

# **Report of the 2014-15 UO Faculty Personnel Committee**

## **Membership and Case Load**

The 2014-15 FPC consisted of twelve members:

Patrick Bartlein (Professor, Geography)  
Elizabeth Harn (Associate Professor, COE, SPECS)  
Leonardo Garcia-Pabon (Professor, Romance Languages)  
James Harper (Associate Professor, History of Art/Architecture)  
Leslie Harris (Professor, Law)  
Qusheng Jin (Associate Professor, Geological Sciences)  
Steven Matsunaga (Professor, Accounting)  
Ronald Mitchell (Professor, Political Science)  
Jonathan Palfreman (Professor, Journalism)  
James Schombert (Professor, Physics)  
Lydia Van Dreel (Associate Professor, Music)  
Harry Wonham (Professor, English), Chair

The committee considered a total of 58 cases during AY 2014-15. The breakdown of cases was as follows:

Associate Professor with Tenure: 32  
Full Professor: 19  
Tenure Only: 7

## **Work Chronology**

The committee convened on October 31, 2014, for an orientation with Doug Blandy, Ken Doxsee, and Pam Palanuk of Academic Affairs. Daniel HoSang of the UO Center on Diversity and Community also attended the meeting and outlined approaches to evaluating contributions to institutional equity and inclusion in tenure and promotion cases. Throughout the remainder of the academic year, the committee held weekly two-hour meetings, concluding its work on June 11, 2015. Except in cases of recusal, each committee member read all files in their entirety and arrived at meetings prepared to discuss from three to five cases per week. Each committee member was responsible for drafting approximately five reports on individual cases in advance of discussion. As primary author, that member was then charged with revising and expanding the report in response to the committee's deliberations. All cases were checked and finalized by Harry Wonham, FPC Chair, before being released to Academic Affairs and the Provost.

## **Problems and Recommendations**

Over the course of its deliberations, the committee identified several areas of perennial concern and ideas for improvement of the promotion and tenure process.

1. Use of metrics for assessing scholarly/creative impact and significance: Some UO schools and departments use citation rates from sources such as GoogleScholar and Web of Science as one among several means of assessing the impact of a candidate's scholarship or creative work within one or more fields of knowledge. While the value of such metrics differs dramatically from one discipline to the next, and while specific index numbers can vary substantially across sub-disciplines, the FPC was generally impressed with the efforts of some units (especially the School of Business) to provide reliable statistics, especially when such data were accompanied by comparative information, allowing us to appreciate the impact of a candidate's work in relation to that of his or her peers at comparable institutions. We would like to encourage departments to explore information resources that might enhance their ability to quantify scholarly impact and significance in ways that seem appropriate for their disciplines. "Best Practices" on this issue will differ widely among fields, and yet the FPC would like to see more thoughtful use of relevant metrics in internal evaluations of scholarly/creative impact and significance.

2. Quality of publication venues: Another important factor in the FPC's assessment of research impact and significance is the quality of the journals and university presses with which a candidate has published research. Some UO departments provide carefully calibrated explanations about the quality of publication venues within their disciplines, while others leave such differentiations to the FPC's imagination. We would like to encourage department heads to adopt the former approach by commenting on the quality of publication venues in the Department Head's Letter.

3. The meaning of "peer-review": A related difficulty for the FPC lies in the different ways in which the term "peer-review" is used by units across the university. Some disciplines appear to use the term casually to refer to scholarship that has been reviewed for publication by someone other than the author (e.g., an editor in the case of an invited contribution to a critical anthology or encyclopedia), while others assume that "peer-review" denotes anonymous (or even "double-blind") evaluation by credible scholars in the field. The FPC acknowledges that such differences in usage are unavoidable, and yet we encourage department heads to provide the committee with relevant contextual guidance on this issue.

4. Student evaluations: In response to a recommendation from the 2013-14 FPC, Academic Affairs has produced a concise and useful "Guide" for FPC members. Among its many clear instructions for the conduct of evaluations, the Guide insists: "**It is not permissible to quote from unsigned [student] evaluations in any summary or evaluation of statements associated with the review.**" In a few cases this year, we noted inappropriate references to student opinions that were undocumented and unsigned. We encourage department heads and departmental promotion committees to read carefully through the Academic Affairs Guide and to adhere to its instructions.

5. The question of "what counts?": The duration of the period under review is unambiguous in most cases, and yet for colleagues who have been granted years of credit toward promotion and tenure for prior service, this question can pose minor difficulties.

