

Report of the 2012-2013 Faculty Personnel Committee

Membership and Case Load

The Committee consisted of four continuing members and seven new members. Virginia Cartwright (AAA-Architecture), Roberta Mann (Law), Lisa Redford (Linguistics), and Mike Russo (LCB-Management) served on the 2011-2012 Committee. Ellen Herman (History), Kathryn Lucktenberg (Music), Bonnie Mann (Philosophy), Marilyn Nippold (COE-Special Education and Clinical Services), Greg Retallack (Geological Sciences), Harry Wonham (English) served for the first time this year. In addition, David Swanson was a student member of the Committee. After being confirmed by the Committee, Mike Russo again served as Chair for the year.

Not counting five cases that were deferred or withdrawn, during this academic year the Committee considered 38 cases, with the following breakdown:

Associate Professor with Tenure	14
Full Professor	19
Tenure Only	5

The Committee thanks Ken Doxsee for his careful preparation and stewardship of files and Pam Palanuk for providing outstanding and enthusiastic support. For the second year, case materials were placed in a protected online site, which allowed members to review cases in their offices on campus. The Committee this year made greater use of an online directory created for our purposes, which permitted more efficient preparation of Committee reports.

Our Experience

The Committee met roughly each week, beginning in November and continuing through mid-March, with two additional meetings in April and one in June. The workload was especially heavy in Winter term. Attendance by Committee members was consistently strong, with an average of 8 to 9 of our 11 members sitting in on each review (although with members sitting out on discussions of candidates in their departments). Committee members reviewed the file of each candidate on which they voted.

As is customary, the Committee “reviewed the reviews.” This process could be abbreviated, especially if the candidate was strong and the file well assembled. But in several cases, a more lengthy debate took place. This was true even in some cases where strong positive votes for the candidate were cast in previous levels of review. The Committee often focused on areas of a candidate’s review that it felt

had not been fully addressed previously. It also frequently found issues with how the review to that point had been handled. As compared to last year, the Committee had occasion to request additional information in more instances. In all cases, Ken Doxsee provided the information in a timely fashion or explained how to find the information in another part of the file.

Progress on Process Improvements

Although our process worked well this year in terms of scheduling and time for review, it could certainly be improved. Last year we provided a number of suggestions for important improvements. We refer to last year's report, which should be read by all individuals at the University with an interest in a strong tenure review process. In this report we provide our view of the lack of progress in several key areas. We chose only what we consider to be the most critical areas that we identified in the 2011-2012 FPC Final Report where improvement was limited or non-existent.

Inadequate Discussion of Research Impact – limited improvement

Files continue to have little discussion of the quality of the outlets for scholarly activities, from journals to artistic and performance-related fields. Further, very little provision of citation rates took place this year. Only one department, Economics, conducted thorough analysis of the stature of journals and the citations to their candidates. This outstanding effort was in stark contrast to almost all other departments.

Inadequate Comparisons of the Candidate to His or Her Cohort – no improvement

Despite our public request for more comparative information on candidates, no improvements were made. In our view, it is not simply the job of outside reviewers to make such comparisons (and as with last year this was done by perhaps a single letter writer for every five cases, translating to roughly one of forty outside letters). Departments and schools can provide this type of documentation. As we said last year, "the Committee recognizes that generating a cohort list can be subject to opportunistic selection, so the process of doing so must be carefully designed. In any case, the Committee rejects the idea that any faculty member's research is so unique that they cannot be compared to others in their field of study." We also recommend strengthening the language in the instructions to outside reviewers, to try to improve the chance that they will provide cohort comparisons.

Action item from last year's report for the first two issues: Rework tenure and promotion documents as necessary to stress quality and impact in scholarly activities. Survey review policies and practices at AAU Universities to ensure that the University processes are consistent with best practices, with special

attention to the comparison of a candidate's record to others in the field, assessments of the quality of research outlets, and indications of the impact of publications, artistic and creative outputs, and other scholarship. Strengthen the importance of judgment in promotion review.

Inconsistent and Imprecise Time Windows for Research – limited improvement

To quote from last year's report, "In a number of cases that did not represent standard sixth year cases for tenure (as adjusted by life events), there was confusion over how much of a candidate's prior research should be included in review." Again this year, the window being used for evaluation was left unclear in several cases, and perhaps even worse, it was not communicated to outside reviewers.

Action item from last year's report for this issue: Clearly define the time window during which publications are to count in the review process. Give explicit instruction to the candidate, internal reviewers, and external reviewers in this regard. Provide clearly annotated vitas to external reviewers showing this window, and do not send publications to them that are outside of the window.

Unclear Explanations of Teaching Load Reductions – no improvement

As with last year, "repeatedly, the Committee was left guessing about why a faculty member apparently taught fewer than the required number of courses." In our previous report, we asked for a simple change to process to address this problem, to include a sheet in each candidate's file, prior to initial reviews, explaining year-by-year the teaching load and the rationale for any teaching releases. This change to process was not made, but remains critical for careful, consistent review.

Action item from last year's report for this issue: Include a sheet in each candidate's file, prior to initial reviews, explaining year-by-year the teaching load and the rationale for any teaching releases.

