

# The Occidental

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## Hewitt case: Advisory Council 'atrocities'

### Gilman key to promotion denial; Affirmative Action Checkmated

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After spending the past two weeks talking to faculty members, administrators and students a consistent portrait of Mary Jane Hewitt emerges:

She is a challenging, innovative educator who has a deep concern for students. She is outspoken

*In preparing this investigative analysis of the background and impact of the Advisory Council's decision not to promote Mary Jane Hewitt, John Hinrichs and Rick Cole interviewed all eleven members of this year's Advisory Council and other faculty members and administrators, including the President of the College. Understandably, not all of them wished to speak on the record. In instances where deliberations of the Advisory Council are discussed, the facts have been confirmed by at least two sources.*

leader who has chaired her department, the Faculty Committee on General Policy and the Committee on Multicultural Education and was recently elected to join the Advisory Council next fall. She brings to campus, through her

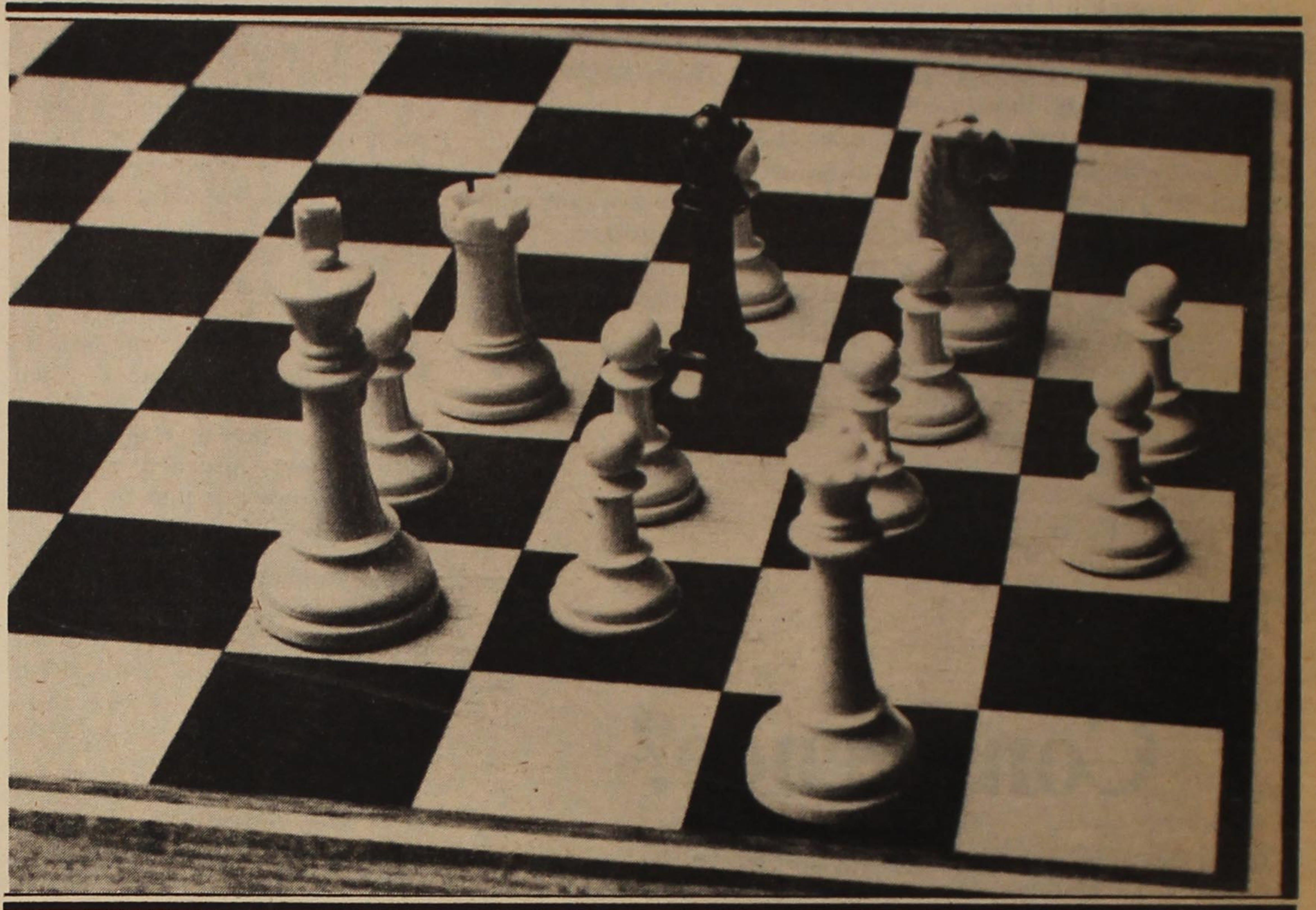
though ten faculty members, who have come to the College since Hewitt, have become associate professor. Only one assistant professor not promoted this year has been here longer and held that rank longer.

