



## SAINT VINCENT COLLEGE

February 2008

### To the Board of Directors of Saint Vincent College

The faculty at Saint Vincent College is gravely concerned about the current President's systematic and pervasive disregard for collegiality and shared governance. These principles, critical to the proper operation of any institution of higher education<sup>[1]</sup> are especially significant to our Catholic, Benedictine, liberal arts mission. According to section 1.6 of the Faculty Handbook, Saint Vincent "considers its administrators to be participants in the educative process, and considers faculty members to be participants in the governance of the College." This concept fits especially well with the Benedictine concept of community "that is nourished by mutual respect, appreciation, and charity."<sup>[2]</sup>

We list below only a handful of the most egregious examples of the President's repudiation of these principles. This is not a comprehensive discussion; we wish only to show some key issues that illustrate our concern. Impartial observers will agree that from the point of view of the faculty, the two most important goals for this academic year were the successful completion of the Middle States Self-Study and review, and the selection of a highly qualified Vice President for Academic Affairs. In both cases, established and approved procedures were abrogated without warning or reasonable cause, faculty (and others) who devoted their time, talents, and good faith in the process were repudiated, and the positive results that were within reach were subverted.

The Middle States self-study document is the responsibility of the steering committee. The committee co-chairs faithfully followed the prescribed Middle States procedure as described in *Self-Study: Creating a Useful Process and Report*. The co-chairs and steering committee worked diligently and successfully to ensure that their assessment remained fair, honest, and on schedule. They kept this process open and transparent by holding regular "Town Hall" meetings with the entire Saint Vincent College community. Unfortunately, the President did not engage in this dialogue and did not send any representative to these open forums. Instead, on September 20, 2007, the President abruptly took over the process at a meeting conducted by the President's Assistant. The end result is that a sanitized but still narrowly accurate document has been produced, but at the cost of the integrity of the process and the demoralization of committed professionals across campus. No amount of pleasantries in public can repair that damage.

With regard to the VPAA search, the results are equally troubling. This position is of critical importance to fulfilling our mission "to provide quality under-graduate and graduate education for men and women." In this case the search committee was dissolved prematurely, then reconvened and instructed to recommend a candidate that the committee, (with the exception of the President's Assistant) unanimously agreed did not meet the qualifications laid out in the position description *and* which had been approved by the President and Chancellor. The unqualified candidate was subsequently chosen by the President, apparently confirmed by your body, and installed in office in the third week of the semester. Since the new VPAA comes from faculty ranks, students enrolled in his classes are amongst the first to suffer from the President's imprudent actions.

If the President's decision to invalidate these two critical efforts were the faculty's only grievances, we would still be writing this letter. Most unfortunately, a matter equally if not more troubling is the President's consistent employment of intimidation, humiliation and coercion. Behind closed doors this has been personally experienced by many at the college, whether in individual meetings or within a group

[1] See the "Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities" and "Faculty Participation in the Selection, Evaluation, and Retention of Administrators" issued by the American Association of University Professors

<sup>2</sup> Faculty Handbook, Section 1.2

as a member of a committee. However, the entire faculty witnessed an appalling public display of the President's penchant for such behaviors at the January 23rd meeting of the full faculty. During that meeting the President demonstrated a fundamental disregard for civility, collegiality and basic respect for others in his abusive treatment of Dr. Mary Beth Spore, at that time interim VPAA. After laying out an account of events surrounding the forwarding of the second group of names from the Search Committee to the president, Mr. Towey turned to Dr. Spore with a question. This question gave her the option of either publicly confirming Mr. Towey's account, an account which members of the search committee knew seriously misrepresented the truth, or publicly denying the accuracy of Mr. Towey's account. Dr. Spore serves in a non-tenured, at-will appointment. Dr. Spore managed a response of sufficient ambiguity to allow the retention of some dignity. To place a colleague in such a position is simply deplorable. That one would find such tactics employed at a Benedictine, Catholic institution is beyond the pale. The fact is, however, that scarcely an office or academic department across campus does not have first-hand experience with this sort of scandalous treatment.

If the President were in his first year, one might consider excusing these deeply regrettable actions, despite their real potential for long-term damage to the institution. But the time is long since past that this President could have learned the culture of the institution, and made it work to his advantage. He has chosen not to, and he must be brought to understand the perils inherent in this decision.

By our signatures below, we, the tenured faculty of Saint Vincent College, declare to you, the Board of Directors that Mr. H. James Towey as President, has through his actions brought about an unparalleled crisis in the history of this institution. Much damage has already been done to the academic integrity and collegial atmosphere that have been hallmarks of Saint Vincent College. Much worse threatens if you do not intervene. We call on you to make the President understand the necessity of working in a collegial manner with all members of the community, respecting and abiding by community norms, both those written into legal documents, and those developed through long years of dedication to our mission. In the absence of clear and decisive action on your part, it is unclear how long this faculty, or the dedicated staff and administrators of Saint Vincent College, can continue to do the jobs we love so well, and this institution will be damaged beyond recognition.

Respectfully,

Editor's Note: This letter was signed by 32 people. The Post-Gazette has redacted their signatures.