

Faculty Senate

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Promotion & Tenure Committee

2007-2008 Annual Report

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This was another active year for the Promotion and Tenure Committee, with a number of important charges handed to us as follow-up activities and charges at the beginning of the year. In addition, other discussions intersected our purview during the year and have been added under individual headings.

At the beginning of the year (July 2007), the Faculty Senate Promotion and Tenure committee was given three specific charges:

- Creation of a university wide mid-term review process for tenure-track faculty.
- Creation of a set of guidelines for the student evaluation letter for the promotion and tenure dossier.
- Review of the College level process for promotion and tenure.

In the sections below, I will discuss what the committee's actions were on each of the items. Additional information exists as part of other Faculty Senate meeting minutes and will not be reproduced here (I have tried to reference appropriate documents).

Original Charges

Creation of a university wide mid-term review process for tenure-track faculty

Our committee successfully developed a set of guidelines that has now been approved by the Faculty Senate and is being implemented across the university. The document (attached) will become part of a series of guidelines maintained by the Office of Academic Affairs to provide faculty the information they need to take charge of their own cases, and to help units stay on track with respect to the advice they are providing to their junior colleagues.

Creation of guidelines for the student evaluation letter for the promotion and tenure dossier

This second major charge was focused at improving the quality and consistency of the student input for promotion and tenure. Specifically, we targeted the need to obtain information on performance of faculty as advisors by facilitating the collection and use of letters from former students and advisees. In addition, the new guidelines were written within the framework of the need to clarify the boundaries of the waiver of access for student letters. This was accomplished in collaboration with the office of Legal Council and the FS Executive Committee.

The resultant document (attached) represents another administrative tool, which will be maintained by Academic Affairs.

Review of the College level process for promotion and tenure

The committee made a number of alterations in the unit level guidelines last year, as well as changes to the definitions of the specific assignments. This year, we were asked to examine the role of the college review process.

After some discussion in our committee, it became clear that the college level process has a less clear purpose than does the P&T process at the unit or University level. This may be viewed either as a lack of clarity, or as flexibility. Regardless, the response taken by various colleges at OSU raised the issue of the lack of a uniform process at the college level across the university. The two most important examples of this

are:

1. The degree of independence of the college committee and the dean. (e.g. does the college committee meet and deliberate separately prior to writing it's own independent letter?)
2. The extent of the faculty voice at the college level. Specifically, what is the membership of the college committee? Currently the range is from a faculty dominated committee to a committee essentially entirely composed of administrators.

These issues were raised with the Provost's Council. Specifically, we asked "what level of uniformity in process and standards is optimal from the perspective of the College administration?"

In response, we received some specific information, strong opinions and requests for our positions. Questions from the Provost's Council are in bold, followed by our position statement.

Should there be a merit review at the College level?

Merit review is implicit in P&T process at all levels. Process review is specifically mentioned in the section in the P&T guidelines on the college level process because of past problems with process at the unit level.

How should we specify the character of faculty representation at the College level?

College level P&T committees should have significant independent faculty representation. In this case, independent in the sense of being selected by a process independent of the Dean's office. The goal should be to select individuals who:

- are knowledgeable with respect to the process and the promotion benchmarks
- represent the faculty perspective as a whole (not the candidate)
- are viewed as independent from the dean and administration.

Individuals might be selected from among elected unit P&T committee chairs, former unit chairs, or from an established list of volunteers (as per Anne Gillies suggestion last year).

The committee did not feel that they wished to make specific recommendations with respect to the proportion of the faculty representation. The paramount issue is the independence of the voice. This interpretation is consistent with the current wording of the guidelines. In effect, we interpret the selection of the faculty voice on the college committee by the Dean as a conflict of interest – something that is spoken to in other sections of the guidelines. Therefore, no additional changes in the guidelines need to be made.

What remains to be determined is the process for selecting the faculty representative(s). That process should be left to the individual college based on their own culture and history.

Independence of College level committee and Dean's office evaluation

One outcome of the position outlined above is that the evaluation performed by the college level committee should be independent of that done by the Dean or their designees.

Use of unit's strategic goals as criteria for Promotion and Tenure

The committee felt that the pursuit of strategic goals by unit leadership is clearly important. However, individual goals must be made consistent with those strategic goals if unit and college leadership wish to fairly implement their visions. In particular, with respect to individual faculty, the influence of strategic goals is most effectively and fairly wielded at the time of a faculty member's hire. Strategic goals – if they are important to the leadership of the college – and will be used for P&T– should be a component of the individual's position description. There is ample opportunity to revisit those goals each year and during the mid-tenure review. In that way, all parties are aware of the strategic and personal expectations inherent in each individual position.

It is the committee's position that it is the leadership's role to clearly communicate the impact of collective expectations on each individual during the annual review and mid-term review processes. Individuals should not be held accountable for strategic criteria for which they are unaware. To do so is fundamentally unfair and incompatible with the basic premise of the tenure system.

Recommendations

Our conclusions were that the current promotion and tenure guidelines for the college level process are overly vague. The changes implicit in our positions outlined above may be made without a rewriting of the guidelines. Nevertheless, it is the committee's position that clarity would be best served by revision of that section of the guidelines by the Faculty Senate P&T committee next year, and we provide the input above as

a starting point. A specific charge from the Executive Committee including boundary conditions would be helpful.

Other issues

Post-tenure review

As per our recommendations last year, a separate task force was configured to examine the process of post tenure review. That task force had one representative from this committee, and completed its task in early June. Those recommendations will be provided to the Faculty Senate P&T committee for process development and implementation in 2008-9.