The Advisory Council is an eleven member committee that advises the President on matters of tenure, promotion and the granting of leaves. There are eight tenured faculty members—John Stephens, Tom Robertson, Tim Sanders, David Cole, Mike McAleenan, Lewis Owen, Hal Lauter and Jean Wyatt—on the Council who are elected by the faculty.

The president appoints two other members this year—Tom Slobko and Robert Bovinette. Dean of the Faculty Otis Shao presides at Council meetings.

Hewitt's decision to resign caught most of the members of the Advisory Council by surprise. They use words like "shocked" and "stunned." "I was first surprised and then I thought about it," biology professor John Stephens reflects, "and I wasn't surprised."

Hewitt's loss is called "a great loss" by English professor Jean Wyatt and "a disaster" by philosophy professor Hal Lauter. The impact will be felt throughout the life of the campus, the College's



Because of dissatisfaction over those decisions—and abuses that led to them—those secret doors have cracked slightly. Through that crack can be seen an almost incredible matrix of subjectivity, innuendo, hearsay, manipulation and even duplicity. We have found an Advisory Council marred by startling flaws and regularly subject to inconsistency, insensitivity and, at times, incompetency. Finally, we have discovered that the one apparently crucial actor in the process that refused tenure to Mary Jane Hewitt is the president himself, Richard Gilman.

We have learned that, by a vote of 6-3 on February 22 of last year, the Council actually voted to grant promotion to Hewitt, despite reservations about her scholarship expressed to the Council by the president. But at the conclusion of the vote, the president told the Council that he would take the decision under advisement, a move of the sort that Gilman himself admits occurs only once or twice a year. He told the Council that he was not as strongly convinced that Hewitt should be promoted as he would have liked to have been. He said he was unsure what factors played a role in the Council's decision. He expressed questions about the weight the Council gave to Hewitt's length of service and her professional achievement and scholarship potential.

Less than two weeks later, on March 3, 1977, a reconsideration of the vote was called for on the Hewitt recommendation. The president repeated his reservations about her professional achievement and scholarship potential. This time, after much less discussion, the result of the vote went against her 4-7.

Admitting that it is possible for him to influence a vote Gilman told us, "My misgivings could have quite possibly over the years changed a decision in a vote for reconsideration. However, it would be rare." Most Advisory Council members agree that the

President does have influence over decisions, however, as Slobko indicates, his influence "is difficult to judge."

Lauter indicates that he's "sure that on some people (the president) has some influence." Slobko agrees, adding "it's unrealistic to think that people aren't concerned with the president's opinion."

However, as biology professor John Stephens says, the President's influence is "subtle." Slobko characterizes Gilman's style as low key, "He sits there and listens. He tries very hard not to communicate his feelings one way or another before the vote is taken."

And yet, a former advisory council member said, "The president always gets what he wants from that committee." Current Council member Robertson attributes this to "some of the members who change their vote to maintain a cooperative relationship with the president." At least two members changed their minds last year on Hewitt's promotion and voted against it after Gilman repeatedly interjected his reservations about her.

