



PROPOSAL TO CREATE PROFESSOR OF TEACHING RANK (April 2021)

The Professor of Teaching Task Force has prepared a proposal for consideration to create a new set of ranks at OSU:

- Assistant Professor of Teaching
- Associate Professor of Teaching
- Professor of Teaching

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Faculty at OSU in the past have generally been hired as tenure-line professors and instructors. The job description of tenure-line faculty always included a combination of scholarly work, teaching, and service. Instructors have been hired, evaluated, and promoted primarily on the basis of their teaching.

As the economic realities of higher education have changed, the university has broadened the core faculty to include more specialized classes of faculty members, including:

- Research professors, who are hired, evaluated, and promoted primarily on the basis of their scholarly work
- Professional faculty, whose tasks are mainly to support the success of our students and the functioning of the university
- Most recently, the rank of Professor of Practice was created to meet the needs of Extension programs

For nearly a decade, the Faculty Senate has labored to improve the working conditions of our non-tenure track teaching faculty. In 2014 and again in 2016, reports were presented to the OSU Faculty Senate, which learned of the considerable unhappiness among the Instructor ranks. Serious concerns included worries about job security, professional development, unjust compensation, and a sense of low status on campus. These reports also recommended access to extended contracts.

OSU's Strategic Plan 4.0 – in the section titled “Provide distinctive curricula and support innovative pedagogy to advance our mission and vision” – states the following goal: to “Develop a teaching professor career track.”

As a result, the Faculty Senate created a working group to investigate this new rank and its potential structure.

These new professorial ranks would be expected to have longer term appointments than instructors, but the Professor of Teaching will not be a tenure-track position. It is possible that some colleges and programs would create a pathway for people currently employed in instructor positions to transition into this new rank. In addition, new Professor of Teaching positions could be created in programs wishing to use them. At the same time, there is no requirement for colleges or departments to use these ranks. Not all academic colleges use all the different ranks available on campus.

WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF A PROFESSOR OF TEACHING?

It is expected that the Professor of Teaching rank would include FTE along the following lines, with details to be negotiated between the faculty member and their unit head:

- Teaching .75 to .85
- Scholarship .05 to .15
- Service .05 to .1

The main responsibility of a Professors of Teaching is instruction, which accounts for the large majority of the allocated time. In the delivery of their duties, the percentage of time spent on direct delivery of courses would be larger for a Professor of Teaching than for a typical tenure-line faculty member, though likely less than that allocated for an instructor-rank faculty member.

In addition, since all Professorial ranks at OSU have a scholarship component, Professors of Teaching would have some of their FTE devoted to scholarship, likely in the range of .05 and .15 FTE. While variation will exist, the content of the scholarship FTE for Professors of Teaching would be expected to tend toward the impacts and effects of curricular development, or of pedagogical improvements, innovations and methodologies, suitable for each individual's discipline.*

All faculty members, including Professors of Teaching, must perform service, and this will have a value of .05 or .10 FTE.

* Curriculum development does not constitute scholarship. All instructional faculty are expected to contribute to curriculum development of the courses that they are assigned. This work is independent of rank, but strongly dependent on course level. Many instructors deliver large lower division courses, while a large number of tenure line faculty members teach smaller, major-specific upper division and graduate courses. These courses have very different curriculum development needs. For the new Professor of Teaching rank, it is important to acknowledge that curriculum development can be driven by educational research or lead to educational research, and such scholarship would have to be justified in that context.

Units could recruit Professors of Teaching nationally. They could possibly also fill the new rank with internal candidates who currently serve as instructors. As is currently the case for instructors, units will determine the appropriate degree requirements for individual positions.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

There are a number of benefits for teaching faculty, and for academic colleges and programs, that can be realized by creating this new set of ranks.

1. Competitive recruitment and retention of excellent instructors whose focus is teaching

Some colleges are struggling to recruit and retain excellent teaching faculty. A Professor of Teaching rank will provide greater attractiveness in recruitment for the teaching pathway, to help us recruit and retain instructors who deeply value teaching. (This may also be of use in facilitating partner accommodation for dual career hires in recruitment by providing a more suitable position for partners of recruits for tenure-track positions.) This rank could also offer more job security by allowing longer term appointments or rolling contracts. It might also offer a step up in pay scales between typical instructor rank salaries and tenure-track salaries.

