

## **Membership**

This year, the committee consisted of three continuing members and seven new members. Serving the second year of their terms were Marina Guenza (Chemistry), Beth Stormshak (Education - Counseling Psychology), and Steve Vacchi (Music). Serving the first year of a two-year term were Cynthia Vakareliyska (Linguistics), Gordon Sayre (English), Daniel Rosenberg (Honors College/History), Jenny Young (AAA - Architecture), Richard Hildreth (Law), and Tom Wheeler (Journalism).

Michelle Wood (Biology) resigned from the committee shortly following the first meeting to take a job with the NOAA in Washington, DC, and she was replaced by Victor Ostriak (Mathematics), who then stood for election to a full two-year term for 2010-2012. Steve Vacchi served as Chair during the Fall term, and then Gordon Sayre took over as Chair during Winter and Spring terms.

## **Meetings and case load**

The FPC read, considered, and issued reports to the Provost on 49 cases this year

32 for promotion to Associate Professor with tenure

14 for promotion to Professor from Associate Professor

3 for tenure only (new appointments at the Associate Professor or Professor rank)

The committee met once in early December, and then weekly, on Fridays, from Jan. 8th to March 19th, and again April 2nd, 9th, and 16th, with a last-minute meeting during Finals Week. A schedule of four cases per week proved manageable. It is essential to have a full complement of ten committee members in order to reach a quorum of two-thirds or 7 while allowing members to travel for research, presentations, and other responsibilities.

## **Consultation with the Provost**

The committee report from the previous year, 2008-2009, provoked a controversy that aroused a discussion at the October and November meetings of the University Senate. In the 2008-09 FPC report chair Patricia Curtin wrote that "The Provost did not advise the FPC of his final decisions...nor did he share his letters to the candidates with the chair of the FPC, as has been customary in past years." Senior Vice Provost Russ Tomlin disputed some of the assertions in Professor Curtin's report, replying that whereas in 2007 during the administration of Provost Linda Brady the letters of decision sent to promotion candidates were copied to the chair of the FPC, this was not the case under Provost John Moseley and thus the practice was not truly "customary." Moreover, the Vice Provost asserted in a note submitted to the Senate at its November 10, 2009 meeting that it would be a violation of the state OARs to share these letters, inasmuch as they are confidential personnel records. The only way it would be possible to share the Provost's decisions with the FPC would be to do so before the decisions are final, which is to say, before the decision letters are sent to the faculty members.

A compromise was reached: the Provost and Senior Vice Provost agreed to meet with the FPC chair

for consultation if a decision on a case is being contemplated that would contravene the vote of the FPC. The FPC recognizes that its own vote may not be consistent with the votes or the recommendations of the Deans and committees earlier in the process, and that in the case of a tie vote, no clear mandate exists. Attached to this report are copies of the November 10, 2009 note of clarification presented to the University Senate, and the memorandum of December 22, 2009 which describes the compromise. This compromise has not fully satisfied the objections of Prof. Curtin nor of this year's chair, because the status of delayed cases is unknown. It would be preferable if the chair were informed of positive tenure decisions at the same time the candidates are notified.

During the winter term the chair met every two weeks with the Vice Provost. In years past the Provost or Vice Provost met with the entire committee periodically during the season. The FPC feels that such a "hands on" approach is not constructive and may be perceived as an effort to influence decisions or to communicate what the Provost's priorities are. It is important that the FPC be an independent body.

## **Recommendations**

Certain issues in the preparation and consistency of promotion files have been mentioned repeatedly in the FPC's year-end reports. Given that committee members serve for just two years, it is difficult for us to say whether there has been long-term improvement on these matters or not. The Senior Vice Provost and his staff work to correct errors and deficiencies in files before the FPC reviews them, and the FPC greatly appreciates these efforts. The following recommendations speak to issues that arose this year.