Gilman refused comment to us on Hewitt, so only speculation can explain his actions. But one former member of the Advisory Council feels strongly that Hewitt's role at the time of the vote as chair of the Faculty Committee on General Policy (FCGP) was in Gilman's mind. The FCGP was handling the first faculty review of the president, "something he fought every step of the way," according to the same source. "I think he resented Hewitt's effective leadership," the faculty member details.

Hewitt later resigned from the FCGP with a stinging worded critique of the president's management. Underscoring the president's anger at his evaluation by the faculty which is generally known to be negative the source says of Gilman, "anyone with any self-respect would've resigned after being savagely criticized like that by his colleagues."

In contrast with last year's active role, this year we have

confirmed that Gilman made few comments at the approximately seventy-minute meeting, Feb. 23, at which it was decided not to recommend Hewitt for promotion for the third consecutive year. However, during the discussion of Hewitt's scholarship, the president did summarize the mood of the council's discussions as being similar to that of the previous two years in that it was difficult to get focus on her professional achievement.

Although one member's recollection was that the President's comments were insignificant, it is precisely in his role as "historian" of the Council that Gilman generally exercises the most direct influence on deliberations, according to the testimony of current and former members. Six of the eleven members of this year's council were new. The Hewitt case was the first promotion matter they handled this year. It is impossible to say whether Gilman's signals about previous year's questions affected the vote. But it seems probable that other factors, many of them exposing structural faults in the system itself, contributed more to her defeat by a 5-5 vote (two votes short of the two-thirds vote needed for recommendation). Although Lauter admits he was surprised at the vote, neither he nor any other members later moved to reconsider the denial. "I didn't think there was any hope," Lauter says. We have confirmed that Dean Shao did recommend a reconsideration of the vote to the president last month, but that has not been acted upon.

Among the factors inherent in the council's procedures that apparently put Hewitt at a disadvantage is the presence of a majority of new members on the Council.

English Professors Lewis Owen and Jean Wyatt joined last spring, while four others—Cole, Sanders, McAleenan and Slobko—were seated last fall. Although some served on previous Councils,

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personal contacts, such national figures as Alex Haley, Nikki Giovanni, Bea Richards, James Baldwin and Maya Angelou. She is doing seminal intercultural, interdisciplinary research which may shatter a century of traditional academic misconceptions about the black experience. Her service and counsel are routinely sought out by the entire college community. Mary Jane Hewitt is the kind of professor that Occidental College is fortunate to have and should do everything to keep here on the faculty.

The College, however, particularly its President, has driven her away.

Mary Jane Hewitt's resignation becomes effective at the end of fall term.

She resigned after learning that the American studies program's recommendation for her promotion from assistant to associate professor was denied by the Advisory Council for the third time in the past three years. The denial of promotion for a third time is not unprecedented, al-

though curriculum offerings and in the department she currently chairs. "Her image as a black woman and faculty member will be lost forever," laments Assistant Dean of Students Jimmy Moore. "She is virtually irreplaceable."

Lauter maintains that "the College could have avoided this (Hewitt's resignation) by promoting her." Another Advisory Council member sociology professor Michael McAleenan agrees, assessing the loss of Hewitt this way: "We've lost the single most irreplaceable member of this community and we didn't have to lose her."

McAleenan is right. The College didn't have to lose her. "There is no doubt in my mind," affirms Associate Dean of Students Brigida Knauer, "that she was committed to the place." But behind the walnut doors of secrecy in upper Coons, the Advisory Council deliberations resulted in three consecutive, mysterious denials of the American studies department recommendation that Hewitt be promoted.



# Advisory Council flaws work against Hewitt

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members told us, it still takes time to become acquainted with procedures and information. McAleenan asserts that new members "have less information, so in general terms, they are less powerful (than more senior members). The currency of power is information."

One member told us that in Hewitt's case, "the people who were most likely to argue" for Hewitt were new members—who are in a relatively less powerful position. Several of those new members, forbidden access to previous minutes, told us they were actually unaware at the time that Hewitt was up for her third recommendation, a fact they clearly regret not knowing.

