

Faculty Personnel Committee

2008-2009 AY Report to the Senate

Committee Composition

According to University legislation, the Faculty Personnel Committee (FPC) consists of 10 tenured Officers of Instruction who are also voting faculty members whose term of office is two years. The two-year terms are established so that half the committee rotates off each year. Each faculty member exercises one vote.

This year, the committee comprised only three returning members, not five: Aletta Biersack (Anthropology; CAS), Patricia Curtin (Journalism and Communication; chair), and Renée Irvin (Planning Public Policy and Management; AAA). Two elected members joined the committee for the first of their two-year terms: Marina Guenza (Chemistry; CAS) and Beth Stormshak (Counseling, Psychology; COE). Four members were appointed to one-year terms: Dan Dugger (Mathematics; CAS), Sara Hodges (Psychology, CAS), Mary Jaeger (Classics, CAS), and Steve Vacchi (Music). One member, Barbara Aldave (Law), resigned on January 15, 2009. Only two members, then, will automatically rollover to next year's committee instead of the usual five, and this year the work load of ten members was carried by nine. Because of the reduced number serving, the two-thirds quorum requirement was met if six voting members were present. If a member had to recuse from a case, quorum was established if at least five voting members were present.

The FPC was assisted by Jennifer Burton, Pam Palanuk, and Tami Oar in the Academic Affairs Office. We are indebted to their hard work this year. They ably handled administrative details, file processing, and scheduling.

Meetings and Case Load

During the 2008-2009 AY, the FPC held two organizational meetings and 18 meetings to deliberate and vote on case files and review reports, beginning in late fall. The deadline for completion of the majority of the case files was moved up to April 15 this year, which necessitated starting in fall and keeping to a rigorous and ambitious schedule through winter and the beginning of spring terms. The chair met with Russ Tomlin, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, and Ken Doxsee, Associate Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, three times. The remaining FPC members had no direct guidance from or meetings with the Provost, Vice Provost, or Associate Vice Provost regarding the deliberations, including, but not limited to, ways in which they might prefer that university and departmental standards be interpreted and the degree of due diligence desired.

The FPC advised the Provost on 53 cases involving tenure and/or promotion.

Promotion to Professor with tenure	1
Promotion to Professor	18
Promotion to Associate with tenure	29
Tenure only	5

The Provost did not advise the FPC of his final decisions on these cases, nor did he share his letters to the candidates with the chair of the FPC, as has been customary in past years. We believe this oversight constitutes a breakdown in the overall integrity of the process. We urge the Provost to reconsider this practice next year.

Overview of Workload and Case Quality

An average of four cases were reviewed each meeting, which typically lasted two hours. All committee members reviewed each case thoroughly, requiring approximately one hour per case or more if the file was incomplete or not clearly presented. Each committee member also took the lead for writing and revising the report for six cases, which required an additional average of four to eight hours per case beyond the standard six hours per week spent meeting and reviewing. The workload, then, was about 148 hours total for each FPC member—the equivalent of 3.5 full-time weeks of service. Such a burdensome load is necessary if each case is to be given the careful and thorough review it deserves.

The overwhelming majority of cases we reviewed this year substantially met unit and university standards in at least two of the three areas of evaluation (research/creative activity, teaching, service). Overall, we were impressed with the level of research, creative activity, teaching, mentorship, service, and engagement taking place across campus. The majority of cases this year were testament to the high quality of the faculty at the University of Oregon. Our most contentious and prolonged deliberations resulted either from marked weakness in one or more areas and /or poorly prepared case files, in some cases on the part of the unit and in some cases on the part of the candidate. Please see the following recommendations for more on these issues.

Recommendations

Reiterating Process Points from Last Year's Report

Many points were made in last year's FPC report to the Senate that we would briefly re-emphasize this year. Files coming forward for review should be clear on the following points:

- **Co-authored publications:** The file should clearly state the relative contribution of the candidate to such work, including conventions for author order in the discipline. This is particularly important when the work is co-authored with senior scholars.
- **Clarification of promotion standards:** Some units' promotion standards are so vague as to be relatively useless during deliberations; we commend the units, such as Linguistics, that have developed clear standards that are also flexible enough to recognize that candidates will take different, yet equally valid, paths to promotion and tenure. We would add that unit standards should clearly state the relative merits and weights of different formats/forms of research or creative work. Additionally, units should clearly delineate the standards used if putting forth a candidate for tenure and/or promotion early, with a clearly articulated statement of why the case is being put forth earlier than the norm.
- **Choice and characterization of outside reviewers:** Units need to be reminded that any reviewer relationship to the candidate should be clearly noted, and reviewers with a very close relationship (adviser, postdoc supervisor, etc.) should not be used except in exceptional circumstances that are fully explained. Reviewers should also be from peer

institutions unless the most qualified reviewer[s] are found elsewhere; again, these circumstances should be fully explained. All reviewers who decline should be listed and the full reasons given.

- **Evasive or misleading reports:** At all levels of prior review, we encountered reports that ignored serious issues in the file. Candidates are not well served when it appears as if critical issues are being ignored. Unit reports that demonstrated a clear engagement with both the strengths and the weaknesses of the files facilitated a robust discussion of the merits of each case and greatly aided the FPC's deliberations.
- **Unexplained votes:** Unit reports should reflect the full range of discussion and subsequent vote, including any minority votes. The FPC should not be left to speculate why a vote was split.
- **Delineation of work accomplished during time period under consideration:** The candidate's curriculum vitae should clearly demarcate work accomplished during the review period from previous work.
- **Dated candidate curriculum vitae and statements:** all candidate curriculum vitae and statements should be signed and dated, and the FPC should see what the outside reviewers saw. If candidates update their curriculum vitae because of significant changes, the updated curriculum vitae should be added to the file and should not replace the original.