### ***Timing:***

The FPC insists that files be released to the committee for reading at least one full week before the meeting at which the committee is to vote on the case. All the committee members need to visit the Academic Affairs office to read the file, and to ask the committee to rush the consideration of a case and the writing of a report is not appropriate.

### ***Student Members:***

The charge to the FPC in Senate legislation stipulates that two student members should be named to the committee. This has not been done in recent memory. The ethical issues here are serious, and given the record of attendance by student members on other university committees, it seems unrealistic to expect a student to put in the many hours of work that FPC service requires. The Senate should consider revising the charge to the committee to remove this clause.

### ***Quorum:***

The charge to the FPC says nothing of a quorum requirement, but in practice the committee has enforced a threshold of two-thirds: seven members when all ten are eligible to vote, or six if one has recused. Is a quorum of fifty percent plus one the legal threshold? The question needs to be resolved.

### ***Outside Evaluators' Letters:***

Among the files this year we saw a few where former post-doc supervisors, dissertation committee chairs, and graduate school classmates had written letters on behalf of candidates. This is generally inappropriate and when it does occur it needs to be justified, e.g. in cases where the professor works

in a very narrow field of expertise.

Department heads should be sure to include in the file a list of the all materials, publications and supplementary materials, being sent to the outside reviewers. Also, the materials sent to reviewers should be comprehensive and come from the relevant period in the candidate's career, generally the six-year probationary period for those standing for promotion to Associate Professor. The dates of all publications, and the dates the faculty member has earned advanced degrees should all be included on CVs.

### ***Course or Teaching Evaluations:***

During the 2007-08 academic year the University implemented a new system of course evaluations. The paper questionnaires and written response forms which had been circulated to students by instructors during the last week of class each term were replaced by a web-based system which students are asked to complete during a week-long period that ends the day before final exams begin. The results of this system are now becoming part of tenure and promotion files in significant numbers.

From the perspective of the FPC there are many advantages to the new system. No longer need we carry the suspicion that negative written responses may have been culled out from the files. The number of courses which, for whatever reason, have no evaluations in the files, will be reduced or eliminated. In the on-line system students are no longer able to submit signed written comments with signatures that are intentionally scrawled in an illegible fashion, so as to enter the personnel file without the necessity of standing behind one's words. Now the electronic signature is a form of self-identification. Perhaps most important, the new system does not calculate standard deviations or "z-scores" of the results as measured against a set of comparable courses. This calculation was made in a manner that in practice could be misleading or statistically invalid. Finally, the presentation of the numerical evaluations is now more user-friendly, taking the form of bar graphs. Most files included the bar graphs, but not all, and we would recommend that all departments include these pages in the section devoted to teaching.

Under the new system the z-scores are gone, but this means that evaluators must pay close attention to what remains. To simply count how many classes were above the department mean or below may not be a good measure if the scores are only above or below by .1 or .2, or if the response rates are low. We often saw response rates below 60%. Response rates on evaluations may have actually fallen since in the 2007-08 roll-out of the new online system. The new system included a disincentive for not completing the evaluation—a delay on a student getting access to his or her grades. But this disincentive is meaningless for students who can get access to their grades through the blackboard system before they get the official final grades through Duckweb. Response rates seemed especially low in the Law School.

### ***Departmental Promotion and Tenure Guidelines:***

Most units now have thorough and unambiguous criteria, but there is still a range in the detail and relevance of these documents in some units and departments. Department and program heads should all read their promotion guidelines and consider revising them to bring them up to date. This must be done with care, however, as in one unit a change in the promotion standards led to confusion because it was not certain under which document a candidate should be considered. In revising promotion guidelines, departments should address the question of how electronic publications (not just electronic peer-reviewed journals but blogs, and general interest electronic journals) ought to be considered, whether as service, teaching, or as part of the research publication

record.

