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# Faculty discusses Garza, relationship policy

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STAFF WRITER

Faculty members faced a weighty agenda as they assembled for their monthly meeting on Feb. 25 in McCardell Bicentennial Hall, with Nicholas Garza's '11 disappearance and the policy draft on student-staff sexual relationships prominent on the list of concerns.

President of the College Ronald D. Liebowitz and Dean of the College Tim Spears provided the group with an update on the search for Garza, who has been missing since Feb. 5. According to Spears, the Vermont State Police (VSP) Search and Rescue Team is back at the College and will be extending their search to more peripheral regions of campus — including parking lots and smaller nooks of buildings.

As explained by Liebowitz, the College offers resources to aid in this investigation, and while Public Safety does not have oversight of the situation, the department is doing everything it can to help the Middlebury Police Department in their efforts.

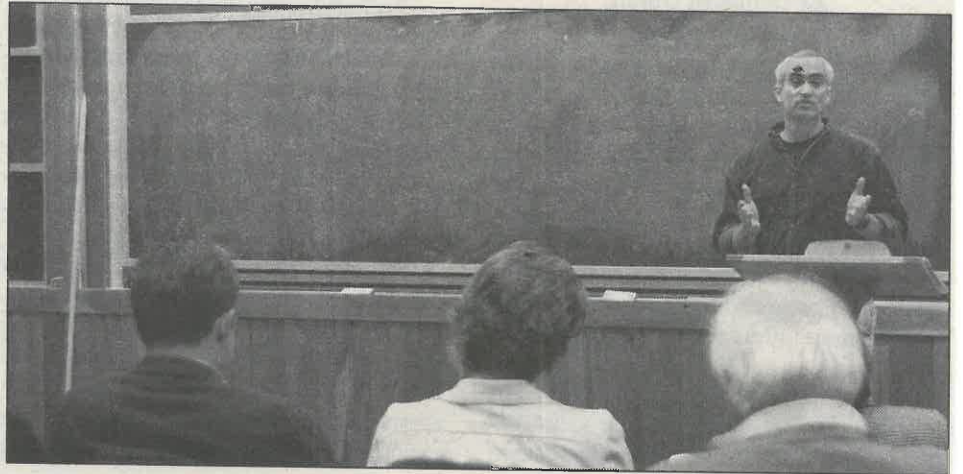
In addition, Garza's mother Natalie has contacted a Texas-based search and recovery organization called Equusearch. The team will be arriving sometime this week, said Liebowitz, and it will work primarily with the Middlebury Police Department. Following the recommendation of the Burlington Police Department, Natalie has also sought psychic advice — a practice which is occasionally utilized by law enforcement professionals.

The search is intensive, but the snow remains an extreme impediment. According to the commander of the VSP Search and Rescue team, the probability of recovery in such circumstances is as low as 40 percent. The current state of Garza's disappearance thus remains riddled with uncertainty.

"The more information we get, the more questions arise and, at this time, the less information we can be sure of," said Liebowitz. "The assumptions upon which the initial searches were based are being questioned, and that has led to some different tangents on the search."

Spears echoed this sentiment. "I think what [President Liebowitz] is getting at is that when you put together a time-line based on input from a bunch of different people, it's confusing," he said. "I think also [that because] the search and rescue teams haven't found anything yet ... it encourages one to look beyond what we know now, and it raises questions about what might have happened. I think this kind of speculation is a product of the uncertainty that we are all feeling."

Following Monday's meeting, admin-



Grace Duggan

Miguel Fernandez leads discussion on the proposals regarding student-faculty relationships.

istrators emphasized that the College is still encouraging all students and community members with information about Garza's disappearance or whereabouts in early February to contact the Middlebury Police Department (MPD). Officials are investigating all leads and scenarios.

Conversation at the Feb. 25 meeting further centered on administrative policy regarding sexual relationships between faculty and students. Debate has arisen between faculty members on the issue, with some supporting a policy of mandatory notification of misconduct followed by appropriate action, while others suggested an outright ban.

After extensive research and discussion, the Faculty Council has adopted the former stance. Under their proposed policy, "the College requires that any faculty member who has supervisory, evaluative, coaching, or pedagogical responsibilities with respect to a student with whom he or she has had, or currently has, a sexual relationship to notify the Dean of the Faculty immediately." Following this notification, the Dean of Faculty and Dean of the College would take necessary steps to ensure academic integrity for the student, while simultaneously considering the interests of faculty and the larger College community.

Though the policy asserts a strong expectation for faculty to avoid these relationships, it resists banning them completely — a choice which would be logistically difficult, if not impossible, to enforce. The Faculty Council warned that a ban might threaten the safety of involved students, as a faculty member might silence his or her partner in light of possible suspension.

Others present at the Feb. 25 meeting met such claims with dissent. Stephen Donadio, Fulton Professor of Humanities at the College, most notably raised objection. "What's being

proposed is altogether unrealistic," said Donadio. "[The Faculty Council's current policy] makes the College administration complicit in the behavior it addresses. I think the machinery of reporting is altogether fantastic."

From this perspective, Donadio offered a simple counterproposal. He suggested that the College regard sexual relationships between faculty and students as unethical and unprofessional, continuing that such behavior should be met with a range of penalties — including termination of employment.

While Donadio's proposal did gain some support among others at the meeting, the group ultimately voted against it, choosing instead to follow the Faculty Council's recommended policy of notification. Donadio's concerns nevertheless raised some important questions.

One faculty member warned that the current administrative policy will fail to address interests of the wider professional community. If a sexual affiliation exists between any student and faculty member, it might taint all other academic relationships, encouraging surrounding students to regard their professors in appropriate sexual terms.

Another opponent worried that the present policy places an emphasis on serial abuse, implying that sexual relationships will only be punished when they have become frequent or habitual for a particular faculty member.

Still others responded that the Faculty Council's policy — and the firm insistence on notification — strikes an excellent balance of avoiding inappropriate sexual relationships and protecting the involved parties.

In the end, discussion was put on hold due to time constraints of the Feb. 25 meeting. Further conversation on the matter, as well as efforts to perfect the Faculty Council's proposal, will continue in the coming months.