Another factor that seems clearly to have worked against Hewitt is the Council's subjectivity in applying criteria. Although the Faculty Handbook provides for three areas to be taken into account (teaching, professional achievement, and service to the College) the members have free rein in balancing or not balancing these criteria, and the evidence presented for each one. McAleenan says that members "can vote because of or despite the evidence." This is partly due to the lack of clarity among members on what criteria are used and with what weight. Former Advisory Council member Jane Jaquette says: "There is little debate on

the rigid rules of secrecy than useful guidance on decision-making.

The Advisory Council has rejected attempts to put its criteria into policy formulas. Lauter says he would "hate to give up my power to weigh each case individually." As Jaquette quips: "There is a tradition of no tradition on the Advisory Council." As a result the council's decisions are frequently inexplicable, even to its own members. "I don't find it predictable," Stephens shrugs, "I don't find it consistent."

And while ambiguity allows each member to weigh different criteria individually, it also allows people to, as Robertson notes, "votes for the craziest of reasons." Even extraneous issues like questions of "lifestyle" get factored into votes, according to Robertson. "If there is something that bugs you about a person, it of course skews your evaluation of the data," he observes.

The Council clearly found a way to change its mind last year without new evidence. This year thier subjectivity undoubtedly played a role in denying Hewitt promotion. One member was particularly critical of the "absolute" standards he suspects some current members rigidly apply, such as publishing and service in general studies. "When you start with a couple automatic 'no' votes they add up quickly," the member notes.

the process makes it easy to veto candidates. And there is one constant according to Robertson: "The administration at every stage want to slow the (tenure and promotion) process down."

But the Hewitt vote might have gone differently for any number of reasons, including the fact that one member of the council was out of town. At least two of that member's colleagues think his arguments might have swayed the two votes that would have made the difference. Of course, whether this would have again resulted in the strong interposition of President Gilman cannot be gauged, nor can the impact of such an interposition. As it went, however, the President remained behind what one member called "the shield" of faculty division.

Hewitt's record of service to the College is such that the American studies Departmental Report of October 1976 maintained that it "needs no rehearsal." The report, which recommended tenure and promotion and was signed by David Axen, Robert Ryf, Robert Winter and Norman Cohen, reminded the Council that "any awareness we now have of a 'multicultural' experience can be traced in large part to her commitment and example, no less than to her verbal precisions." (It was Hewitt, according to the report, who pioneered the use of the word 'multicultural' as the founding head of a committee on 'Multicultural education'.)

Her visible and valuable contributions to faculty committees and discussions are consistent, with colleagues praising highly her term as chairperson of the Faculty Committee on General Policy. In terms of her broader contributions to the institution, Lauter sums them up as being "as strong or stronger than anybody else I know." Other members of the Council agree, using descriptions like "superlative" (Wyatt) and "exceptional" (Stephens). Cole calls her "a tremendously important person to this College," and that service "is her strongest suit."

But he also notes that in its considerations, Council members "generally weight service to the College least." McAleenan says that there are "some on the Council who would almost dis-

count it as a factor. McAleenan details the uncertainties by pointing out that: "Service to the College is the most troublesome because it is so broad and undefined. It's very subjective in two ways—did this person do enough and did this person do the right

Comments on her overall record were equally mixed, especially on the question of student attitudes. One member found the student evaluations inconclusive, while another described student reaction to her teaching as quite impressive. The member who found the

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thing?"

These general observations that the Council discounts service to the College were born out during February's deliberations on Hewitt. While most everyone rated her service "outstanding," outside the meeting one Council member recalls that during the discussion "her service was rated far below her actual record."

The question of teaching seems to have played a larger role, at least from the Council discussions. The Departmental Report is quite specific in evaluating her teaching, taking note of both strengths and weaknesses. It observed "a steadily improving teaching record in an ever-widening repertoire of courses," calling her "an innovative teacher, open to experiment."

