

## *CCAS case study for inclusion in New Deans Seminar*

### **A Case of Tenure Denial**

It is faculty evaluation season at Comprehensive State University, and the Department of Geosciences' Promotion and Tenure Committee, a body composed of all tenured faculty members, has voted to deny promotion and tenure to Dr. Susan Stalwart. Dr. Stalwart has a stellar record as a teacher, particularly in the large enrollment sections of Physical Geology, and she recently received a university-wide teaching medal that is awarded by students. Her service record is satisfactory for a junior faculty member. The committee vote was close (5-3) and was largely based on strong disagreements about Stalwart's research. Although the number of articles published during her probationary period meets the departmental criteria for promotion and tenure, some committee members argue that her co-authored geology publications should not count because she played a secondary role that was not significant. In addition, they take issue with the fact that two of her first-authored publications are in geoscience education, rather than her specialty area within the discipline. The latter publications resulted from an NSF Course, Curriculum, and Laboratory Improvement grant on which she is PI. Although the committee's deliberations are intended to be confidential, word quickly leaks to the other junior faculty members in the department, who are appalled and upset that Stalwart has been denied tenure. As a group, they express grave concerns about the manner in which the criteria have been applied and worry that, if Stalwart does not meet the standards, surely neither do they.

Just six months into her tenure as department chair, a position for which she was externally recruited, Dr. Anna Lytical is in a difficult situation. Citing the fact that her prior annual reviews have been positive, Stalwart has decided to appeal the tenure and promotion denial, which requires a determination by the chair whether to uphold or overturn the decision by the Department's Promotion and Tenure Committee. As someone who was recruited from a research university, Lytical has not yet garnered a sense of her new institution's expectations for advancement, but her own assessment is that Stalwart meets the criteria as specified in the department's evaluation policy. However, she finds the prospect of overturning the majority vote of her colleagues to be a daunting one, as she is new to a leadership role and actively establishing her credibility in the position. Lytical has contacted you, Dean Hugh Manatee, to solicit your advice. Unbeknownst to Lytical, her own selection as chair also was a source of division among the department's tenured faculty, although the nature of that division was not made clear to you. Despite the mixed recommendation by the faculty, you appointed Lytical on the basis of her strong record as a teacher-scholar, effective interpersonal skills, and success as Assistant Chair in her prior setting. The opportunity to diversify the department and your college's leadership through the addition of a female science chair was also appealing, especially in that the geosciences department has had a spotty record with regard to recruiting and retaining female faculty members (Lytical's appointment made her only the second tenured woman in the unit).

You want to see Lytical succeed in her role and know that her actions on Stalwart's appeal may carry high stakes for both individuals. How do you guide her?

**Questions:**

- 1) The committee's decision to deny promotion and tenure focused on Stalwart's research. Based on the information provided, how strong is the rationale for denial?
- 2) Is there evidence that the criteria for advancement are being applied inappropriately by the committee? If so, what is it?
- 3) Is there an indication in the scenario of gender bias? If so, what is it?
- 4) What strategies might you suggest Lytical utilize in responding to the appeal that are mindful of her need to establish credibility, and how might you as dean best support her?
- 5) Addressing the consternation of the junior faculty will be important to their morale and retention. What steps might you recommend Lytical take to mitigate the negative impact of the committee decision on these individuals?

**Acknowledgement of Support and Disclaimer**

This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 0930138. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.