

Report of the 2011-2012 Faculty Personnel Committee

Membership and Case Load

The Committee consisted of three continuing members and seven new members. David Conley (Education), David Crumb (Music), and Victor Ostrik (Mathematics) served on the 2010-2011 Committee. Virginia Cartwright (AAA-Architecture), Jeff Cina (Chemistry), Van Kolpin (Economics) Roberta Mann (Law), Lisa Redford (Linguistics) Mike Russo (LCB-Management), Hailin Wang (Physics) served for the first time this year. David Conley was on leave during spring term, reducing our Committee to nine members for that term. After being confirmed by the Committee, Mike Russo served as Chair for the year.

Not counting six cases that were deferred or withdrawn, during this academic year the Committee considered 56 cases, with the following breakdown:

Associate Professor with Tenure	27
Full Professor	26
Tenure Only	3

The Committee is very grateful to Ken Doxsee for carefully compiling case materials and to Pam Palanuk for handling innumerable planning issues. This year, case materials were placed in a protected online site, which allowed members to review cases in their offices on campus. This was of great help in our preparations and deliberations, and the Committee expresses its appreciation for this initiative.

Our Experience

The Committee met roughly each week, beginning in late November and continuing through the first week of April. The workload was especially heavy in Winter term. Attendance by Committee members was consistently strong, with an average of more than 8 of 10 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. The Committee continued to use color-coded cards and simultaneous voting, as introduced by Gordon Sayre last year.

The Committee saw its role as “reviewing the reviews.” Where a case was demonstrably strong, it often did not engage in lengthy debate. However, when issues arose for members, even in cases with unanimous positive votes in prior reviews, considerable time was spent on discussing those issues. Final reports were written by members under a rotating format that recognized work schedules and the nature of the case under review.

The Committee spent its time attempting to provide additional insights rather than repeating a process that had already been done in prior reviews. Thus, the Committee focused on areas of a candidate's review that it felt had not been fully addressed previously, and frequently on the manner of review itself. Committee members wrote concise letters that attempted to bring a unique perspective to the evaluation.

In our view, the process worked reasonably well this year. In particular, with few exceptions, the Committee found that files contained the requisite, well-organized information to provide for efficient review. Nonetheless, in this report the Committee seeks to spotlight a number of areas for improvement. In each case, we provide clear action items, to animate a sense of priority about the need for constructive change and to guide the Administration's efforts to improve the promotion and tenure process.

The Process of Review: Issues to Address

Despite the diligent attempt by many parties to improve the University's promotion and tenure review process, there remain significant issues. And as one might suspect, what is not consistently included in files was at least as troubling to the Committee as what is typically included. What follows here is an attempt to categorize issues that repeatedly arose for the Committee.

Review of Research

Inadequate Discussion of Research Impact

It was rare for the Committee to be presented with evidence of the quality of the outlets for research. In the case of scholarly articles, impact factors for journals in which a candidate has published would help. In the case of scholarly books, which for many departments represent the critical aspect of the record, credible assessments of both the stature of the press overall and its stature in the subject area of the book were not always provided. For artistic and performance-related fields, some evidence of the stature of the location or event would help the Committee to appreciate the standing and impact of faculty members in fields where written publications are not the norm. In fields where it would be relevant to consider them, citation counts and other indications of research impact were seldom provided in cases. Despite their imperfections, it would help to use accounting measures such as those appearing in Google Scholar (a leading indicator, and therefore of more potential value than lagging indicators like the Science and Social Science Citation Indices).

Inadequate Comparisons of the Candidate to His or Her Cohort

Although outside reviewers are requested to compare our candidates to others in the field and often oblige, a more consistent and rigorous attempt to do so would improve the process. It was rare indeed for reviewers within the UO to carefully compare a candidate to others in his or her field. For a standard promotion to Associate Professor with tenure, the comparison set would include new PhDs that took tenure track jobs at comparable (e.g., AAU) institutions at the time of their appointment. In other situations, the cohort may be more difficult to identify but the idea is analogous. 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.

Overreliance on the Number of Publications in a Candidate's Record

While numbers of publications do present a method for assessing one measure of productivity, they are incomplete without measures of impact, outlet quality, and comparisons to others in a candidate's field. Reliance on numbers is particularly worrisome as the University moves to a unionized setting, as a "counting" approach can provide the basis for increased levels of appeal and adjudication.

Action Item: 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.

Imprecise Guidance About Scholarly Outputs

In several cases, the Committee found it difficult to assess records of faculty members whose scholarship was concentrated in a particular type of output. Committee members raised questions about tenure documents that presented relatively long lists of possibilities for scholarly outputs without providing guidance to faculty members about their relative desirability in creating a strong record for promotion.

Action Item: Rework tenure and promotion documents as necessary to clarify the relative importance of particular types of scholarly outputs in departmental documents where long, unranked lists of types of outputs are now presented.