Some of the most difficult discussions the FPC had this year resulted from the heavy reliance upon the scholarly monograph as a criterion for promotion in most humanities and some social science disciplines. This creates an "all the eggs in one basket" situation. An Assistant Professor is led to believe that he or she must publish a monograph to be promoted, and that so long as the book gets published, everything else is gravy. Departmental promotion guidelines often encourage this belief. There are two unfortunate consequences:

First, by concentrating their research and writing efforts upon a book manuscript, some faculty members apply for tenure with no published articles in peer-reviewed journals. This is very discouraging. For all intents and purposes, the decisive factor in such promotion cases may be determined by two anonymous readers of a book manuscript and an acquisitions editor for the press.

Second, because the publication process is complex, confusion arises over what constitutes the definitive moment of publication. The Senior Vice Provost informs faculty in P & T workshops that a book must be under contract, approved by the publisher's editorial board, and the author's manuscript submitted for final production. In at least three cases the FPC accepted copies of brief emails from press editors as proof of these criteria. Given the importance of this matter a formal letter from a publisher might be more appropriate. We also recognize the precarious financial situation at some university presses, and the possibility that a book project may be in danger of being cancelled at any point in the production process.

***Votes and Reports by Departments and Committees:***

We saw a few cases of double voting at different stages. Sometimes this is appropriate, if a faculty member serves on a one-time or ad hoc P & T committee, then votes in a departmental vote. But in other units there is a standing P & T committee, and those members should not vote again.

The FPC wonders if voting in all units should be subject to uniform procedures - i.e. a secret but not anonymous ballot? In a few instances where a department head did not explain a split vote by a department, or individual faculty submitted letters explaining a "no" vote, the committee suspected that the vote had been anonymous, which is not the norm. For small P & T committees of 3-5, a consensus approach makes sense, but the report should be sure to declare unanimity if that is the case, and no vote result is mentioned.

The Deans and their advisory committees have issued in some cases a contingent vote or contingent support for a case, pending the outcome of an important publication or grant. Because the FPC is the last committee to consider cases, and has a very limited time span in which to do so, we would like to discourage such contingent judgments.

As for the FPC's own voting, the chair was concerned that if committee used a voice vote, the sequence might influence the way committee members voted. So this year we used a system of simultaneous voting, employing a set of four color-coded cards. This worked well.

***Moving Materials Online:***

Some departments now facilitate the review of P & T files by making them available electronically on a secure site. There are plans for creating such an on-line system for the FPC itself, and indeed

for digitizing the entire P & T process within the Office of Academic Affairs. The confidentiality and security issues involved in this effort are challenging. The committee members this year were divided on this issue. Some who frequently travel or work off-campus believe that an on-line system is urgently needed, while others are content to read files on paper and to pick them up and return them to Johnson Hall. When the digital system goes on-line, it is important that at least one paper copy still be available for FPC members to read.

***Compensation for FPC service:***

Last year Professor Curtin wrote of an FPC in crisis, and asked that faculty serving on this extremely demanding committee receive compensation in the form of a stipend or course release. This year the sense of crisis was not so severe, mostly because we had the full complement of ten members. However, the case for compensation remains strong. Many committee members believe that a one-course reduction (preferably in Winter term) is an appropriate balance for FPC service. The FPC this year asked the Provost and Senior Vice Provost that service on the committee be recognized in the form of a contribution from the Provost to faculty members' research or ASA accounts of \$2000 per year. This proposal was modest, and affordable. Unfortunately, it was denied by the Provost and President. No direct input from the FPC chair was solicited before this decision was made, and the reasons for it are not entirely clear to us. One objection to stipends that was articulated is a sense that if committee members are serving in order to receive compensation then this might compromise their independence. We feel this is false. The real threat to the integrity of the FPC is that the number of faculty who stand for election to the committee is so low. Many seats draw only a single candidate for election, and sometimes this one candidate has been actively recruited by Deans or Department Heads following a request by the Secretary of the Faculty. Moreover, if a seat has only one candidate in the election, then there is no replacement for that committee member should he or she resign.

Respectfully Submitted,

Gordon Sayre

Professor of English and 2009-10 Chair of the Faculty Personnel Committee

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