



May 30, 2003

Dr. Tom Trotter
Chair
School of Mathematics
Georgia Tech
Campus

Dear Tom:

I know that you are aware that the performance of each faculty member at Georgia Tech is reviewed each year. It is my responsibility as Dean to meet with the School Chairs and provide them with a written review of their performance. To aid me in this responsibility, I've asked you for a summary of your accomplishments, and I've sought the advice of the faculty and the staff of the School. This was accomplished, in part, by a questionnaire that was distributed to members of the School and returned anonymously to me, and in part by my discussion with selected members of the faculty of the School.

We received 26 responses to the questionnaire distributed in the School of Mathematics; the statistical results and a summary of the comments are reproduced below. I am sure you are aware that it is commonly believed that the response rate to such questionnaires is greater among individuals wishing to voice a concern than it is for those having no current issues. Thus, neither the statistical response nor the commentary should be viewed as a reliable poll of faculty opinion; nevertheless, the opinions expressed do provide valuable input to you and me. As you will learn by reading the comments abstracted from the responses, opinions vary from critical to very supportive.

My own view is that this has been a year of transition for the School of Mathematics in a number of dimensions. Your arrival as Chair clearly was met with high expectations on the part of the faculty. They were eager to have sound and permanent leadership in place after what had been a difficult period internally. The School had made considerable positive strides in recruiting and supporting excellent faculty members, and many were anticipating continuation and acceleration of that trend. The faculty were looking forward to a period of growth and relative calm.

To some extent these goals have been met. Two Associate Chair positions have been filled, which will surely help with the management of the School. We have just successfully completed faculty reappointment, promotion and tenure, and recruiting cycles. A number of successful offers to prospective faculty were made, which is a very hopeful sign. More broadly, it seems that there is an increased sense of confidence on campus that instruction in the School of Mathematics will be relevant and responsive to the needs of the units it serves.

Much of the criticism of your performance is triggered by a sense of frustration that is characterized as originating with an "absence of communication." This view is exemplified by several events that occurred during the year, but the primary source of irritation is the

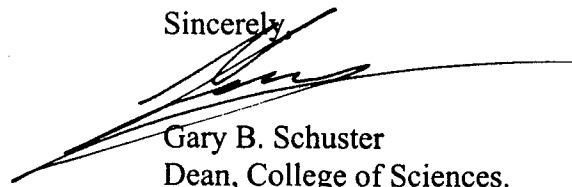
extraordinary salary increases given to two faculty members. Although it is generally acknowledged that both faculty members merited recognition, there is widespread criticism of the manner in which these decisions were made. In addition, there is concern that "favorites" (for one reason or another) are being rewarded. You and I are aware of "external" issues associated with one of the salary decisions, and this is suspected by several of the critics. However, attempts to justify that raise by praising the merit of accomplishments have backfired. There are those among the faculty who view their own accomplishments and the accomplishments of others as comparable (which, true or not, is not uncommon), and there are others that do not recognize the magnitude of the contributions of the "rewarded" faculty members (a matter that I can not judge). Additional examples used to support the notion of a communications gap are the attempts to hire Winkler and Mitchell, and uncertainties about your plans for the future of the Center for Dynamical Systems.

Tom, it has been my experience that faculty are generally willing to "believe the worst" when they feel uninformed. Academic faculty members are generally extraordinarily bright people with strongly held professional and personal views. It is challenging but necessary to build a sense of community and shared responsibility among the faculty. This can be accomplished by discussion and debate even though the ultimate decision and its execution are primarily the responsibility and duty of the Chair. This creates a dilemma in academic administration that requires the careful construction of key decisions and actions so that when they are executed there is a natural support base for it among the faculty. That base need not be unanimous or even a majority, but it must exist, and it should be composed of respected faculty members who are willing to defend and explain their recommendation. Often times this group comes from the key operating committees of the School. These committees can share in the assessment of confidential or sensitive information that should not be broadcast to all faculty members, and thus they can develop a broader perspective than can be achieved in a more public forum. And these committees often help the Chair assess professional accomplishments outside the area of his expertise. The view of many of the faculty who responded to the survey and several that I have spoken with is that key decisions were not made with the input or counsel of the faculty. That perception must be changed.

I have confidence that these rough spots can be smoothed and that the view of many of the currently critical faculty members can be changed. An effective way to attempt to accomplish this is for you to reach out to selected senior members of the faculty for their advice. I am certain that they will be candid with you, and that you will find that their comments are helpful. Also, it might be helpful if this coming fall semester you arranged a "retreat" for the faculty members of the School. The process of working together to develop an agreed upon forward-looking agenda for the retreat, and the open, but managed, discussion of that agenda during the event could provide a mechanism for setting a stable course for the School.

I have asked Jan Brown to schedule a meeting for us to discuss this letter.

Sincerely,



Gary B. Schuster
Dean, College of Sciences.