The report discusses student reaction to her teaching, putting some complaints about her methods into perspective: "The overwhelming weight of the evidence is that her method works. She does get students to make the effort."

Citing the number of former students who continue to seek her counsel, it declares "it is abundantly clear that she has made a lasting impression as a teacher."

However, this impression is fuzzy to members of the Advisory Council. We have learned that in last February's deliberations, two members who witnessed the same Collegium lecture differed sharply in their evaluations. One described it as very poor and disorganized, while the other thought it was to the point and worthy of a good rating.

student's evaluations inconclusive said he would like to see more faculty evaluations of her, since he had heard another professor describe her as a "rambling lecturer."

The idea that faculty evaluation of Hewitt's teaching may not have been conclusively dealt with by the Council rankles Hewitt's American studies colleague David Axen. "In teaching the American Perspectives class," Axen notes, "Mary Jane comes under the closest scrutiny of at least eight other faculty members, who are in an excellent position to evaluate her teaching performance. It disturbs me that the informed opinions of her colleagues in classes and in the department do not appear to have been adequately considered."

The level of hearsay involved in the promotions considered this year disturbed McAleenan who termed it an "abuse." He feels this is part of a general pattern: adding, "It's clear that hearsay is used and has an impact well out of proportion to what it should be."

A particularly obnoxious form of hearsay in the Hewitt case involves the continual consideration of her attitude toward black students. Since a discussion in April, 1975 of possible prejudice in favor of black students—based upon hearsay—the Council has heard evaluations of her racial attitudes toward students, in three of its four major discussions of her with the upshot of the discussions being that she is "tough" on black students. Several Council members did not recall such racial considerations arising in other

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***'Some of the Council members change their vote to maintain a cooperative relationship with the president.'***

what criteria we should use to base our decisions." As a result, "it is clear that members have different sets of criteria," according to Slobko.

There is "no training, no briefing" given to new Advisory Council members, according to Sanders, rather only the broadly suggestive guidelines of the Faculty handbook are stressed. In fact it seems that more attention is given to impressing new members with

The question of voting is fraught with difficulties for a candidate like Mary Jane Hewitt. McAleenan argues "in the arithmetic of the Council it's clear that a 'no' vote is relatively more powerful than a 'yes' one." "The 'no' votes are all that matters," declares Robertson. While it only takes four votes in a full council to deny a recommendation, it takes eight votes to approve.

This innate conservative slant to



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People's cases.

Professional achievement and scholarship—another factor in evaluating promotion and tenure—is generally ranked by Council members as being second in importance only to teaching. In Hewitt's case, professional achievement was probably decisive in denying her promotion. Gilman reportedly expressed reservations about the February, 1977 vote which recommended promotion because of questions about her scholarship and professional achievement.

These same reasons were reportedly again cited by him when the Council reconsidered its decision, one week later and denied Hewitt promotion. We have confirmed that doubts about scholarship were raised by Gilman again this year.

A member of the council says that this year it seemed "at least from the discussion, that the reason for the denial was a supposed lack of scholarship."

But that rationale, one member contends, results from the fact that the Departmental report was "largely ignored." The member describes it as "well-documented, well-written and important—a much more thorough and time-consuming examination than the Advisory Council's." That report is particularly precise on the question of professional achievement. In its introduction the report stated: "Professors Hewitt's scholarly studies in non-literate but still articulate, cultural remains are of extraordinary importance to us...Her interests and background are unusually di-

larly misconception. In other words these are questions which conventional scholarship has almost totally ignored until recently because evidence is incredibly difficult to find and impossible to interpret on conventional assumptions."

**The members are 'on a moral holiday—they can talk one way and vote the other.'**

Since the Council accords less urgency to decisions on promotion than on tenure, it appears that the fact that Hewitt's scholarship was difficult to evaluate before completion—particularly by traditional scholars in other fields—some members of the council decided not to give her the benefit of their doubts. Since Shao notes that, in a general sense, her scholarly pursuits "defy any kind of traditional measurement standards," the Council as a whole did not strain itself to look deeper.