Disinclinations to Address Weaknesses in Cases

Many cases were plagued by the refusal—particularly at the departmental and dean’s level—to address clear weaknesses in promotion cases. This was frequently the case regarding issues raised in outside letters. However negative (or even unprofessional) the tone of a letter might be, internal reviewers must not reject it simply for those reasons. The issues raised in any letter that pertain to the facts of the case must be addressed. We reviewed one case where a clearly dyspeptic reviewer went on at length and in ill temper about the negative elements of a case. Despite the letter’s author being the only outside reviewer that appeared to have read the candidate’s articles, departmental reviewers dismissed the letter primarily due to its tone. That was poor practice and put the candidate’s case at risk.

Inconsistent and Imprecise Time Windows for Research

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. In one case for promotion to Associate Professor with Tenure, a candidate’s most cited work, one discussed at length by several external reviewers, was published nearly two decades ago. The Committee itself was frequently puzzled by what appeared to be inconsistent policy in this regard.

Action Item: 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.

Different Internal and External Expectations for Outside Funding

With respect to expectations about the importance of raising research funding, in some cases departmental promotion documents seem to be inconsistent with the standards at institutions of external reviewers. In these cases, external reviewers at AAU institutions noted an absence of grants raised by candidates, even when our own documents suggested that success in this regard was not a point of evaluation. This may indicate that our expectations for performance are out of step with our aspirational cohort. Although grant-raising is only a means to a vital end—research and scholarship—this issue is worth examining.

Action Item: Review the last several years of external letters to identify the UO departments where a mismatch between external and internal expectations exists with regard to grants and external funding. Clarify the role of grants and external funding in those departments.

Review of Teaching

Unclear Explanations of Teaching Load Reductions

Repeatedly, the Committee was left guessing about why a faculty member apparently taught fewer than the required number of courses. There are various ways in which teaching loads are reduced, including sabbaticals, administrative duties, reductions in the first year on campus and so on. None of these are necessarily inappropriate and indeed generally make sense and are applied consistently. But teaching reductions should be made explicit for reviewers.

Action Item: 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

In several cases, very limited teaching records for incoming hires were available. The Committee sees no reason why this element of a candidate's record should not be a mandatory part of each file. In particular, even though a candidate may be arriving for an administrative position, there is always a chance that they will at some point return to the classroom. Full review of a candidate's record requires information on teaching.

Action Item: Require teaching evaluations from all incoming mid-career hires, including those being hired for administrative positions.

Lack of Grading Information

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: 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.

Other Process Issues

The Committee was not informed until the end of the year about two cases in which the Provost decided against its vote. Although such differences do not suggest a broken process, a clear majority of the Committee feels that it is critical to

the integrity of the promotion and tenure process that the University return to the practice instituted several years ago, in which a face to face meeting between the Provost and the FPC chair takes place if a decision that would contravene the vote of the FPC is contemplated.

Although feedback from the Provost about the Committee's reports was informally transmitted back via the FPC chair, the Committee believes that re-instituting a practice of arranging for a brief session between the Provost and the full Committee early in the year (perhaps after submitting its first five reports) would be a productive practice. It might also make sense to meet a time or two subsequent to this first meeting.

The Committee found it difficult to review several administrative appointments for which tenure review was requested. In particular, it was a challenge to judge the research components of cases where an administrator had not engaged in research for some period of time.

In a couple of cases, external reviewers seemed not to appreciate whether or not a case was timely. This should be clearly stated in letters they receive.

The Committee also was confused in several cases by recusals from faculty members within the department for which no clear rationale was provided.

Action Item: The Provost should raise the level of transparency of his or her decisions as noted above. The other minor issues identified above should be addressed by the appropriate UO administrator.

The Committee and its Charge

With a record number of promotion cases, one that will likely be topped soon, the time has come for the Administration to recognize the workload associated with this committee. Each year, an amount of time that may exceed the teaching of a class is necessary for each of the Committee's members to serve its mission. We understand that all faculty members on campus are expected to provide service as part of their duties. Therefore, a course release each year would not be appropriate. But for the full two-year appointment, it is more than warranted. In our opinion, the possibility that faculty members will serve in order to obtain release time and then shirk from duties is far less likely than the possibility that the University will continue to have to scramble to populate this critical committee without such appropriate time compensation.

Action Item: In the second year of service on the Committee, the faculty member should receive a one-time reduction of teaching equivalent to one course.

Although there were no students on the Committee this year, we have been informed that this will be the case next year. The Committee does not understand the rationale for having students on the committee and strongly opposes this policy. Despite their best efforts and demonstrable spirit of volunteerism, students do not have the skill set or experience necessary to contribute meaningfully to the Committee's discussions. The presence of students on the Committee seems even more inappropriate if we consider that untenured faculty members are excluded from serving on it.

Action Item: Work with the University Senate to change the constitution of the University Promotion and Tenure Committee to remove its two student members. Refer to the proposed text included in the Report of the Faculty Personnel Committee for 2010-2011.

Respectfully Submitted

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2011-2012 Chair of the Faculty Personnel Committee
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