

Report of the 2013-2014 Faculty Personnel Committee

Membership and Case Load

In 2013-2014, the Faculty Personnel Committee consisted of four continuing members and seven new members. Ellen Herman (CAS, History), Kathryn Lucktenberg (Music), Bonnie Mann (CAS, Philosophy), and Marilyn Nippold (COE) served on the 2012-2013 Committee and continued in 2013-2014. Jennifer Ablow (CAS, Psychology), Li-Shan Chou (CAS, Human Physiology), T. Bettina Cornwell (LCB), Jon Palfreman (SOJC), Nicholas Proudfoot (CAS, Mathematics), Ofer Raban (Law), and James Tice (AAA) served for the first time this year. After being confirmed by the UO Senate, Steven Chatfield (Music) replaced Kathryn Lucktenberg, who took a medical leave shortly after the FPC began its work. Ellen Herman served as FPC Chair during 2013-2014.

Not including several cases that were withdrawn, the FPC considered a total of 56 cases during this academic year. The breakdown was as follows:

Associate Professor with Tenure: 31
Full Professor: 20
Tenure Only: 5

[Note: See the case log for the 2013-2014 FPC for additional details.]

Work Chronology

The Committee met for an initial orientation with Doug Blandy and Scott Coltrane on October 28, 2013. Beginning in early December, the committee held nineteen meetings to conduct its work, which ended in late May. We handled one very tardy case (tenure only) by email because it required a decision after the 2013-2014 promotion and tenure reception on June 3, 2014. The workload for this committee was, as usual, quite heavy, especially during the Winter 2014 term. Attendance by FPC members was consistently strong and very few cases were considered with four members absent, the maximum permissible for us to conduct business. FPC members were, of course, excused on cases from their own units and any other cases in which personal relationships with the candidates created conflicts of interest; four such conflicts occurred this year. FPC members were, without exception, extremely conscientious and worked extremely hard. Each committee member reviewed lengthy files for each case on which s/he voted. Each committee member drafted an average of five committee reports, which were discussed during our meetings and revised afterwards based on questions raised and points made during the committee discussion. Ellen Herman checked and finalized all of the revised reports before sending them along to Academic Affairs and the Provost.

The primary job of the FPC is to safeguard the fairness and integrity of the promotion and tenure process by “reviewing the reviewers.” Even when candidates were strong and files well assembled, this process took considerable time, but it could be done relatively

efficiently. In a number of cases, more lengthy debate took place, including some where strong positive votes for the candidate had been cast at previous levels of review. In these cases, the FPC concentrated on procedural errors or areas of review we felt had not been fully or adequately addressed previously. The FPC had occasion to request additional information in four cases this year before taking final votes. In two of these cases, one from the School of Law and one from Architecture and Allied Arts, reviewer selection seemed very problematic to us and requests were made for additional outside letters. (No additional letters were ultimately produced in either of these cases and we were asked to make a decision on the basis of the letters originally provided to us.) In the third case, from the College of Education, most of the unit faculty eligible to vote had never done so, nor had they even been informed about the case. (A “re-vote” was conducted in this case, which was strong, after which the FPC easily concluded its work.) In the fourth and final case, a candidate for promotion to Full Professor in the College of Arts and Sciences, clarification was required about which publications had “counted” for tenure and which had not. (That information was easily obtained and the FPC acted immediately on the case.)

Additionally, there were two cases this year, both originating in the same unit in Architecture and Allies Arts, and displaying similar patterns, where the FPC requested that its chair meet directly with the Provost before taking a final vote. The point of doing so was to bring to the Provost’s attention problems in the unit that we felt were serious enough to warrant independent investigation. The Provost agreed to review both cases. After doing so, he asked us to move forward on the basis of the information in the files. We did.

Chronic Problems and Recommendations

Some of the problems and inconsistencies that the FPC encountered this year are chronic challenges in the promotion and tenure process. Among them are:

1. Inconsistent criteria for tenure and promotion across the university. Some variety is necessary and even desirable, considering the diversity of fields and professions represented in this university. Several cases this year revealed the difficulties that arise when tenure expectations not only vary internally, but depart dramatically from the expectations typical of our peer institutions. The Department of Dance, we learned, appears to have criteria for tenure and promotion that are significantly different than those prevailing in our peer institutions, or at least those universities from which external references were solicited. In cases like this, where UO has exceptionally low standards, we will continue to be in the unhappy situation of having faculty elsewhere inform us that our candidates meet local standards but would not be tenured or promoted according to the standards prevailing elsewhere.
2. Gaps between the unit’s stated tenure expectations and case documentation. Sometimes the unit’s p&t criteria are quite distant from the evidence presented in the file. If the unit’s standard is “demonstrated achievement in research” or “demonstrated excellence in teaching” the documentation should explain how that candidate has (or has not) met those standards. In some cases, evidence suggested

that candidates met a very different standard: “demonstrated potential in research” or “unambiguous improvement in teaching.” It would be helpful to remind unit heads and committees to re-read their own P&T statements each year.

