

Fixed-term Faculty Task Force Report and Recommendations: Executive Summary

The Faculty Senate's Fixed-Term Faculty Task Force (FTFTF) was charged by Bruce Sorte as Faculty Senate President to:

1. Define and describe the different types of fixed-term faculty across OSU, Oregon, and the US.
2. List expectations and benefits for scholarship and service among fixed-term faculty.
3. Determine how exemplary performance is or can be measured.
4. Describe how exemplary performance should be rewarded in the short and long terms.
5. Suggest how the responsibilities for advocating on behalf of fixed-term faculty should be accomplished by associations with fixed-term faculty members and the Faculty Senate.

The FTFTF began by determining types of fixed-term faculty (FTF) at OSU. The FTFTF invited all non-tenured FTF at OSU, approximately 1900 people, to respond to a web-based survey. Five hundred forty-six fixed-term faculty responded. The FTFTF survey highlighted concerns in the areas of job descriptions, performance review, rewards and recognition for exemplary performance, attitudes of tenured faculty toward FTF, and the Faculty Senate as a venue for the concerns of FTF. Those who responded to the survey tended to be long-term employees (in all categories), but recent hires were also represented.

Task force recommendations:

- Administration should assess the value of high quality undergraduate instruction, research, extension, clinical services and administration to the university, and **implement policies, recognition, and rewards** consistent with that value.
- Because FTF perform such a range of service to the university, under such varying circumstances, we suggest that ***predictability and consistency, rather than uniformity*** across the varied types of fixed-term faculty in the areas of salary increases, professional development and promotion would promote a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment among FTF.
- Units should develop a **consistent system for measuring and rewarding exemplary performance**, and a **system for disseminating that information** to FTF. It is the Task Force's sense once again that predictability and consistency within units are more important than uniformity across types of FTF. (See Appendix C for an example of a system for disseminating information.)

- FTF are essential to university operations. Their importance must be acknowledged from the highest levels of administration. Administration should **hold department heads accountable** for leadership and quality communication with FTF in order to improve respect and recognition issues, and to promote cultural change at OSU.
 - We recommend the establishment of **opportunities for professional development and travel** for all FTF, consistent with the opportunities implemented for professional faculty.
 - Fixed-term faculty should be able to **transfer leave balances** to other fixed-term faculty. This will promote a sense of camaraderie and shared effort.
 - Current FTFTF members recommend establishing a **mailing list and mentoring groups** for all FTF, to address the differences in orientation at hiring. Mentoring groups could also help address issues of alienation felt by fixed-term faculty at OSU.
 - Annual appointments do not reward exemplary performance. **Bridging funds** would provide some security during a specific time frame for grant-supported FTF until subsequent grant funds are disbursed, and could come from indirect costs or returned overhead.
 - A **two-year rolling contract** would more appropriately reward exemplary performance of instructors and professional faculty, especially those with records of long-term service to OSU.
-

Fixed-term Faculty Task Force Report and Recommendations

Background: The Faculty Senate's Fixed-Term Faculty Task Force (FTFTF) was charged by Bruce Sorte as Faculty Senate President to:

1. Define and describe the different types of fixed-term faculty across OSU, Oregon, and the US.
2. List expectations and benefits for scholarship and service among fixed-term faculty.
3. Determine how exemplary performance is or can be measured.
4. Describe how exemplary performance should be rewarded in the short and long terms.
5. Suggest how the responsibilities for advocating on behalf of fixed-term faculty should be accomplished by associations with fixed-term faculty members and the Faculty Senate.

The FTFTF began by examining types of fixed-term faculty at OSU. The list and approximate number of each includes

Professor (8)

Associate Professor, Sr. Research (24)

Assistant Professor, Sr. Research (94)

Faculty Research Assistant (340)

Senior Faculty Research Assistant (110)

Faculty Research Associate (182)

Senior Faculty Research Associate (1)

Professional Faculty (780)

Instructor (309)

Senior Instructor (15)

Clinical Faculty (4) This category emerged from the survey. Most are at Associate Professor rank.

Tenured faculty at all ranks can also serve in administrative positions on a fixed-term basis. Such faculty were not included in our review, since their tenured status places them in a very different position from other fixed-term faculty.

