Good morning. My name is Andrea Simpson and I am graduating senior at OSU double majoring in history and education. Today I will be speaking about the issues of tenure, protest, and freedom of speech at Oregon State, specifically during the late 1960’s. This was the subject of my senior history seminar and one that I have been researching for the last six months. Today we will explore the atmosphere of the university before protest events, the events themselves, the denial of tenure to politically outspoken professors who participated, and both the immediate aftermath and the current state of free speech on tenure.

To understand the foundation of academic freedom at OSU, we need to explore a case that brought the college to the forefront of the conversation before the 1960’s. Oregon State became famous for a case involving chemistry professor Ralph Spitzer in 1949. As a doctoral candidate, Spitzer worked directly under Linus Pauling and began to share his views of social sciences and mutual concerns about the atomic bomb. Spitzer applied for an international fellowship to study economics and philosophy, as well as physical chemistry, all on the glowing recommendation of Pauling. However, President August Strand thought that Spitzer had become much more interested in other matters than he was in teaching chemistry and did not renew his contract. Spitzer was told that there was no question of his ability and that he was not delinquent in his duties to the chemistry department. The OSC Appeals Committee fully supported Strand in his decision due to the fact that Spitzer was an Associate Professor and had not yet earned tenure. It was within the legal right of the President to refuse to renew Spitzer’s contract without any reasons given, just so long as political activity was not specifically identified as the cause for firing. Strand came out later and broadly hinted at Spitzers personal political beliefs as the reason for dismissal. Newspapers began to describe OSC as a battleground for academic freedom. This battle would resurface twenty years later, the details almost eerily identical to the Spitzer case.

In 1968, the Vietnam War was at its height with more than a half a million troops in combat. With 61% of the men killed being 21 and younger, many young men feared being drafted into the conflict. Campuses faced upheaval as protests turned violent and students confronted the unbalanced nature of the draft. Although Oregon State has always been considerably more conservative than its counterparts University of Oregon and Portland State, a fair amount of protests...
took place here on campus in the late 1960s. Students conducted sit-ins, erected tents in the quad, signed petitions and staged walkouts in protest of a myriad of catalyst issues including civil rights, the draft, and military presence on campus. And students weren’t the only ones speaking out. Sympathetic professors may have been a minority but as we will see, not necessarily a silent one. The administration struggled walking a fine line between maintaining order and suppressing free speech. And all three factions were surrounded by the opinions and pressures of the nation in a time of war.

So we have to ask, does the administration have the right to deny tenure and subsequently fire a professor because they contribute to what the administration sees as an undesirable atmosphere on campus? Or is it a violation of their civil rights, including free speech and right to gather peacefully? If they fulfill their academic obligations, should their extracurricular activities be ground for firing? To answer this we must first look at the changing structure of tenure.

The very nature of tenure is to give educators job security which allows them to freely explore all avenues of academic truth. But this description of tenure protects the professional life of a professor. But what about their personal beliefs or actions? Tenure was also designed to protect educators for that reason as well. Before the implementation of tenure, a teacher could be fired for various personal reasons including marriage, pregnancy, and political beliefs. But the cases that we are looking at today involve professors who were under review for tenure. If the basis for their denial was personal and political rather than based on their academic performance, than Oregon State would have only been adding to it’s reputation as a suppressor of free speech. By withholding a reason for not renewing their contracts, the university legally protected itself. But I will demonstrate that there was significant evidence for the true reason being personal.

Alan Young, Frank Harper, and Michael Papadopoulos were three professors who saw themselves as helping students navigate the unfamiliar and frightening arena of war. Many of them were being drafted, or knew someone who was, into an overseas conflict run by a government with no exit strategy. At home, young people faced racism, sexism, ageism in their communities and schools. These three professors felt that they were providing not only traditional education for students but guiding them as well-liked advisors.

On February 9, 1968, mathematics professor Michael Papadopoulos organized an Anti-Military Ball. This was a direct play off of the ROTCs annual Military Ball, which was held the night after the anti-war event. Proceeds from the event went to sponsor draft counseling, an area where fellow professor Alan Young had been a guidepost for students. Papadopoulos spoke to the Daily
Barometer about why he decided to bring this event to campus and said, “The Anti-Military Ball was set up with the idea that war is stupid and, I want you to go away and see what you can do about it.” He was also involved in picketing Dow Chemical when they came to recruit on campus.

In December of 1968, Papadopoulos came up for tenure review after being at Oregon State for about a year and a half. His peers in committee voted for tenure 20-1. However, after the recommendations advanced to the Dean of the college and the President’s office, the tenure was denied. Reasons given ranged from lack of progressive research to the vague insinuation that he did not meet standards for a professor outside of the Oregon State community. In refusing tenure to Papadopoulos, the Executive Office went against recommendations of individual math professors, an official math department tenure committee, the University Review and Appeals committee and the ad hoc committee. Papadopoulos pursued appeals all the way to the Oregon Supreme Court but to no avail. Some accusations were made that the reason he was denied tenure even after all these recommendations was because John Ward, Dean of the School of Science, had personal issues with him. The Mathematics department chairman, Dr. Arvid Lonseth, confirmed that Dean Ward had made derogatory comments about Papadopoulos to him about a year before the tenure review started. Dean Ward called the chairman into his office, and after a short discussion about that report, the Dean stated: “It’s a good thing that we didn’t give this bird tenure when we got him.” In his court testimony, Lonseth said that although nothing explicit was said, he got the impression from Ward that Papadopoulos should not be retained at Oregon State. These conversations took place well before any committees had met to discuss academic qualifications, which meant that Dean Ward had bias against Papadopoulos that could have only been based on his extracurricular social and political activities.

