

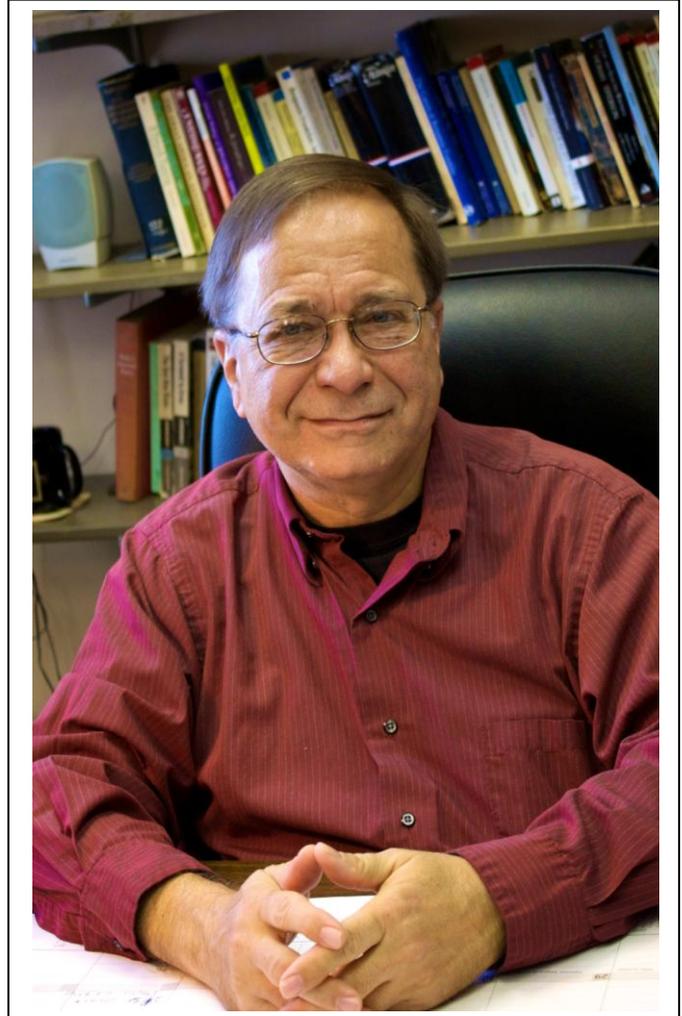
## Building an Excellent Working and Learning Environment

By Julie A Cajigas

David Larson, Ph.D., had the opportunity to learn about the negative effects of a poorly managed promotion and tenure process early in his career. A member of the Cleveland State University faculty since 1975, Larson's first teaching assignment prior to joining CSU was at a small liberal arts College. "In my third year at the college, there was a squabble about the promotion and tenure of a candidate" says Larson. "I was not directly involved, but the disagreement left the department badly divided." The environment became so toxic, he explained, that all eight faculty members in his Department decided to look for work the next year. "I was one of two faculty members from my Department lucky enough to find a position," he says. "I joined the faculty at Cleveland State University and achieved tenure four years later." Now, Larson serves as the chairperson of the English Department at Cleveland State University.

Larson's early experience with a difficult and secretive tenure process has made him a passionate advocate for a fair, thorough and open tenure and promotion process. "Tenure was initially founded in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to protect academic freedom," says Larson. "It keeps faculty members from being fired for their political views or research on controversial topics, and allows them to openly disagree with the college or university without fear of retribution." Tenure was founded in response to a high incidence of faculty being fired because they had spoken or written something that administration did not approve of. "Because academic freedom is so crucial to a thriving, growing academic environment, protecting and creating fair processes for faculty to achieve tenure is a necessity for a healthy collegiate environment," says Larson.

When David Larson arrived at Cleveland State in the '70s, the process for achieving tenure was better than what he had witnessed in the past, but still had a lot of room to grow if it was to become truly transparent and equitable. "I was one of the four AAUP executive committee members who



Larson. "The faculty at the time were frustrated with the administration, specifically the acting president, who had withheld raises, given secret raises and required all faculty members to teach an extra course," explains Larson.

