

**Faculty Personnel Committee  
2007-08  
Report to the Senate**

The Faculty Personnel Committee (FPC) has completed its work for AY07-08. The FPC comprises ten elected faculty members and two student representatives (when possible). No students participated on FPC this year. Each faculty member has one vote. Five faculty members were elected or appointed by the Senate from the College of Arts and Sciences and five from the professional schools. The faculty members on this year's committee were: Aletta Biersack (Anthropology), Bruce Blonigen (Economics), Patricia Curtin (Journalism and Communication), Patricia Gwartney (Sociology), Michael Hames-Garcia (Ethnic Studies), R  n  e Irvin (Planning Public Policy and Management), Steve Larson (Music), John Postlethwait (Biology), and Robert Ribe (Landscape Architecture) who chaired the committee. Carl Bjerre (Law) served for fall term only, before going on leave, and was not replaced in winter and spring. The FPC was assisted by Jennifer Burton and Lizz Zitron in the Academic Affairs office. They professionally assisted with administrative details, processing of files, scheduling, and organization of meetings.

During AY07-08, FPC advised the Provost on 48 cases involving tenure and/or promotion. The breakdown of the cases was as follows:

Promotion to Professor with tenure	1
Promotion to Professor	23
Promotion to Associate with tenure	22
Tenure only	2

Over AY07-08, the FPC held two organizational meetings and 17 meetings to deliberate and vote on case files and write reports. The chair met with the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, Russ Tomlin four times. The FPC had no direct guidance from or meetings with the Provost regarding the nature and degree of due diligence she desired, or the ways in which she might prefer that university and departmental standards for promotion be interpreted. The FPC chair inspected all decision letters sent by the provost. This is a critical step that should always be practiced soon after they are sent.

The FPC meetings involving the case files lasted two hours, during which members discussed two to four cases. All committee members read every case file thoroughly, which involved approximately two to four hours per week per person. Each committee member was also responsible for writing and rewriting FPC reports for five or six cases. This task required approximately three to nine hours per case, beyond the commitment to read and assess other files and attend meetings.

The FPC's expectation is that units have prepared case files according to the guidelines found in the *Faculty Guide to Promotion and Tenure* and the *Timetable and Guidelines for Recommending Promotion and/or Tenure for Faculty Members*, both from the Office of Academic Affairs. The opportunity to review numerous files made it clear that nearly all

departments, programs and schools now consistently follow the guidelines; only a few units still have problems with a few key details. This represents significant progress compared to recent years. The FPC strongly urges everyone connected with the preparation of tenure and promotion files to continue to follow these guidelines carefully. We applaud those units that do so. Any lack of clarity created by a poorly prepared file harms the candidate, the university's efforts to sustain a high-quality faculty, and the promotion process' integrity and efficiency.

All cases we assessed this year substantially met existing unit and university standards for promotion in at least one or two of the three areas of performance evaluation (teaching, creative scholarship, and service), while many met all three. Our most difficult and contentious deliberations typically involved marked weakness in one of the three areas, often in service or teaching. This indicates faculty members' strength and success in meeting high standards of achievement.

The quality of candidates' personal statements also generally impressed the FPC, and they often played critical roles in our decisions. The statements were typically understandable by non-specialists, richly informative about the nature and value of candidates' research and creative enterprise, and informative about their teaching philosophy and methods. The few personal statements that did not serve candidates well addressed only research and failed to describe the nature and value of teaching or service.

What follows are the FPC's recommendations for improving the promotion and tenure review process to help solve problems we encountered this year. They are listed in rough order of importance.

### **1. Pending Publications**

A new section should be added to case files called "pending publications." This section should contain all communications from book publishers and journal editors regarding the evolving status of pending publications listed in candidates' *cv*'s, including both postal-mailed letters and printouts of original email communications. These materials will help resolve the ambiguous, potentially outdated, and sometimes contradictory characterizations (or mis-characterizations) of pending publications in candidates' *cv*'s, candidates' statements, reviewers' letters, internal unit and Dean reports, or in answers to FPC queries about the status of books and peer-review article manuscripts. When FPC encountered such issues, the evidence needed to resolve them was often difficult to find in case files or the supplemental materials, and often it was simply not available. In addition, it would also be helpful if candidates for full professor applied for promotion the year after publishing a major book, rather than in the same year.

### **2. Election and Service of FPC Members**

There are serious problems with the seating of FPC members. There should always be ten members who are competitively elected (not appointed) from readily recruited candidate pools.

The university is making a concerted effort to complete promotion and tenure evaluations earlier so as to be competitive with other institutions on the semester schedule in retaining and recruiting quality faculty. The slowest part of the process, after file preparation, is the FPC review process. The FPC's capacity to accelerate this review as much as possible depends on

how many members there are to write and rewrite case reports, and how much time FPC members have to do so. This year we worked short-handed with nine instead of ten members for most of the year. Steps must be taken to prevent this from occurring in the future.