Many felt that universities had no place inviting outside organizations, be they private companies or the federal government, onto a campus whose primary purpose is to provide a safe environment for learning. In the April 3rd issue of the 1968 Barometer, OSU English professor Alan Young contributed an article titled “Alan Young – Draft Advisor.” The majority of the article is a bombshell where Young reveals that although he personally does not encourage people to turn in their draft card or flee to Canada to avoid the draft, he is able to put them in touch with people who hold sympathetic views and may be able to assist them. This offer, although bold and possibly in violation of Oregon State policy as well as federal law, was in service of the idea that students deserved to hear both sides of the argument. Because OSU allowed ROTC recruiters on campus, students should hear contrary options and opinions in the name of fairness, Young argued.
Although the University allowed Young to distribute this information, the article gives the impression that there was pressure and efforts to silence or remove Young because of these radical anti-war activities. ‘The department has, in fact, resisted any efforts to have me removed or gagged.’” These pressures from within the university could very well be referring to the upper levels of administration that were ultimately held responsible for his tenure denial. And use of the term “gagged” would imply that somewhere outside of the English department but within the University, efforts were being made to curtail Young’s freedom of speech.

Young also supported the efforts of a group that called themselves “OSU Resistance” when they decided to stage a draft card event. The afternoon of April 3, 1968, a crowd of 300 people, students and non-students, gathered outside the Memorial Union quad to view 12 students, two of them from OSU, turn in their military draft cards. Students tore up their draft cards while Professor Young counseled people on the draft resistance on site.

And perhaps one of the most well known OSU protests is that of the Black Student Union. In February of 1969, head football coach Dee Andros demanded that an African American student named Fred Milton shave his facial hair before being allowed to practice and play. Milton refused and was let go from the team. The incident sparked a local controversy about the treatment of black students by the administration. Demonstrations included large rallies, both for and against the Andros ruling. A handful of teachers even participated in a teaching boycott as a number of black students and sympathetic supporters on campus had declared their intention to boycott all classes and athletic events. Among these teachers were English professors Alan Young and Frank Harper. The American Federation of Teachers viewed this as a civil rights issue and encouraged its members and their colleagues to refuse to teach classes.

Even within the faculty, there was disagreement about the “appropriateness” of this refusal. The OSU Faculty Senate met on June 5, 1969 and registered its opposition to faculty refusing to teach during campus demonstrations and disruptions. Even though the resolution voted on made no mention of punitive measures for future refusal to teach, a proposed amendment which failed suggested that “the faculty member may be further reminded that he may be called upon to defend himself, with his academic appointment in jeopardy, if his actions, whether guided by conscience or not, violate the administrative code of the State System of Higher Education.” While this amendment was not attached nor approved, it shows us that the idea of dismissing a professor based on his political activities had support from a number of faculty and administration.
Since Young and Papadopoulos were under tenure review within a year of their political activity and Harper was in the middle of tenure review when his activity took place, one may conclude that with no concrete evidence of academic neglect and the professional support of their peers, that the tenure and employment decisions were of a more personal nature.

Although there is not time to adequately go into detail, students staged several protests against the tenure and employment decisions of the administration. One of these included a sit-in in Dean Gilkeys office that resulted in the arrest of 14 students.

President Roy Young spoke with Barometer about the sit-in arrests and defended bringing in the police saying, “The longer that action was delayed in calling in the police the more chance there was for violence.” This reasoning shows that fear of violence was one of the concerns and reasons that the administration shut down protests as quickly as possible. He also commented “the university has public opinion to think about and the possibility of more stringent laws if the administration does not exercise its authority to maintain order.” Within one interview, President Young summarized the administration’s justification of suppressing free speech. They had seen violent demonstrations across the country and recognized that when protests were allowed to escalate, violence occurred more frequently and in some cases, casualties occurred. With the amount of correspondence putting pressure on Young to control campus demonstrations, preemptively stop violence, and maintain the university’s positive image, the administration perhaps felt that the best way to accomplish those goals was to remove those faculty who contributed to opposition. Since most players in these events are no longer with us, we may never know the true intentions behind the actions.

What do these actions mean for tenure and the current state of academic freedom of speech? Ultimately, the problems that these teachers encountered are no more because tenure changed. There were a number of Supreme Court cases that changed the requirements for hiring and firing practices at the University level. Professors are no longer verbally promised tenure but instead are often immediately put on “tenure track.” Since 1972, there has been a steady decline in the percentage of college and university teaching positions that are either tenured or tenure-track. Some think that tenure is an antiquated institution that will not be around much longer.

As much as we may try to see this conflict from all perspectives, we are unable to know the personal narratives of many of the players. Much of the administration from this time is no longer with us so their true motives may never be known. We have only the physical correspondence, court documents, and
personal stories of those who remain with which to construct a narrative. Tenure is a subject that is fraught with conflict and controversy and as we can see, it was no different at Oregon State.