3. Confusion about the period under review. As in the past, there was considerable uncertainty in several cases this year about when the period of review began and/or ended. Typically, this takes the form of uncertainty about how much of a candidate’s prior research should be included in the evaluation. It is important for units to be specific about the time window being used for evaluation. In the most problematic cases, the period of review was not explicitly communicated to outside reviewers, leading to situations where referees included in their evaluations research done and publications completed well outside of the period being considered.
4. Vague or no explanations for reductions in candidates’ teaching loads. Teaching loads vary a great deal from unit to unit. In addition to specifying the unit’s normal teaching load, file documentation should ideally include explanations for additional, legitimate course releases (e.g. reductions for all junior faculty, reductions associated with external funding).
5. Inadequate or missing teaching records for new hires. Very limited teaching records (i.e. numbers and titles of courses taught, student evaluations, peer teaching evaluations) were included for some incoming hires, especially but not only at the senior level. The first case we reviewed this year, for the new Dean of the Clark Honors College, offered an example, but there were others. For all cases, teaching information really must be provided for a thorough review unless we think it advisable to set up a streamlined process for purely administrative or other senior positions. (See new recommendations.)
6. Adequate time for the FPC to review cases. We request an absolute minimum of one week between the release of a case and the meeting at which it will be discussed.
7. Course release for FPC members. Members of the 2012-2013 FPC were told last year by Provost Jim Bean that FPC service would be compensated with one course release, beginning in the 2013-2014 academic year, a policy that had been under discussion for at least a year before that. Members of the 2013-2014 FPC started our work unhappily this past fall, after being told by Scott Coltrane (then Interim Provost) that he knew nothing about any such arrangement and could not honor it this year. The FPC is an extremely time-consuming service obligation, and it is critically important to the university’s academic standing that its work be taken seriously. It is a measure of the integrity of this year’s FPC members that they worked tirelessly in spite of the disappointing way the year began. We encourage the central administration in the strongest possible terms to implement either this

policy or some equivalent form of compensation for FPC members. Without it, few or no faculty will be willing to serve on the committee and devote the time and effort to it that it requires.

New Issues and Recommendations

1. We recommend a fully online promotion and tenure system in which all materials would be submitted electronically from the very beginning to the very end of the process. Such a system would have numerous benefits. It would make the process much more efficient by making all the documents in each file searchable, and that would make the job of each individual and committee charged with reviewing files much less time-consuming. Additionally, an electronic system would eliminate all the scanning of paper (hundreds of pages per case) that is currently done by Academic Affairs staff and permit more centralized monitoring and management of the personnel process university-wide. We support a relatively simple system that would allow candidates for promotion and tenure to upload their materials, including CVs, as PDFs, in formats appropriate to their particular disciplines and professions. We do not favor a more complex system that aims to standardize all submitted materials by generating all promotion and tenure documents in a single, standardized format.

2. Academic Affairs should create and distribute an FPC manual to all committee members at the beginning of the year. It should not be lengthy, but it should clearly state the FPC charge and include policy explanations, guidelines, and clarifications on the following issues, which surface repeatedly every year.
 - a. The university-wide minimum number of external letters is five.
 - b. It is a desirable goal to have a clear majority of external referees independently selected by the department or school rather than proposed by the candidate. According to the language in the CBA, there is no absolute requirement that a majority must be independently selected, but it seems sensible for the university to articulate this as a “best practice.”
 - c. It is critically important to identify previous ties between external reviewers and candidates, and explain them when they exist. There are certain relationships that should probably be categorically excluded, such as dissertation advisors, close collaborators, and co-authors. These should be named whenever possible so that Department Heads and personnel committees will know to avoid them. We recognize that the practical challenges of securing independent referees vary from field to field within the disciplines and professions and know these challenges can be significant in small fields where collaborative work is the rule. When external reviewers do have ties to the candidate, these need to be identified and explained in the

context of disciplinary and professional norms so that reviewing committees will have the contextual information needed to make appropriate decisions.

- d. FPC members raised questions in several cases this year about how and when family or medical leaves “counted” toward the period of review. The university’s legal obligations in these cases should be clarified so that there is no confusion about the period under review.
 - e. There was some confusion about cases of early promotion and/or tenure.
 - i. Are there different expectations for candidates or not?
 - ii. How should we determine if a case is early? In most cases, it is obvious, but not always. For example, if the candidate spent two years as an untenured Associate Professor and then four years as a tenured Associate Professor, is the case early or on time? If the candidate left a tenured position elsewhere for an untenured position at UO and then comes up for tenure review before six years have passed, is the case early or on time?
 - f. Detailing the co-authoring conventions in different disciplines and professions would be helpful. In some fields, the first author is considered the major contributor to a co-authored publication, whereas in others, the final author is considered the major contributor. In some fields, author order also indicates the candidate’s role in obtaining research funding. In some fields, advisors are expected to co-author publications with their doctoral students; in others, they are not.
3. We should consider the advantages and disadvantages of a significantly streamlined process for purely administrative appointments and other senior and/or endowed positions where candidates are moving laterally and there is really no question about their scholarly credentials, tenure status, or rank.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen Herman
Professor of History
FPC Chair, 2014-2015