13 January 1993

Dear Rob,

I've finally gotten back to your note of 23 November. I'm sorry I left it so long. I'll give you some reactions, but I'm not sure they're quite in the direction in which your note leads.

I think you're basically right about the importance of supporting our colleagues in a distressing situation. (I'll explain in a minute why I did not.) They weren't treated well, and an unfortunate conglomeration of circumstances led to their getting that letter. Some of the complications that underlie their situation include the lack of a clear conflict of interest policy, a breakdown of campus communications (if, indeed, they were ever very good), an atmosphere of suspicion and litigiousness on campus, and a new president who probably made a wrong choice of action within this confusing atmosphere. But, looking back on that discussion, I think it is probably correct to see this letter from the AAG as symptomatic of the lack of community or the breakdown of community. At least, I think it's correct to say that if we really had the kind of community feeling that we should have (and I think once did have), the letter wouldn't have been sent and the whole situation would have been handled in a relaxed, informal, congenial way.

Why didn't I join in the support of our colleagues? Well, perhaps I was feeling a bit petulant because I expected us to be discussing the larger issue, and I felt that we had been led off on a tangent. But, leaving my personal lack of graciousness aside, if I take this case as a symptom of there being a problem, I want to ask the more general questions and derive the take-home lessons. I think that would have been the more useful exercise for the group--not just general agonizing and expressions of sympathy. I tried to begin the discussion, before the letter was brought up, by expressing what I think is an important general point and a diagnosis of our underlying problem, and I'm sorry that no one heard what I said--at least, no one responded to it. So let me say it to you.

I think we have an underlying atmosphere of suspicion because we don't know one another and we mistrust one another's basic motivations for being here. I don't mean know one another in particularly personal ways, but, rather as teachers, as academics. When the College was founded, we all spent a lot of time trying to figure out how we could operate this strange new place, but I think we shared a general sense that we were all here to find new ways in higher education and that we were engaged in a great, multifaceted educational experiment. The "multifaceted" part is important. We knew that we weren't all trying to do exaclty the same thing, and much of the fun and excitement was learning about all the interesting, sometimes quirky, sometimes weird things that other people were doing. But I think the situation has changed for the worse, probably because of a combination of size (we don't all know one another even in superficially personal ways), diversity, and probably some other factors. We aren't sharing our stories with one another; we don't know one another; and we have vague suspicions that all those *other people* over there are trying to carry out illegitimate, wrongheaded agendas that are probably at odds with our own agendas. Not only are they probably all doing Wrong Things with their students, they (perhaps from the Old Dinosaurs' viewpoint) are probably all plotting to subvert the entire College or they (perhaps from the new people-of-color's viewpoint) are trying to hold onto exclusive power and make us second-class

members of the faculty.

My contention, then, is that the road to building community is to spend a lot of time talking about our fundamental business of teaching and learning--a lot of time sharing stories and a lot of time talking about our own hopes and motivations (and fears, I suppose). My faith is that if we really talk to one another about these matters, we will come to see the commonalities among all these hopes, dreams, and agendas; we will come to see that we are all trying to do mutually compatible things that should strengthen the College, that there is no reason for the unspoken fears and suspicions, and that we can all live together and work together for a common good. Once we acquire that shared sense of purpose, we will have a firm foundation for developing trust, true collegiality, and true community.

By the way, on a personal note, you have a real flair for observation and description of people. You mention Gonzalo's noisy style and Craig's ironic, angry one. I don't think I could describe people that well. It's a gift.

Best wishes,