"The next year, after an intense campaign, the university faculty voted by a wide margin to form an AAUP collective bargaining chapter," says Larson. Prior to becoming an active union, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) chapter at Cleveland State was only an advocacy chapter.

The benefits of an active AAUP union on campus were both immediate and long term. "The most immediate and dramatic benefit of the AAUP was seen in faculty salaries," says Larson. The faculty at the time had extremely different salaries, because some had been hired at much lower salaries than others. "You might have two faculty members with the

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same rank, in the same department, and the same number of years of experience, who had drastically different salaries,” he explains. “The union set up minimum salaries for all ranks including assistant, associate and full professors, which raised the pay grade of those who were paid the least and reduced extreme salary inequities throughout the faculty.”

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“The long term results of organizing an AAUP chapter, on the other hand, were that salary raises and promotions became more clear and fair,” says Larson. Instead of the backroom, secretive tenure decisions that Larson had witnessed at his previous position, the AAUP ensured that Cleveland State University’s policies and procedures for assigning tenure were fair. The review process now includes an orderly review of a faculty member’s documented research, service and teaching. A faculty member’s documentation is reviewed by a committee of tenured faculty in the department, by the chairperson of that department and then by an elected committee in the college and the dean of the college. The process also includes a university review committee and a grievance process with binding arbitration, should a faculty member be treated unfairly during the tenure decision-making process. The process, set forth in the AAUP contract is clear and legally binding.

Beyond providing a transparent tenure process and creating equity in faculty member’s salaries, the AAUP has also impacted the quality of the faculty. “I think having a strong, fair group like the AAUP has had a major effect on the recruitment of faculty,” says Larson. “The hiring process is clear, and some of the faculty members we’ve recruited like to see how our promotion and tenure assignments are made.” This clear structure for promotions and tenure sets Cleveland State University apart from a number of other institutions who do not publish and share such policies and processes.

As chair of the English Department, Dr. Larson now sits on the other side of the table from his days supporting the then nascent union. He still supports it wholeheartedly because, in addition to all the benefits for faculty, as he says, “In many ways, the clear process has made the relationship between faculty and administration stronger.” Larson finds that the clear rules and procedures help the administration relate to the faculty in a positive way to facilitate growth and strong relationships. He has come a long way from the toxic work environment in his first academic position and has built a career around the idea that creating equity and fairness in faculty salaries, promotions and tenure decisions is necessary to build an excellent working and learning environment.

### **David Larson, Ph.D., Chair of the English Department**

Dr. David Larson grew up in Western Minnesota, received his B.A. from the University of Minnesota, Morris and his Ph.D., from the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. His scholarly publications focus on the American Enlightenment and several treat Benjamin Franklin as a writer. He is currently putting his creative energies into fiction writing. For the past 35 years, Dr. Larson has taught courses in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century American literature, American fiction and 18<sup>th</sup> century British literature. More recently, he has developed an interest in contemporary American autobiography, and has begun offering a course on that subject. After being active in faculty governance and CSU-AAUP collective bargaining for many years, he became the chair of his Department in January of 2008.

## **About the Author**



**Julie A Cajigas** is both a Cleveland State University alumni and a current graduate student in the Department of Communication. Cajigas received her B.A. in Communication and her B.Mus. in Music Education from Cleveland State University in 2006. After graduation, she pursued a career in public relations, and after several years working for a major Cleveland corporation, she started her own business as a professional writer and public relations specialist. Cajigas is currently pursuing her Masters in Applied Communication Theory and plans to pursue her Doctorate Degree in the hopes of one day becoming a tenured Professor of Communication herself. She is an active writer in the Cleveland area, a frequent contributor to CoolCleveland, a weekly e-zine devoted to Cleveland events and accolades, and has been published in the Plain Dealer. Cajigas also serves as a contributing writer for a number of trade publications on a monthly basis. She is an avid musician and performs regularly with the Cleveland Orchestra Chorus and Cleveland State University Chorale.

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