At the same time we note that there was a deficit of candidates from professional schools this year, entailing appointments by the senate early next academic year. We also note that elections in recent years have often been non-competitive with only as many (or fewer) candidates as positions. This means the FPC is not genuinely an elected body, but one of volunteers and appointees, and with a shortage of available replacements when a member is unable to serve—as occurred this year.

The essential problem is that FPC service is likely the most stressful and time-consuming of any university-wide committee, and few faculty members are willing to stand for election and serve, even though it is very interesting work offering a sample of the range and quality of work across campus. Both the problems described in the paragraphs above could be ameliorated if FPC service entailed some kind of incentive or compensation, such as relief from other work obligations during the period of service, or compensation such as summer pay or increments to ASA accounts. We recognize that if this were formalized it would set a precedent that could spread to other university service obligations that entail less time and stress. But, some system of relief to encourage FPC service would likely make the FPC a genuinely elected body, one less likely to be vulnerable to cronyism when members are appointed, and one more able to complete its work in a timely manner.

### **3. The Status of Non-Peer-Reviewed Achievements**

Unit heads should vouch for the competitiveness and/or prestige of intra-discipline awards faculty members receive, which outsiders do not understand. Examples of when such information is needed include art exhibitions, music and dance performances, prizes for films, books, and articles (peer reviewed and not), recording contracts, design awards, professional awards, and the like. While outside reviewers' letters commonly describe the quality of journals and book publishers, they only intermittently provide such assessments of awards and achievements that fall outside of these venues. The FPC is often at a loss to assess whether such awards resulted from competitive or rigorous reviews and therefore evidence of quality achievements in creative enterprise.

### **4. Author Order in Relation to Contributions**

Unit reports should always characterize the meaning of a candidate's position in the order of authorship for important publications and papers, because conventions differ across disciplines. Most of the publications in FPC case files this year were multi-authored. When explanations were lacking, the FPC had to rely on its members' *ad hoc* recollections and understandings, and failing that, inefficient queries to unit heads. Additionally, some indication of the extent to which a candidate contributed to publications for which they are not a major author is helpful.

### **5. Uniformity of Promotion Standards**

In recent years UO has emphasized the clarification of units' promotion standards, both in conceptual and operational terms, resulting in more fair and transparent promotion and tenure decisions. However, a few units still employ overly vague concepts and poorly specified

standards, potentially leading to arbitrary interpretations and decisions by the FPC and other decision makers. The administration should press these units to rewrite their standards. Indeed, all units should regularly improve and update their standards.

The FPC noticed a disparate range of standards for promotion across units, such that we sometimes felt pressured to promote a candidate from one unit that we might not in another. The fairness of this situation is problematic and it dilutes the commonly shared meaning and value attributed to promotion anywhere at UO. We therefore suggest that the next step in improving promotion standards should involve efforts to improve uniformity across campus. We recognize that perfect uniformity will never be possible or desirable, given the differences inherent across the sciences, social sciences, humanities, and professions. Nevertheless, standards could be much more similar across campus than they now are. One approach could involve specifying common minimal standards or equivalences across types of achievement. There are other possibilities.

## **6. Characterization of Outside Reviewers**

The FPC encountered many instances in which we had reason to question how candidates' files described their relationships to outside reviewers, and the extent to which units actually selected reviewers independently of candidates' advice. For example, some files described reviewers as "having no relation" to a candidate or as "not selected by the candidate," yet the corresponding reviewers' letters mentioned strong, even collaborative, professional relationships. We also noticed a seeming tendency of some units to select reviewers from less prestigious institutions to review weaker candidates and vice-versa. When units recruit reviewers from non-peer institutions, candidates' files should clearly explain their appropriateness. We recognize that there are fields in which specialists form small and tightly knit groups, but we also recognize that prestigious reviewers tend to decline reviewing candidates they perceive to be weak. In any case, candidates' files should be more forthcoming and circumspect in identifying and characterizing outside reviewers, to maintain the integrity of this critical part of the promotion review process.

## **7. Level of Voting in Cases Involving Colleagues**

The FPC urges the Provost to require, not simply encourage, discussion and voting on tenure and promotion cases at the lowest available level by all faculty involved in the process. In other words, faculty members who have the opportunity to vote on unit-level promotion committees, a dean's advisory committee, an FPC, or their equivalents should discuss and vote on a colleague's case at the unit level only. No faculty member should have an opportunity to strategically select when or where to vote in order to maximize their impact on a case – in either a positive or a negative direction. Participation at the higher level presents too high a risk for inappropriate skewing of discussion and final case disposition, whether real or in appearance. There were fewer instances of such potentially strategic voting this year than last, but a simple rule would solve the problem.