Missing Teaching Records for New Hires – no improvement

Again this year, very limited teaching records for incoming hires were available. In one case, no teaching records were included, an issue that was not even identified in any level of review prior to the FPC. For all cases, including purely administrative positions, teaching information must be provided for a thorough review.

Action item from last year's report for this issue: Require teaching evaluations from all incoming mid-career hires, including those being hired for administrative positions.

Lack of Grading Information – no improvement

Although it is a sensitive topic to many, the Committee would have preferred to see information on the grading behavior of candidates. In the cases where a candidate is a “tough grader,” this could provide an important element of their teaching story. Especially in a situation where reviewers focus strongly on student evaluations, including such grading information is essential to appreciating the totality of a candidate’s record.

Action item from last year’s report for this issue: Require the file to contain average grades for the candidate’s sections, along with department-wide average grades for classes of a comparable size and degree level.

New Issues and Recommendations for Process Improvements

This year’s group of cases revealed a number of other issues that we are bringing to the attention of the Administration. As with last year, we provide an idea for how to implement policies to support positive changes.

Inconsistent Expectations in Tenure and Promotion Policies

Our first and most important recommendation is the most difficult to address. The Committee believes that much more standardization in expectations for promotion and tenure documents and policies would benefit the University. Although the primary problem has to do with vague and lenient expectations, we also encountered a case where standards were so high and so explicit, that taken literally tenure would be nearly unattainable.

Action Item: Each school or college, working with departments, should review promotion and tenure documents to ensure greater consistency in expectations and clarity in the explanation of those standards.

Gaps between Departmental Tenure Criteria and Supporting Documentation

Related to the previous issue, in several cases, the committee was presented with arguments in cases that seemed quite removed from the criteria specified in promotion and tenure documents. For example, if this document specifies that a candidate must “demonstrate excellence in teaching,” then the department must explain why the candidate’s teaching met this standard.

Unclear Nomination Process for Outside Reviewers

The Committee became aware this year that in cases where both a candidate and a department recommend a reviewer, that person is listed as having been nominated by the department. This undesirable ambiguity is avoidable and easily addressed.

Action Item: Replace column on the current standard form, which marks with an "x" each reviewer nominated by a candidate with two columns. The first, as now, would include an x for reviewers nominated by a candidate. The second column would mark an x where the reviewer was nominated by the department. Where both candidate and department nominate a reviewer, there would be an x in both columns. The file should confirm that the department and the candidate made nominations independently, and if that is not the case a clear explanation of the process followed should be included.

Inconsistent Materials Sent to Outside Reviewers

The Committee reviewed a case where different sets of materials were sent to different outside reviewers. We were not persuaded by the arguments of the department that this practice was appropriate and. The Committee believes that it is not. The reason is that it is imperative for outside reviewers to react to a common set of criteria and source materials when they prepare their letters.

Action Item: Require that a common set of materials be sent to all outside reviewers, without exception.

Use of Promotion as a Retention Device

The Committee reviewed a case on a short time frame where promotion was being used to provide an inducement for a candidate that received an outside offer. The Committee believes that this is a relatively clumsy way of dealing with offers, because it puts us in a difficult situation with little in the way of guidance, for example when an associate professor has been in grade for less than the typical period. Promotion should not necessarily be a retention tool.

Action Item: Use salary and other inducements that are not associated with academic rank as the primary mechanism for retention. Develop a policy for when promotions are appropriate (e.g., the candidate must be in the current rank for at least four full years).

Unclear Explanation of "Non-votes."

The Committee did not always receive clear explanations on why reviewers did not vote on cases. Most importantly, simply stating that an individual was "not available" for the vote is insufficient and injects risk into the interpretation of votes.

There also appears to be some confusion about what constitutes grounds for both abstention and conflict of interest, for example in the explanation of a person not voting because they had voted in a previous level of review.

Action Item: Provide a complete explanation in any case where an individual eligible to vote did not do so. Clarify what constitutes grounds for abstention and for conflict of interest.

Questionable Inclusion of Individuals in the Voting Process

The Committee reviewed a case in which associate professors voted on a promotion to full professor in their own department. Although it might be argued that this is appropriate in very small departments (this was not true in the case that came to us), the Committee feels that this is poor process and, with two exceptions, should never take place under any situation at Oregon. The first exception is when an associate professor serves as a department head. The second is when an associate professor serves on the University Faculty Personnel Committee, since by its rules no member reviews cases in their own department. The Committee feels that this policy would balance the valuable contributions that associate professors can bring to the review process with the need to avoid conflicts of interest.

Action Item: If it is not already University policy, institute a clear policy of voting such that only individuals at or beyond the rank that a candidate seeks are allowed to review the case and cast votes. The only two exceptions would be for associate professors serving as department heads or on the University Faculty Personnel Committee.

Note: Two members of the 2012-2013 Committee dissent from this item, because they believe that associate professors should be eligible to participate at all levels of review and for any type of promotion.

The Committee petitions the University Administration to aggressively seek the changes outlined in this letter. Positive movement on these items will take a solid process of review and ensure that it is fairer, more consistent, and worthy of the high standards that, as faculty members, we set for ourselves.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mike Russo
Professor of Management
2012-2013 Chair of the Faculty Personnel Committee
July 16, 2013