section D on page 3, which was seconded.

**In reference to the Report of the President's Taskforce on Tenure, the senate:**

- 1. Endorses the Taskforce recommendation that the university reinstate the tenure system;**
- 2. Endorses the Taskforce recommendations pertaining to transition for assistant and associate professors;**
- 3. Recommends that, upon unfreezing of tenure, full professors in post automatically gain the tenure status;**
- 4. Recommends that the university take concrete steps towards developing and offering adequate, if not attractive, retirement packages to tenured faculty who opt for voluntary retirement, as thoughtfully recommended by the Taskforce under Paragraph V.6.**

The chairman of the taskforce expressed concern that a negative motion had been made before a positive endorsement of the taskforce report. It was pointed out in reply that the report was the president's property and could not be altered by the senate, as minuted at the previous meeting of January 25. The following substitute motion was seconded. **The senate urges the university to**

**integrate the recommendations made on page 3 of the circulated statement into the taskforce report, in the best interests of faculty and university.**

A procedural matter was raised concerning the freedom to discuss an issue not explicitly stated at the time a special meeting is called. The chair confirmed that motions could be made and voted on while discussing the taskforce report even if the report itself was untouchable. A senator remarked that a vote reflecting reservations in the senate over the tenure proposal would strengthen the president with the board of trustees. Another senator stated that the cost of the proposed external evaluation of full professors for tenure would greatly exceed that of granting them automatic tenure. Against the substitute motion, a senator stated that integration of the circulated recommendations into the taskforce report was not possible since the report could not be modified.

**Vote 2008-11: The substitute motion was defeated (For 3, voting members present 30).**

A second substitute motion was seconded, that **the senate discuss and vote on the four points of the motion sequentially.** A senator pointed out that separating out each point would not make sense since the four points formed a package. A senator questioned the relevance of a vote in the senate to the president's presentation of the taskforce report to the board of trustees in March. The chair said that in his opinion the president had brought the report to the senate for discussion and that the question was now whether the president would take the report or not to the board of trustees. A senator said in reply that the president had already expressed his desire to present the report to the board in March, and that the concerns of senators over the tenure proposals needed to be expressed and represented to the board.

**Vote 2008-12: The substitute motion was defeated (For 8, voting members present 30).**

A third substitute motion was made and seconded, **to form a committee to write a statement incorporating the points proposed in the statement of February 1.** This substitute motion was withdrawn after a little discussion.

Concerning the main motion, the chairman of the taskforce, speaking against the motion, reiterated the strengths of the taskforce report in trying to balance the interests of the institution and of different constituencies. He asked the senate to ponder the consequences of voting for the motion, reminding it of recent history regarding the issue of tenure. The senate had long clamoured for the reinstatement of tenure; the present process had been three years in the making; the final report had taken account of objections made to the draft. The two most important issues were, first, to grant tenure at the rank of associate professor, and second to have tenure review for all. The taskforce chairman then estimated the likely reaction of the different parties: the president, who had only recently been won over to the view that the university was ready for tenure, the provost, the board of deans, and the board of trustees. He anticipated that the tenure enterprise would be knocked into a hole if the motion was carried, from which it would not recover for many years.

A senator, speaking for the motion, said in reply that estimating the reaction of trustees was irrelevant to a matter of principle. The process whereby present full professors had attained that rank had been long and thorough, and the university could not go back on that process. A dean said that by the time a faculty member gets to the rank of full professor he/she would have been evaluated twice already. A new process had been recommended by the taskforce which had the potential to improve the quality of the university. A senator remarked that, whether one supported the motion or not, it was up to the board of trustees to take a decision. Another senator said that, while the final decisions on promotions to full professors were based on six internal letters of evaluation by the various constituencies of the institution's governance structure and five or more external referees' letters, it seems illogical as a matter of principle for a full professor to be now evaluated for tenure on the basis of a simple C.V., as verbally conveyed by the taskforce's chairperson and indicated in the handouts distributed at the senate meeting of January 4, 2008. After further discussion the question was called.

**Vote 2008-13: The motion was defeated (For 15, voting members present 30).**

The following motion was then proposed and seconded: **A committee of the senate shall be elected from its members, chaired by the chair of the senate steering committee, and including one**

**member from each faculty along with the chair of the senate committee on faculty affairs, with a view to writing a senate statement concerning tenure to present to the board of trustees.**

**Vote 2008-14: The motion was carried (For 15, voting members present 29).**

Members of the committee were elected as follows: M. Nimah (FAFS), S. Seikaly (FAS), A. Abdul-Malak (FEA), M. Jurdi (FHS), A. Al-Kutoubi (FM), and I. Osman (OSB).

The meeting was adjourned at 3:50 p.m.

Richard Smith, secretary