2. Parity with other non-tenure track professorial ranks at OSU.

Other categories of non-tenure track faculty at OSU, often with no higher qualifications than our instructors, carry professorial titles. These include: Research Professor, Clinical Professor, and Professor of Practice. A Professor of Teaching rank will provide greater alignment with these other roles on campus, and further professionalize the tasks of teaching and curriculum development. It also provides added opportunities for qualified individuals in the Professor of Teaching rank to be members of the graduate faculty in their unit.

3. An increase in status, respect, and morale for instructors

The title of Professor generates more respect and career benefits. Use of language is an important indicator of status. Designating in OSU communications that a topic applies to “professors, not instructors” or worse, the title of “adjunct,” demeans some of the hardest working individuals at OSU. Professorial ranks and titles command more respect both within and outside the OSU community, including colleagues, students, administrators, and other colleges and universities (e.g., graduate admissions committees receiving letters of recommendation from Professors of Teaching). In addition, including professorial ranks and titles are likely to encourage departments that hire primarily teaching faculty to consider them as career professionals since they also conduct scholarly work like the tenure-track faculty.

4. OSU will catch up with a national trend that many other universities have already embraced

Just a few years ago, only a half-dozen universities were conferring professorial titles on their teaching faculty. Now there are at least 40 such universities. OSU's embrace of this change will help with recruitment and highlight our commitment to our educational mission.

5. Ability to carry out scholarship and research and receive recognition for it.

Professors of Teaching would have a scholarship component in their FTE. The last two decades have seen a rise in the discipline-based educational research enterprise. Some applicants have an educational research background, and lack interest in the tenure process, but wish to pursue pedagogical research projects and curriculum development. Currently, these people choose employment in smaller colleges. A Professor of Teaching rank attracts these skilled teachers. In addition, instructors are currently not allowed to be principal investigators or co-investigators on many federal grants. They need to work with other professorial faculty members to achieve their own goals. This rank is important in creating more opportunities for funded research to serving on grants and advising graduate students.

6. Demonstrate OSU's commitment to undergraduate education

Professorial ranks and titles will demonstrate to students, parents, legislators, and donors that the faculty teaching these courses are innovators and even national leaders advancing the pedagogy of their disciplines.

7. Via a transition process (to be determined), recognize the achievements of current instructors at OSU

A transition process would have to be determined at the university level and unit level. That is not a subject for this proposal to determine. It is possible that the transition process could sunset after a fixed number of years. After that, instructors would have to apply for open positions. This is similar to what was done after the establishment of the rank of Professor of Practice.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE PROFESSOR OF TEACHING RANKS

There are some important concerns and potential downsides to adopting this new rank.

- This new position could further add to the hierarchy of ranks that already exists in academia and at OSU. Rather than alleviating what has come to be seen as a class structure on campus, this new rank could exacerbate it and divide instructional faculty even further.

- Considering the proportion of women and underrepresented minorities serving in instructor positions at OSU, it is possible that how this rank is employed could end up deepening existing inequities on campus, and diminishing the work that is done disproportionately by those who identify as part of these populations.
- Budgetary concerns may limit the use of the Professor of Teaching rank if it comes with a higher salary and multi-year contracts. Department Heads and College Deans may not be willing to appoint people in this new rank.
- Having this rank available could lead to conflict and tension inside units with respect to who qualifies and who does not.

TASKS GOING FORWARD

The Task Force will engage the OSU community in a series of conversations and listening sessions to ascertain interest in potentially adopting this new set of ranks. It will be important to hear about reasons for support, concerns, and to see what types of modifications, terms and conditions should be considered in the use of a Professor of Teaching rank.

If it appears that there is interest in moving forward with this proposal, it will require approval and implementation from a number of parties, starting with approval by the Faculty Senate. Support from OSU administrators and Deans, and Faculty Affairs will also be essential to adopting these ranks.

The Faculty Senate Promotion and Tenure Committee will need to establish criteria and timelines for promotion. The Faculty Union, Human Resources, and the Faculty Senate will need to set rules for selecting current instructors to transition into the rank. The University and Faculty Union will be expected to address the issue of longer-term contracts and/or rolling contracts to provide more job security.