In two cases this year, the Dean's letter informed us that, according to the agreed upon terms of employment, "all" of the candidate's "previous scholarship" should count in the evaluation for promotion and tenure. The committee was concerned that such language complicates the evaluation process by implying an open-ended period under review (i.e., the period in these cases might arguably include the candidate's 7<sup>th</sup> grade term paper). We did not consider this a serious problem, but in the interest of consistency and fairness, we recommend that hiring agreements that affect the period under review be carefully and consistently worded and, where relevant, that they be provided *verbatim* in the Dean's Evaluation Letter, rather than by way of informal summary.

6. More on "what counts?": It is vital that the dean and department head confer and agree upon the duration of the period under review at the **outset** of the evaluation process, before the department contacts outside evaluators. In several cases this year, we noted that outside evaluators focused their comments on scholarship performed prior to the period under review, which obviously diminished the usefulness of their evaluations.

7. More thorough explanation of declinations: The willingness or unwillingness of outside evaluators to participate in a promotion review can be an important factor in the FPC's deliberations. Too often, however, we lacked sufficient contextual information to make informed judgments about the significance of declinations from outside evaluators. Whenever possible, the Department Head's Letter should provide context and guidance on this issue: Were the invitations sent in a timely fashion? Is the field of research unusually specialized? Does the DH consider declinations from key scholars problematic, given the nature of the research? Does the DH consider the assembled panel of outside evaluators highly qualified, or—because of the number of declinations—are the evaluators less than ideally qualified to assess the significance and promise of the research portfolio?

8. The meaning of abstention: It is vitally important to the promotion process that the votes of all eligible faculty members be accurately reported and, where necessary, explained. The FPC encountered several cases this year in which departments failed to distinguish between "abstention" (which implies a deliberate refusal to vote) and "absence." Department heads should carefully record the number of eligible voters, the number of signed abstentions, and the number of non-participating eligible voters. Abstentions should be thoroughly contextualized in the Department Head's Letter, and instances of non-participation should also be explained.

9. Institutional Equity and Inclusion: The Collective Bargaining Agreement mandates that candidates for promotion provide a 3-6 page personal statement that includes "discussion of contributions to institutional equity and inclusion." Although this is a new requirement, most candidates for promotion in 2014-15 provided eloquent and impressive narratives of their contributions in this area, and each of our reports to the Provost included a discrete section on Institutional Equity and Inclusion, whether or not the candidate complied with the CBA's directive. The FPC encourages department heads and deans to ensure that members of the bargaining unit who are future candidates for promotion understand the significance of this aspect of the file. We also encourage

department heads to offer their assessment of the candidate's contributions to equity and inclusion as a regular feature of the Department Head's Letter.

### **Suggestions for Academic Affairs**

10. Electronic files: We endorse the 2013-14 FPC's recommendation that Academic Affairs adopt a fully electronic promotion and tenure system, in which all materials would be submitted electronically from the start. Such a system would expedite the review process and would improve Pam Palanuk's life (she currently scans tens of thousands of pages of promotion files so that the FPC can enjoy remote electronic access).

11. Early Promotion and timeline for promotion to Full Professor: We applaud Ken Doxsee's new "Guide" for FPC members, which includes very useful information on the FPC's purposes and procedures. In the next iteration of that document, we would like to see clarification of the university's policies on early promotion to both Associate and Full Professor. What does the university consider a "typical" timeline for promotion to Full Professor? Are candidates who elect to be evaluated early for promotion (to either Associate or Full) held to a higher standard, or do the same criteria apply? If early promotion implies a higher standard (as we feel it should), then it would be helpful to define the difference as carefully as possible in departmental Promotion and Tenure Guidelines.

12. Finally, we hope Academic Affairs and the Provost's Office will revisit the issue of course-release or other compensation for FPC members. The heavy preparation and extensive meeting schedule through late fall, winter, and spring terms significantly exceed the demands of a single course. FPC members were promised this consideration several years ago, as explained in the 2013-14 FPC report, but no action was taken. If course release for all members is not feasible, it might be appropriate to offer members a stipend or research funds. At a minimum, the committee chair, who has the additional responsibility of editing reports and running meetings, should receive a course reduction. The time has come to acknowledge committee members for their extraordinary service to the university.

Respectfully submitted,

Harry Wonham, FPC Chair, 2014-15