## **8. Evasive Reports**

The FPC encountered a significant number of cases in which unit committees, unit heads, college personnel committees, and even deans failed to address critical issues raised in files, as if ignoring these real or potential issues will prevent them from coming into play in final decisions.

The resulting reports tended to be overly optimistic summaries, rather than judiciously critical reviews. To the extent possible, those involved with evaluation at each level must understand the importance of praising that which is praiseworthy and engaging critically that which is not. Candidates are not well served when the FPC gets the impression that serious issues have been swept under the rug, for it allows needless and potentially harmful speculation rather than informed decision making. If prior levels of review have indeed sidestepped real or suspected problems, they do not serve the university community well in the long run.

### **9. Unexplained Votes**

Units should document the key reasons behind minority votes or abstentions in split decisions. Failure to explain faculty members' alternative opinions encourages the FPC to speculate, possibly in unfounded directions or directions not anticipated by the unit.

### **10. Teaching Evaluations**

The FPC encountered several cases in which candidates' student teaching evaluations were uneven at best or demonstrably weak. Yet unit-level committees or heads excused the record, usually along the lines that the candidate is a tough, demanding teacher who does not coddle students or who demands harder work, more learning, and higher performance than instructors with better evaluations. The FPC had little basis to judge these conflicting items of evidence, except by *ad hoc* and potentially arbitrary impressions derived from the nuance of written course evaluations and the candidate's statement.

One solution we suggest is to add a third item to the teaching evaluation summary now required in each file. The two questions now summarized across all courses taught in the review period are (1) overall quality of the course and (2) overall quality of the instructor. A third question could ask students to rate how much they learned in the course. This would provide some summative evidence that an unpopular or poorly rated instructor is actually an effective teacher, to help corroborate (or not) such counter claims as sketched above.

We were pleased to observe that units generally no longer use Z-scores in characterizing teaching evaluations. But we were discouraged to find that some unit reports for candidates failed to explain why certain courses received low evaluations, or why decreasing or increasing trends in course evaluations were clearly observable.

This was the first academic year in which the Provost's Office insisted upon having peer teaching evaluations in promotion and tenure files. We found, however, that few peer reviewers took the task as seriously as they could have. (Some did.) Almost all reported only positive observations, leaving the FPC to tease out varying levels of positivity that might suggest an unmentioned problem. For example, few addressed how well instructors listened to questions and directly and completely answered them, and virtually none commented upon the atmospheric quality of air or sound or the influence of distractions, such as hallway noise. So long as such peer evaluations will be part of this process, we urge the administration to assist faculty in doing it well, e.g., by publishing a list of guidelines or by distributing a checklist to help observers remember what to look for. (The Sociology Department is willing to share the instrument its members can use if they wish.)

## 11. Time Period of Scholarly Production

Scholarly and creative works should be cited in *cv*'s and counted in reports in such a way as to indicate which work was carried out during the time interval under review and which pre-dated the review period. The review period can be unnecessarily time consuming and difficult to ascertain, particularly in cases where years of service elsewhere were credited or employment is at less than 1.0 FTE. Such periods should be clearly established in all files.

## 12. Electronic Technologies to Assist File Review

Last year's report discussed the use of computer-based technologies to standardize and streamline the promotion and tenure process. This year's committee wishes to note the positive impact such a change might make in easing the heavy workload FPC service entails for committee members.

As noted elsewhere in this report, FPC members devote a substantial number of hours each week to the Committee's work, and the current system of having each file exist only in paper form is a needless impediment to getting that work done. In an electronic age, committee members should not be expected to walk across campus to a designated building during fixed office hours in order to read files; nor should they need to do this twice in a row when checking out files for overnight review. Instead, given their already busy schedules, committee members need to be able to take care of their file-reviewing labor when their own schedules permit, without elaborate planning. To this end, the FPC strongly urges the administration to make the files available in a secure electronic format.

There are several major issues that should be readily resolvable with a little sustained attention. The first issue is the actual scanning, assembly and uploading of the files from digital and paper originals, and the question of who would be responsible for this perhaps labor-intensive additional effort. The second issue would be to what extent would digital, rather than paper, submissions of review letters and reports be admissible as verified and signed evidence. The third issue, of course, is security. This could be readily addressable with temporary-duration passwords issued to committee members and intranet access to the files. We do not think that security concerns justify restrictions on printing, because hard copies of long documents are much easier to read and Committee members can be responsible for shredding of the printed versions as they now routinely do with all other confidential notes and draft reports.

We would urge adoption of such a system as soon as possible, as other universities are doing so. We do recommend that, even when the electronic access system is in place, the traditional hardcopies of files be maintained as legal records and to increase the options available to FPC members for review of files. In the long run, we feel that simplifying access to files might contribute to a larger pool of willing nominees for FPC service.

The FPC elected *Pat Curtin* (Journalism and Communications) to serve as chair for the 2008-2009 academic year.

Submitted by Robert G. Ribe, FPC Chair, AY07-08  
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