

Resolution on the Retirement of James P. O’Leary
Read by Frederick Nelson, Department of Mechanical Engineering

To be adopted by the Faculty of Arts, Sciences and Engineering of Tufts University, May 18, 2005

This June marks the retirement of James Pierce O’Leary after 42 years on the faculty of the School of Engineering.

Jim is a native of Harrisburg Pennsylvania and received his Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering from Villanova University. Jim had always wanted to teach and at that time West Virginia University had a policy permitting people with a bachelor degree to be appointed to the faculty as instructors. So Jim applied for such a position and was appointed instructor in mechanical engineering in 1960. While a fulltime instructor Jim pursued his Master of Science in Mechanical Engineering on a part-time basis, receiving that degree in 1964. But Jim didn’t just want to teach; he wanted to teach design. This desire drew him to the summer design course taught by Robert Mann at MIT. A fellow student in that course was Percy Hill, whose book on design was being used by Jim at WVU. Their meeting led to long and fruitful discussions on how to teach design with many of them held over an evening bridge table. So when WVU phased out instructorships in 1963, Jim picked up the telephone and was soon an instructor in the Department of Engineering Graphics at Tufts. Jim rose to Assistant Professor in 1964 and received tenure and promotion to Associate Professor in 1970. Since his initial appointment Jim saw the Department change into the Department of Graphics and Design, then the Department of Design and, lastly, the merger of most of its members into the Department of Mechanical Engineering.

But Jim didn’t just teach design he did design. He is an example of the simplest, and maybe the best, definition of an engineer: someone who builds things. Early in his Tufts career he spent a series of summers at the Polaroid Corporation where he helped design, erect, and commission a complex train of machines for assembling Polaroid’s film packs. The personal associations he developed there led to his involvement in the Boston Section of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers and his dedication and service to that organization extended over many years, ending only a few years ago after a long tenure as its Treasurer. For another client, he designed a unique machine to measure the cutting force of surgical scalpels and thereby their sharpness. Jim’s many industrial contacts paid significant dividends for the Department when he assisted in the development of its senior design course. The degree of interaction between Tufts senior mechanical engineering students and the array of project sponsors Jim recruited from local industry has received many accolades, most importantly from our accreditors who commented that our senior design course was an exemplar for other mechanical engineering programs. It should also be pointed out that Jim’s stature as a design engineer is reflected in his list of 14 patents, which may set the standard within the School of Engineering. One of the most notable of these is for a device to reattach ligaments and tendons to bone. It epitomizes the goals of engineering design by combining simplicity and effectiveness to fulfill a need, in this case a longstanding need

in orthopedic surgery. Lastly, but by no means least, we acknowledge Jim's service on numerous committees of the School of Engineering and of the Faculty of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering. His caring way of performing these vital responsibilities advanced the collegiality of this campus and made Tufts a more pleasant place. So as Jim embarks on his endless sabbatical, he can be assured of the admiration of his colleagues and our best wishes for a full return to an active and productive life.

On behalf of the Department of Mechanical Engineering, I move that this resolution on the retirement of James Pierce O'Leary be spread on the minutes of the faculty of Arts, Sciences and Engineering and that copies of it be sent to him and his wife, Olga, and to his children, James and Kevin O'Leary, and Kathleen Lazzaro.

For the Department of Mechanical Engineering
Frederick C. Nelson
John G. Kreifeldt

May 18, 2005