The FTFTF then reviewed websites of comparator institutions to see what types of fixed-term faculty were mentioned and, where possible, how they were evaluated. Some follow-up interviews were conducted. Other institutions vary greatly in how they define faculty. In some, all faculty were unionized, including professional faculty and instructors. In others, there seemed to be fewer gradations among researchers. A special note about Extension faculty: they can be virtually any of the categories listed above, from instructor to associate professor.

The Task Force also interviewed people from Forestry who had examined some issues related to their research faculty and from the Professional Faculty Task Force. Both provided useful perspectives for the work of this Task Force.

Finally, for a more in-depth look at OSU, the FTFTF surveyed fixed-term faculty (FTF) by means of a web-based survey. The questions were inspired by interviews the task force's members conducted with FTF from within their units. The survey consisted of 37 items. Thirty-one of the items were forced choice; five were open-ended. The items addressed such topics as FTF demographics, nature of FTF appointment, performance review, recognition, and representation. The survey was posted to the web on 5/24/04 in order to capture responses of FTF with 9-month appointments; the survey was closed at the end of 6/30/04. Five hundred forty-six FTF from throughout the university responded to the survey. Numeric responses from the survey are found in Appendix A.

Who are fixed-term faculty? The university employs some 1800+ FTF, who are responsible for a broad array of functions within the university, including teaching, research, extension, clinical services, and administration. They can be at virtually any rank, from Professor to Instructor, Senior Research Associate to Faculty Research Assistant, or Professional Faculty. The breadth of responsibilities and expertise makes it difficult to adequately describe this group. The university has both short-term needs met through temporary hires and long-term needs, some of which are also met by FTF. The majority of FTF at OSU are neither short-term nor temporary. The genders are evenly represented within the total ranks of FTF, although males are somewhat overrepresented within the sub groups of Faculty Research Assistants (FRAs) and Instructors, and females are overrepresented with the ranks of No Rank faculty, who are generally professional faculty. By far, the majority of FTF are on 12-month appointments. Many departments are dependent on FTF for undergraduate teaching; FTF from all responsibility categories repeatedly expressed the opinion that, "without us, the university could not function."

Major findings: The following are highlights of the FTFTF survey:

- **Job descriptions:** More than 80% of respondents have a copy of their job descriptions, 73% feel that the written description accurately describes their duties, and a full 5% of the respondents report that their positions do not have written descriptions.
- **Performance review:** Almost a quarter of survey respondents (23%) report that their performance is reviewed on some schedule other than every 1, 2, or 3 years. Half of the respondents report the use of a standardized instrument in reviewing performance.
- **Special concerns of instructors:** Seventy-three percent of respondents do not know whether their department has a policy regarding the order in which FTF are terminated. Eighty-two percent of respondents are allowed to participate in relevant faculty/staff meetings. Instructor satisfaction had a great deal to do with the attitude of the head of the department. Instructors often feel a notable lack of respect from tenured faculty within their department, even in areas where instructors have more expertise, such as lower-division teaching. Like other FTF,

many instructors have a long-term relationship to OSU. Respondents had been at OSU from one quarter to 29 years, with the average at over 10 years and a median of 6 years.

- **Faculty Research Assistants/Associates:** FRAs had widely varying levels of responsibility, from being assistants to being virtually PIs. This is an area where more work needs to be done in making sure departments follow the guidelines about classification of FRAs.
- **Reward for exemplary performance:** Fifty-one percent of respondents report departmental recognition of exemplary performance; 31% report that it is rewarded. Forty seven percent of respondents report eligibility for merit-based salary increases; 12% report eligibility for non-salary rewards.
- **Recognition for exemplary performance:** Twelve percent of respondents report the implementation of a reward system at the departmental level; 57% have never been nominated for departmental, college or university awards, 22% have received departmental, college or university awards.
- **FTF and the Faculty Senate:** Nineteen percent of respondents agree that the Faculty Senate is the appropriate venue for hearing the concerns of FTF, 16% disagree with that statement, and 64% are unsure.

