Resolution on the Retirement of
Joseph F. DeBold, Department of Psychology

The members of the Department of Psychology are pleased to recognize Professor Joe DeBold and his many years of outstanding research, teaching, and service at Tufts.

As a Navy brat Joe spent most of his formative years in California of the 50’s and 60’s, but he was born in Charlestown, Massachusetts. His early interests were not particularly academically oriented: he became an aficionado of fine motorcycles, folk music, exquisite chocolates and wines – and not necessarily in this order. In 1979, Joe was recruited to Tufts in a cluster hire to be part of the core of the behavioral neuroscience focus in the Department of Psychology. Previously, Joe had taught at Carnegie-Mellon University and at Michigan State University after attaining a Ph.D. in psychobiology at the University of California at Irvine.

After steroid hormones were discovered in brain cells, Joe was among the pioneers in delineating their functions, particularly with regard to their role in orchestrating the intricate neural architecture of proceptive and receptive sexual behavior. In recent decades, Joe was part of a team that identified neural mechanisms of alcohol and its link to aggressive behavior. Joe has been supported in the past by grants from the NSF, and from NIH/NIDA and NIH/NIAAA since the 1980s to the present. He enhanced the eminence and visibility of the department by serving on the editorial board of the premier journal in behavioral endocrinology, Hormones and Behavior, and as a member of grant review committees for NSF.

Here at Tufts, the success of Joe’s well-crafted lectures and his interest in the academic advancement of each student was recognized with the Lillian and Joseph Leibner Award for Excellence in Teaching and Advising of Students in 2011. Joe has the rare gift for explaining complicated subject matter in clear and accessible form. His trademark style is to facilitate student learning with a special combination of understated elegance and explanatory clarity. He is one of those teachers committed to talking to each student until he or she “gets it.” To overhear one of Joe’s concise explanations of a complex physiological phenomenon is, indeed, a joy to behold.

Joe inspired generations of students to begin careers in the life sciences. As member and former chair of the Health Professions committee he catapulted a countless number of aspiring students on the trajectory to become doctors. Needless to say, every year a large number of graduating seniors consider Joe as the one professor who had a major impact on their studies at Tufts.

We were fortunate that Joe took on the duties as department chair for two 3-year terms, and his inability to say “no” led to his extraordinary long service on the labor-intensive Health Professions committee from 1980 until now. He also chaired the Academic Standing and Honors committee several times. In the department, Joe has served on every committee multiple times, demonstrating his incomparable collegiality.

Joe will continue to contribute to ongoing NIH-supported projects before he rides off into the California sunset in his new role as a grower of wine grapes.

On behalf of the faculty of the Department of Psychology, I respectfully request that this resolution be spread on the minutes and that a copy of it be provided to Professor DeBold and his wife Carol.