The 1972 Master Plan of State University of New York called for a reevaluation of the existing tenure system. "It seems clear," the plan said, "that the matter of faculty tenure is evolving as a major issue which cannot and should not be ignored. We propose a careful reexamination of the present tenure system. The major aim of this review should be to retain and enhance the basic goals of tenure, while developing safeguards against its possible abuse."

Many groups within the University have given careful and thoughtful attention to the question of tenure. It seems timely and appropriate that I comment now, indicating the principles on which the administration of the Trustees' policies on tenure will be based.

The history of faculty tenure is well known. It emerged early in this century as a safeguard to protect professional, capable faculty members from dismissal for expressing unpopular or provocative views.

Over the years tenure has contributed enormously to the stability and strength of the teaching profession and to institutional excellence as well. Further, the conditions of job security have now extended far beyond the faculty, and have become a part of personnel practices throughout society. The tradition of tenure has persisted over the years with only occasional criticism from those who felt the abuses might outdistance the virtues of the process.

In recent years, however, the tenure debate has intensified both within and outside the profession. The exchange has become especially heated as the growth of higher education has begun to level off. So long as the Nation's colleges and universities were rapidly expanding, they were able to preserve a fairly balanced relationship between tenured and non-tenured faculty. However, the plateauing of enrollment and the resultant slowdown in faculty growth has introduced the very real possibility that in many academic departments most of the faculty will in time be tenured.
Rapid increase in the percentage of tenured faculty will, it is being argued, restrict the institution's capacity to respond to educational and scholarly needs during a time of rapid change. Some contend that because of continuing shifts both in the content and the methodology of education, it is essential that younger faculty continue to be added in order to keep the program vital. It has also been suggested that larger numbers of women and minority group members are becoming available for employment and, if future employment opportunities are restricted, these groups will continue to be disadvantaged.

In searching for a University response to these issues, the needs of the institutions as well as individuals have been carefully weighed. It is clear that as State University's enrollment stabilizes, we, too, may have an ever increasing percentage of our faculty on tenure if the present rate of increase of four percent a year in the proportion on tenure persists. Further, it is also true that since State University has a younger faculty on the average than many other institutions, the prospect of very limited faculty turnover may persist for years to come. Given these considerations, the University response will embrace ten interrelated elements.

First, the State University of New York reaffirms its commitment to the principles of tenure. This tradition has added enormously to the stability and strength of our profession and, while there are problems and potential for abuses in its execution, the principle is sound and the policy will be preserved.

Second, no rigid quota will be placed on the number of tenured faculty permitted in the system. While a high percentage of tenured faculty in a given department or on a campus may be educationally harmful, it also seems clear that an artificially imposed ceiling cannot be defended. Such an arrangement ignores interdepartmental and intercampus differences and may discriminate against unusually gifted non-tenured faculty, including women and minority group members as they become available for employment in larger numbers.

Third, the process by which tenure decisions are made must be strengthened to assure that continuing appointment in the University is extended only to those who have demonstrated the highest competence and whose future performance can be reasonably expected to be professionally excellent.
Fourth, to achieve this essential goal of an effective professional review of each prospective candidate, the criteria and procedure for tenure decisions on all campuses should be clearly set forth and reflect both standards of individual professional competence and the needs and resources of the University.

Fifth, each college will be asked to prepare an analysis of its current and projected level of faculty staffing and estimate the relationship between tenured and non-tenured faculty during the six-year period 1974-1980. Strategies for maintaining a healthy tenure/non-tenure balance within and among departments will be developed in the local campus context.

Sixth, the present seven-year rule will be continued as a requirement for tenure in the ranks of instructor, assistant professor, assistant librarian, and associate librarian. However, the present "prior service credit policy" should be made negotiable on a case-by-case basis at the time of appointment. It would still be permissible to count up to three years prior service credit, but campus presidents would have discretion to negotiate this with each newly appointed member of the college faculty.

Seventh, while preserving the possibility of an initial appointment on tenure at the senior ranks, the time period after which tenure is mandatory should be extended from three to four years at those ranks.

Eighth, a program of professional development to equip faculty to serve in other fields and for appropriate reassignment to interdisciplinary teaching and research will be developed. Through the use of sabbatical leave or special study leaves, most faculty members who find themselves in declining departments could remain professionally productive.

Ninth, we might also explore the possibility of creating a certain limited number of non-tenured slots in our institution which could be filled on a rotating basis by distinguished visiting scholars interested in such a short-term
academic experience. Such a plan would help provide added vitality in our academic program without jeopardizing the essential principles of professional stability.

Tenth, the matter of retirement in the University should be examined. We may wish to consider the possible reduction of the present mandatory age for retirement of faculty from 70 to 65. In addition, we may wish to give serious consideration to the development of an early retirement plan which would make attractive the withdrawal from State University employment as early as age 55 or 60.

These moves, taken together, should enable the University to maintain a vital and creative faculty, the central ingredient in the educational process. I plan to present to the Board of Trustees of the University specific proposals for amendment of their Policies where necessary and appropriate to effect these moves. Some items will, of course, require further consultation or more formal negotiation.

Looking ahead, I am concerned that we continue to examine the University tenure arrangements and procedures to assure that they remain effective. We should, for example, look for ways through which the effectiveness, creativity, and professional development of faculty members can be professionally reassessed for those on continuing appointment, as it now is for non-tenured faculty.

Finally, we must remain sensitive to the human equation in this entire issue. Discussions about tenure quotas and ratios and enrollment trends should not obscure the fact that we are not only talking about the well-being of an institution; we are also talking about the careers of highly qualified professionals. Here, as in all other areas of University concern, we must be sensitive to the individual faculty member while responsibly serving broader institutional interests as well. As these twin concerns are kept in proper balance, I am convinced the appropriate policies will be developed and sustained.

In the words of the recently released joint AAC-AAUP report, a tenure policy "rightly understood and properly administered" will be a source of strength to this University. I trust the principles set forth in this statement will contribute to that understanding and administration.

Ernest L. Boyer
Memorandum to Presidents
April 2, 1974

This memorandum addressed to:

Presidents, State-operated campuses

Copies for information only sent to:

Presidents, Community Colleges
Deans, Statutory Colleges
Chancellor Kibbee
Vice Provost Risley
President Miles
Dean McGrath