It made no attempt to contact professor Edward Braithwaite, an internationally recognized scholar, who was Hewitt's tutor during her study at the University of the West Indies and who visited Occidental at her invitation as a Remsen Bird lecturer. It did not invite in a departmental representative to carefully delineate the professional questions involved. Rather the Council clearly appears to have applied standards in the way specifically warned against in the Departmental report—"a truly multicultural scho-

of minorities and women). You must bring the same standards to bear in every case."

This has clearly worked against Hewitt, even though in her case there was an unmistakable understanding that different measurements were to be applied.

"When I came to Occidental," Hewitt says, "I told them I had no intention of pursuing a doctorate." Former deans of the faculty Robert Ryf and William Gerberding both indicated to Hewitt in writing that the lack of a Ph.D. would not be a factor in her tenure and promotion decisions. This was also guaranteed in her contract.

President Gilman says that this has "been acknowledged in the record and should not have been a consideration" in Advisory Council deliberations. However, we have learned her lack of a doctorate was cited in discussions of March 1976 as a factor working against her the first time she was denied tenure. This was also raised by one member in last February's discussion of Hewitt's promotion because she has not made progress on her self-imposed goal of receiving a doctorate.

As with other factors, the effect of the lack of a doctorate in this year's decision is uncertain. Biology professor John Stephens admits, "I won't say that everyone didn't take it into account." Tom Slobko is even more blunt, "It seems the lack of a doctorate was a factor in some people's minds."

And in another respect, the standards used by the Council certainly hindered a balanced evaluation of her professional achievement. The American studies report notes that she helped produce "a significant television series on black culture and arts and was for three years on the editorial board of *The Journal of Black Studeis*." She has also served as a member of the board of the Afro-American History Museum.

But as one member of the Council put it, for most Council members "there is no world beyond Oxy." Hewitt declares that she is "not gung-ho about reading scholarly papers to other scholars" and that her professional achievement has a wider range.

Of Primary importance is that she pursued another career before becoming a college professor, one which brought her into extensive contact with black culture and society, both nationally and internationally. Slobko affirms that previous experience should be "a real factor—however, some people on the Council don't agree with me." He contends that such experience, of which Hewitt's is extraordinary, "is tough to factor in."

The broader question of whether affirmative action should and does play a role in promotion and tenure decisions evokes a wide and ambiguous range of responses from Council members. One member contends that the issue is secondary in the Hewitt matter because she is qualified no matter what standards were objectively applied to her. But another member says that "you can tell by the vote it wasn't."

The weight given to the question of affirmative action ranges from almost none at all to considerable. There has never

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Oxyphoto by Theo Schwabacher

verse."

"There is probably no member of the faculty," the report continued, "less confined by disciplinary boundaries and certainly no one more qualified to help us analyze and reformulate our assumptions."

The report discusses in detail the deep significance of Hewitt's current work on her doctoral dissertation about two early women folklorists and creative artists. As Dean Shao reportedly did during the course of last February's Council discussions, the report compares her seminal research to that done by Alex Haley for *Roots* as well as to the lesser known work done by Herbert Gutman on the black family. "Each book," the report argued, "took something more than twelve years to complete and together they demolish a century of scho-

larship cannot be done on the ethnocentric assumptions which have always prevailed."

The reasons for this are pretty clear. Members are wary of the idea of using different standards for women and minorities. Although Shao believes that evaluating professors from other cultural backgrounds on the same standard as those from Occidental's white culture mindset is "second-class citizenship, melting pot stuff," most members of the Council say they believe in consistency.

English professor Jean Wyatt says, "We try to apply the same standards to everyone." Lauter agrees, adding, "Everyone tries to treat every case on a par with others." However, English professor Lewis Owen is most outspoken on the issue, "I think it is very unwise to apply different standards (in judging the scholarship



# Hewitt

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been a attempt, according to the members to establish any common guidelines for affirmative action, despite the College's publicly expressed institutional goal of developing a more diverse faculty. Gilman carefully delineates the College's stated responsibilities, "We have the policy of developing a diverse pool of applicants for openings." He adds, "We have made one offer (to a minority) that was not acceptable. However, with at least ten to fifteen searches being conducted a year, I'm sure there have been minorities or women in the finalist pool."

