

Guilford College response to Eleanor Branch tenure decision

On Feb. 24, 2007, the board of trustees of Guilford College accepted the recommendation of the Academic Affairs Committee of the board to deny a tenure appeal by Eleanor Branch, assistant professor of English. The decision by the Academic Affairs Committee represents the final appeal available to Eleanor Branch and the end of a College process that began in November 2005 and has lasted more than a year.

Tenure is a personnel matter, and the College generally says little in order to protect the privacy of those involved. However, because this case received front-page coverage in the student newspaper and many on campus discussed it openly, including the candidate herself, some additional information about the decision process and the nature of tenure itself is appropriate.

1. Tenure is not a right; it is a privilege that is earned at Guilford by achieving excellence in teaching, as well as by meeting very high standards of community service, advising and growth as a

scholar. The tenure review process is faculty driven, which means that members of the faculty evaluate each other. It is essential that tenure be earned in order to maintain the significance of the distinction and the integrity of the college.

2. Students may comment on the performance of a faculty member being considered for tenure through:

- Confidential letters solicited by the Office of the Academic Dean from students and advisees

- Course evaluations
- Letters invited through The Beacon in an announcement from the Academic Dean advising the community of those faculty who would be reviewed for tenure

3. After reviewing all of the material related to the Eleanor Branch case, the following persons/groups from different backgrounds and different parts of the campus all concluded that the standards for tenure had not been achieved:

- Faculty Affairs Committee (FAC) composed of five tenured faculty members

- Vice President for Academic Affairs and Academic Dean

- President

- A specially-appointed Presidential Advisory Committee of seven current or retired tenured faculty members (some of whom were also on the FAC) to advise the President on this case

4. In response to a discrimination claim by Eleanor Branch, nationally recognized civil rights expert and former university chancellor Julius Chambers reviewed this matter and concluded that race was not a legal or deciding factor in the FAC's decision.

5. In addition, an Appeals Board of three tenured faculty members investigated the claim of discrimination in the process and determined that discrimination did not exist.

6. Finally, the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees, after a thorough review, concluded that proper procedures had been followed with respect to the tenure decision.

It is notable that consensus was achieved at each level of decision

making.

Adrienne Israel is vice president for academic affairs and academic dean and has served on faculty since 1982. She said, "While we have respect for and have considered the views of Eleanor Branch and her advocates, those of us who were closely involved with this matter are convinced that the process was conducted with integrity and that the decision was the right one. We have heard those voices who have suggested that the process should be improved. We recognize that every tenure process can be improved and no process is perfect. Indeed, over the years, improvements to Guilford's process have been implemented, and we will continue to work to achieve the best one possible."

In the wake of the FAC's decision denying tenure, some members of our campus community have raised the specter of racism, both in the tenure review process and in the college generally. Dean Israel, who is herself African-American, rejects the contention that racism explains why Eleanor

Branch was not recommended for tenure.

Guilford is a diverse community that is working to be anti-racist. Unlike many educational institutions, it has an Anti-racism Plan and a team actively working to implement it. And Guilford has done more than just develop a plan. The College has funded these efforts within its strategic long range plan for 2005-2010. In terms of diversity, 28% of Guilford's students are people of color, exceeding the averages of peer and aspirant colleges and the goals of the strategic plan. The percentage of faculty who are people of color (currently 15% versus the strategic plan goal of 17%) exceeds the averages of both peer and aspirant colleges.

College leadership and those closely involved with this matter realize that some members of the Guilford community are disappointed that Eleanor Branch will not be joining the ranks of Guilford's tenured faculty, and we accept the fact that differences of opinion will persist over this decision.

A Super Season

Staff Editorial

Congratulations to Guilford College men's basketball team for posting their best season in three decades.

Congratulations to head coach Tom Palombo for winning the ODAC Coach of the Year award for the second time in three seasons.

Congratulations to center Ben Strong '08 for being named the ODAC Player of the Year and earning a second consecutive berth on the First Team All-Conference.

Congratulations to guard Jordan Snipes '07 for being named to the First Team All-Conference.

Congratulations to Guilford College for having one of the best basketball teams in NCAA Division III.