The following summarizes the final, open-ended question on the survey, “Please enter any other comments for the task force here.” Among the many comments forwarded to the FTFTF by respondents, some of the most striking are:

- Issues affecting instructors differ from the issues affecting grant-supported FTF and from Professional Faculty.
- Performance expectations for FTF and tenured faculty are often highly similar within departments. Nonetheless, department cultures sometimes support a lack of respect for FTF by tenured faculty.
- Some fixed-term faculty (including those at Assistant Professor rank) who teach occasional classes feel that required classloads per FTE can be greater than those for tenure-track faculty.
- FTF vary widely in the amounts and kinds of information they receive at hiring and throughout their careers regarding resources for professional development, opportunities for advancement, and recognition for professional achievement.
- Many FTF, including professional faculty, are institutionally regarded as temporary workers across entire careers, many of which last 20-30 years or more.
- Many FTF experience salary compression, in which new hires begin at nearly the same salary achieved after years of service.
- Comments repeatedly cited treatment by supervisors as making a difference in the FTF member’s attitude. Where they were treated “just like tenured faculty” in terms of respect, attitudes were markedly better than where their contributions were ignored or treated as trivial.

- The most satisfied FTF are those whose department heads promote a culture of communication, feedback and recognition. A change of department heads often heralds a change in satisfaction.

See Appendix B for more detail about the comments.

Task force recommendations:

- Administration should assess the value of high quality undergraduate instruction, research, extension, clinical services and administration to the university, and **implement policies, recognition, and rewards** consistent with that value.
- Because FTF perform such a range of service to the university, under such varying circumstances, we suggest that **predictability and consistency, rather than uniformity** across the varied types of fixed-term faculty in the areas of salary increases, professional development and promotion would promote a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment among FTF.
- Units should develop a **consistent system for measuring and rewarding exemplary performance**, and a **system for disseminating that information** to FTF. It is the Task Force's sense once again that predictability and consistency within units are more important than uniformity across types of FTF. (See Appendix C for an example of a system for disseminating information.)
- FTF are essential to university operations. Their importance must be acknowledged from the highest levels of administration. Administration should **hold department heads accountable** for leadership and quality communication with FTF in order to improve respect and recognition issues, and to promote cultural change at OSU.
- We recommend the establishment of **opportunities for professional development and travel** for all FTF, consistent with the opportunities implemented for professional faculty.
- Fixed-term faculty should be able to **transfer leave balances** to other fixed-term faculty. This will promote a sense of camaraderie and shared effort.
- Current FTFTF members recommend establishing a **mailing list and mentoring groups** for all FTF, to address the differences in orientation at hiring. Mentoring groups could also help address issues of alienation felt by fixed-term faculty at OSU.
- Annual appointments do not reward exemplary performance. **Bridging funds** would provide some security during a specific time frame for grant-supported FTF until subsequent grant funds are disbursed, and could come from indirect costs or returned overhead.

- A **two-year rolling contract** would more appropriately reward exemplary performance of instructors and professional faculty, especially those with records of long-term service to OSU.

Task force response to the charge: FTF are essential to meeting the university's needs in a broad array of functions. Because FTF comprise such a heterogeneous group, the expectations for and benefits from scholarship and service among them vary enormously. Survey results show that measurement and reward for exemplary performance vary widely within and among the units, from appropriately to inconsistently to not at all. Although there was no general call for other representation, fully 80% of survey respondents are not convinced that the Faculty Senate is an appropriate venue for hearing the concerns of FTF.

The Professional Faculty Issues Group presented a well-thought-out plan for rolling contracts and longer periods for timely notice, based on length of service, and for regular professional development for professional faculty. The Fixed-Term Faculty Task Force concurs with these recommendations and urges that they be implemented for all fixed-term employees. Professional development for all employees can improve the overall quality of service at OSU and provide a form of recognition and reward. A strong message from upper administration at the university, including holding department heads accountable for improving respect and recognition for fixed-term faculty, would promote cultural change at OSU. Clear expectations and the possibility of multiple-year fixed-term contracts for long-term fixed-term faculty would appropriately recognize the service of these essential employees.

The members of the Fixed-Term Faculty Task Force are:

Linda Brewer – Faculty Research Assistant, Agricultural and Resource Economics

Judy A. Butler – Senior Faculty Research Assistant, Environmental and Molecular Toxicology

Deborah Healey – Associate Professor, English Language Institute

Mark Keller – Senior Faculty Research Assistant, Animal Sciences

Judith Li – Associate Professor (Senior Research), Fisheries and Wildlife

Gayle Orner – Assistant Professor (Senior Research), Linus Pauling Institute

Scott Peterson – Instructor, Mathematics

Sheri Woods – Professional Faculty, Center for Gene Research

Jennifer Travers, Faculty Status Committee – Instructor, Chemistry

Note: All members of the Task Force are themselves fixed-term faculty.

Many thanks to Linda Brewer for putting this report together.