Yet beyond that, there is no institutional commitment to affirmative action guiding the Council in tenure and promotion decisions. Stephens says, "Most of us feel that affirmative action is better handled at the hiring stage." Sanders indicates he "would not specifically make it a factor in any particular case." David Cole would exclude it as a factor in measuring teaching and professional achievement, but considers it important in evaluating what a person can offer in the way of service to the College.

However, Brig Knauer thinks "it's" game playing to have a commitment to affirmative action at the hiring level and not have it at the tenure and promotion level." She adds, "since 1973—when the first affirmative action committee met, which I chaired—we have had backward progress in terms of minorities and virtually no progress for women."

The ambiguity and subjectivity involved in evaluating whether affirmative action should play a part in the decisions is symptomatic of the ambiguity and subjectivity involved in all Advisory Council decisions, but particularly so in Hewitt's case.

And this ambiguity and subjectivity is protected by a shroud of secrecy that surrounds the Council. According to the *Faculty Handbook*, "All Advisory Council deliberations relating to individual

faculty members are considered privileged and confidential." However, this secrecy rule does not please everyone. McAleenan believes "the more secrecy, the more a potential for abuse exists. We learned that from Watergate."

But most members believe that personal decisions must be made

**'Ever since she was hired here have been people who've been opposed to her personally.'**

in private. Jaquette maintains that deliberations cannot be done in any way other than in secret, "given that there is a person's self-image involved here." Slobko agrees, stating "that just couldn't be in the students' interest."

But what happens when the secrecy hides the kind of abuse McAleenan points to as being engendered and protected by secrecy? Gilman says that he, as the final arbiter, weighs the decisions on the basis of his perception of the quality of the deliberations. Shao says that he is responsible as Council chairman for preventing procedural abuses and that the President is responsible for preventing decisional abuses.

But who guards the guardians, especially when they operate in almost total secret?

When the twelve individuals who take their seats in the President's conference room to make decisions that affect the lives of faculty members and the future of the College, complete insulation is achieved. The members of

the Advisory Council are "on a moral holiday," according to a former member of the Council, "they can talk one way and vote the other way." There can only be guesses as to who cast what votes and for what matrix of reasons.

Total reliance is placed on what Owen calls "the good faith, integrity and even handedness" of the Advisory Council members.

However, "in general," McAleenan believes, "things have not always been handled conscientiously or even handedly this year." And, in particular we've found that the Hewitt decision underscores the dangers of relying on the "even handedness" of the

people are treated on this campus." When the College talks about multicultural education it "wants to deal," she says, "with the niceties and the exotic—music, food, dance, not oppression and exploitation." Other minority staff we interviewed expressed the same frustrations.

Members of her American studies program expressed similar outrage. Norman Cohen, who recommended her for promotion, called the decision "institutional racism."

Axeen called the decision "ludicrous." "Ever since she was first hired there have been people who've been opposed to her personally," he says. "They didn't even think the College should teach Black literature and black history."

Eric Newhall wrote a letter to the Council protesting their decision, calling it "a terrible mis-

take." Our investigation reveals that their outrage is justified. The President of the College and the Advisory Council, by making the murky and insensitive decision not to promote Hewitt for the third time precipitated the loss of a person who respected individuals at this campus have called irreplaceable.

In an emotional plea to the Advisory Council, Anne Howells called their stance "a truly stupid failure to understand and honor what she has done for the College. We have relied on her for too much, but she has worked without resentment. Her contributions have been immeasurable. We ought to have said thank you."

Mary Jane Hewitt continues to act with the dignity and purpose that meant so much to so many, but which was not enough for the President and his Advisory Council. "I don't owe them anything," she told us, "and clearly they feel they don't owe me anything, except my salary until I leave."

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