To the basketball team:

When at times this year's various "incidents" caused some to call into question the very place and purpose of Guilford athletics, you maintained your quiet, unobtrusive quest for success.

Instead of being distracted, you formed last year's 13-14 team into one of the best in Guilford history, 4-5, along the way accomplishing:

1. The best start in Guilford College's 93 year history, 10-0.
2. The best in-conference season in Guilford College's history, 15-3.
3. Three wins in the school's first ICAA tournament appearance.
4. Two winning streaks of over even games.
5. Two 1,000 point career scorers in Strong and Snipes.

6. A victory in one of the greatest games in D-III history, 129-128, 3 OTs, over Lincoln University.

"We did something that was better than winning basketball games," Palombo told The Greensboro News and Record. "We got people to care about Guilford College basketball."

If only we could be so optimistic. Care about sports? At Guilford College? Sports? Guilco?

But, then again, why not?

To the students:

Too often we have heard the lack of student participation in Guilford athletics blamed on poor play and poorer records; that is no longer an excuse. Guilford's men's basketball team both plays well and wins games.

While their record speaks for itself, the team plays an entertaining up-tempo style of basketball that has made them the second highest scoring team in the ODAC the past two years. And on top of everything else, the games are free.

Along with one of the best coaches in the ODAC, next year we'll be returning one of the best players in Division III; the superlatives surrounding Ben Strong should have us chanting, "One more year." Instead we hear, "Who's Ben Strong?"

Have some pride in Guilford athletics, fellow Quakers. Too often, we're asked about box cutters; we can now direct attention towards box scores. Try it, it doesn't feel half bad.

Feminism gone wild, in verse

CARLY PERRIN | STAFF WRITER

"I used to lie awake at night and fantasize about Rosie the Riveter. She would hold me in her strong arms and whisper in my ear, 'Men are smelly, lumpy ... Don't trust them.'"

This was only one of the hilarious lines performed at Guilford College's third annual Bad Feminist Poetry night. This particular poem's title was "Rosie the Riveter," performed by Brice Tarleton. The poem won first place and a plaque that read: "Dear God if you can't make me thin, at least make all of my friends fat," which almost received more laughs than the actual poem.

I had no idea what to expect when I attended Bad Feminist Poetry night. Having grown up reading and listening to some of the best female minds of recent generations like Ani DiFranco, Sylvia Plath, and Maya Angelou telling me the importance of feminist understanding, I definitely had my suspicions. So, I sat back in my chair silently waiting to be pissed off.

Much to my surprise, in a matter of minutes I was gripping my sides and trying to smother my laughter so my digital recorder could still pick up the performers' dialogue — especially during the performance of "Broads" by Garret Fitzgerald, which incidentally won second place and a black gym bag with fuzzy pink letters that read "I (heart)

Dance."

"You rob me of my fluid, motherhood and I become static. A croon perched on the crust of a Diocletian fur-pie ... you shall not wet my void," Garret read to uproarious laughter and praise, which led to a 30-second pause and regrouping by the massive audience.

As a woman I felt ashamed, dirty, and like I was betraying my feminist roots. I believed that if I were found out, "Righteous Babe" would take me off their mailing list.

I felt even worse when I played back particular performances for my friends that night, resulting in random quoting and inside jokes within our circle that lasted for days. I was not only a part of the problem; I was disseminating it.

I went to Eric Mortensen, the founder and organizer of the event, for answers to my crisis of faith, and he provided the following comfort.

"It's making fun of feminism from a feminist or pro-feminist

point of view ... there is a danger with ideology that is so serious for it to become too intense. It is healthy to a) laugh at ourselves and b) discern what is good."

Mortensen was right. I had been taking my feminism way too seriously. There was a lively presence in the air while attending the event.

We were together, talking about our naughty bits and the need for Rosie's strong arms.

There were fewer than 20 performances of both original and borrowed works in all, but each brought its own special personality to the event.

Each performer either highlighted what she or he thought was wrong with feminism or what was too funny to be left alone.

The event, though not initially, was liberating, and shows that if you truly love something you can laugh at it and still love it. As in the last line of "Rosie the Riveter," "It's alright, you are really one of us ... we can do it."

Eric Mortensen
Assistant Professor of
Religious Studies