Flexible tenure guidelines for College of Pharmacy

Our committee was asked to provide feedback to the College of Pharmacy with respect to a proposal to create a modified P&T process for Pharmacy faculty, using a model based on that used at OHSU. In general, our committee is not opposed to flexibility in the tenure system. However, there are a couple of constraints/suggestions we would like to have considered.

- We have a significant concern about the possibility of proliferating different tenure systems at OSU given that we are working on consistent University-wide guidelines.
- COAS already has a modified system where faculty are not eligible for tenure until the Associate to Full Professor promotion. We suggest Pharmacy investigate that option first.
- The position description is the ideal mechanism for documenting the expectations that a unit has for its faculty and should be used to document unique requirements of the unit.

Selection of unit level promotion and tenure committees

As part of the overall discussion of the level of independence of faculty and administrative independence in the promotion and tenure process, our committee was asked about the selection process for unit promotion and tenure committees. Our committee's interpretation of the existing guidelines is that the selection of the unit level committees should be done in a way that is as independent of the unit leader (chair or head) as possible. The ultimate goal is to create a unit committee made up of individuals that are both informed and independent.

Observations from P&T cycle

Many of the observations made in this cycle by our committee members were consistent with the following – which is largely consistent from observations made last year:

Problem cases often combined mediocre performance in one or more areas of the candidate's position with one or more of the following:

1. poor preparation of the case by the unit
2. poor communication of goals/PD workload; more specifically, unclear expectations about obtaining funds (how much and what kind/source) that could be more clear in the PD.
3. administrative turnover – e.g. new chair
4. bad/late advice from a supervisor – example – repeated good reviews based on a mediocre record
5. Difficulty of demonstrating scholarship when FTE for research and scholarship is low (<25%)
6. Poor selection of outside reviewers

Most of these problems are traceable to management practices rather than to the guidelines. An exception relates to the position descriptions, where there were no existing guidelines on how to write them prior to last year. In addition, many units still have no specific benchmarks for promotion or tenure, and occasionally use benchmarks that appear internally inconsistent. Faculty have little idea, independent of what they are told during their annual review or by their unit colleagues, of what is required of them.

On a broader theme, we as a community should decide on what our goals are in the overall process. Are we attempting to get everyone promoted or to obtain the clearest picture of everyone's record so that we feel confident in making firm decisions on the marginal cases? Are we suggesting that too much effort is being dedicated to guidelines that are most applicable to marginal cases? Is that where we should be putting our attention? That decision has a great effect on the faculty expectations of the process, both from the perspective of the candidates, and of the faculty in the units who we rely on to help construct the dossiers and administer P&T.

If one refers back to last year's report, one will see that many of the issues are the same. The one additional issue may be related to the specifics of this year, or may be related to an increase in the range of duties individuals are responsible for (within assigned duties, scholarship and service). There are two important observations with respect to the position descriptions and implications for evaluation:

1. Based on our observations, it is unclear what the expectations should be for individuals with low FTE in a given assignment. For example, what level of productivity at 0.20 FTE scholarship and creative activity represents distinction? Is it 1/3 that of someone at 0.6? What does that mean? Some clarity would help us greatly in providing our colleagues adequate career advice.
2. It is clear that units still use very different methods and measures for describing workload and FTE. During the course of this year's cycle, our group had the opportunity to participate in discussions with many units whose methods varied greatly. Each unit has its own motivation for how it determines its distribution of effort. However, if we are to use such numbers (% FTE) as a benchmark for evaluation, there must be a higher level of consistency in how they are determined across the university.

Recommendations

Administrative training – The need for better communication between junior faculty and units keeps asserting itself in each year's cycle. Towards that end, we recommend that chairs, and unit P&T committee chairs be provided with better training. This means training with respect to the technical aspects of dossier preparation - but more importantly training in mentoring and management. This year's cycle demonstrated the importance of accurate PROF reviews, communication with more than just one's direct supervisor, and for faculty to know and understand the guidelines and benchmarks for their areas (e.g. not to rely entirely on their colleagues).

University-wide metrics – this is a repeat from last year - Academic Affairs should take leadership in setting basic, university-wide metrics for the duties as set in position descriptions. Specifically, some baseline for the distribution of work with respect to teaching should also be set. It is inherently unfair for some faculty to get 40% FTE credit for teaching two graduate courses in one unit and others to only get 50% FTE credit for teaching six large undergraduate courses in another.

We do not think that a solution to this would need to be formulaic. However, the inequities represented across our campus must be addressed. It has become clear that it has a detrimental impact on individual cases, and makes university-wide comparisons difficult.

Topics for discussion for next year

College Level Process – revisions to the P&T guidelines should be made along the lines developed by this year's committee.

Post-tenure review – this committee will need to develop a process based on the recommendations from the Post-tenure review task force.

Flexible timeline for tenure – also from last year – use of a longer timeline for disciplines where it is appropriate (already the case for COAS). Very preliminary discussion in some areas of Chem, Geo, Pharm.

Final note on accountability for service: When I met with the executive committee at the beginning of the year, we discussed methods by which we could make faculty more accountable for their service. At that time, I suggested that committee chairs report on the activity of each of their committee members. As one can readily see, our committee was incredibly active and productive this year. All of our members participated, but I wanted to give special note to Paul Farber as he retires for his service in all his many roles.

[Executive Summary 2007-2008 Promotion and Tenure Review](#)