The Academic Affairs Office has done a good job of working with units to obtain compliance on these points, including holding promotion and tenure workshops geared toward all stakeholders. While many units have been meeting these standards, some are still far from presenting complete and clear files for review. These latter cases require much more of the FPC's time to review and discuss, and ambiguity in a file tends to lead to less strong support for a case because of a lack of clear evidence. We encourage the Academic Affairs Office to return files to units for clarification if those files do not substantially meet the standards outlined above.

Moving Materials Online

The previous two annual reports noted the great benefits to be had from electronic access to files. We reiterate this point—but with increasing urgency. To quote from last year's 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 . . . given their already busy schedules, committee members need to be able to take care of their file-reviewing labor when their own schedules permit. . . .

To this end, the FPC strongly urges the administration to make the files available in a secure electronic format. 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.

We would emphasize that having access to the files only during main business hours and at a location that is not convenient for those members with offices off campus make a heavy, time-consuming service load even more problematic. As we note below, finding people willing to serve on the FPC is difficult because of the amount of time involved. Anything that makes the job less onerous would be of great benefit to the smooth functioning of the group and to University governance.

Teaching: Peer Reviews and Portfolios

Current guidelines require student and peer evaluations of teaching in the file. While we applaud the reasoning behind having peer reviews, we have found that in practice they are often less than useful. Although a very few units produced peer reviews that were notable for their depth, nuance, and the clear guidance they provided to the candidate, more often than not most were perfunctory—sometimes consisting of little more than a checklist—adding little to our understanding of the candidate’s teaching capabilities, strengths, and weaknesses.

The current guidelines require the peer evaluations but state that a teaching portfolio is optional. We would suggest that these guidelines be reconsidered. A portfolio requires a candidate to be much more reflexive about his or her teaching and lends insight that most peer reviews aren’t tapping. Our University criteria state that “excellence in teaching is an important factor in retention and promotion at the University of Oregon and weighs heavily on the tenure decision.” Such excellence may be more readily ascertained from a teaching portfolio than from pro forma peer reviews. We would recommend, then, that units be encouraged to perform meaningful peer reviews while simultaneously encouraging candidates to submit teaching portfolios as part of their packages.

Interdisciplinary Appointments

It is apparent from reviewing files that much truly interdisciplinary work is being done on campus, which positions the UO at the leading edge of a number of integrated areas. While we recognize and applaud these efforts, we would also caution that interdisciplinary work presents a number of inherent issues when it comes to review. In the case of shared appointments, it is incumbent on the tenure home department to clearly lay out the candidate’s obligations to both the home department and any others that share in the appointment, particularly in terms of service and teaching. Clear expectations, along with a complete review in line with those expectations, would allow the FPC to better evaluate the candidate’s record. Additionally, interdisciplinary research/creative activity requires that extra care be taken when choosing outside reviewers. More outside letters than the usual number might be necessary to provide a thorough review and adequately address all areas of the candidate’s scholarship/creative activities, not just part.

Service Requirements

While University and many unit standards are clear concerning expectations regarding research and teaching, the area of service remains relatively less well defined. When unit standards for service are well defined it is usually to note that assistant professors are expected to contribute minimally to service. At the level of promotion to professor, the University standards only note that “well rounded service will include participation at the various department, school or college, and university levels over time,” and many unit guidelines are similarly vague.

The result appears to be one of establishing a culture of little service at the assistant level that is then carried over into associate, with no clear expectation that service loads will increase with advancement in rank. We are seeing files for advancement to professor that include almost no mention of service, either in the curriculum vitae or in the candidate's statement. Standards for reporting service should be as stringent as those for research/creative activity and teaching.

While trying to protect junior faculty from burdensome service loads is a noteworthy goal, it should also be a noteworthy goal to establish clear expectations for a greater commitment to service once tenure and promotion to associate is achieved. Instead, we see a clear pattern of the work of the many being done by a few who feel called to serve, no matter their rank. This has unfairly put a greater service load on a small number of untenured and tenured faculty members, while allowing others to shirk this third and vital area of academic excellence. Clearer guidelines and expectations of service for promotion to professor could do much to address this disparity.

FPC in Crisis

The FPC provides a crucial service to the functioning of the University, but the FPC is in crisis. Both last year and this, the FPC has worked shorthanded, which has increased the already large workload required of each member. As noted earlier, only three members carried over from last year to this, with five members appointed to one-year terms. One member who was appointed to a one-year term this year, Steve Vacchi, ran for office this year and was elected. Because service is limited to two consecutive years, he can only serve one year of the two-year term. The result is that this next year the FPC will again have only three members who will carry over and be available to provide much-needed experience and guidance next year.

The University and the Senate must address the lack of candidates for the FPC in a way that will have lasting impact and not simply serve as a band-aid measure. Two points we have already raised in this report could help: (1) putting the files online so that reviewing them is not so onerous on committee members and (2) clarifying service standards for promotion to professor. But even in combination, these steps are not enough to solve the problem. What is required is a recognition and restructuring of the workload. To that end, we offer a few suggestions for how that could be achieved.

- Compensate FPC members in some way, such as a course release or summer funding, at least in the second year of service.
- Move to a panel review process with half the committee reviewing a case, much like that used by NSF for grant reviews. Only those cases that appeared more problematic (such as those with a negative vote or a very mixed vote) would be reviewed in full by the whole committee.
- Consider having two FPCs of about eight people each, one for professional schools and one for CAS. Each unit would be responsible for ensuring representation on the appropriate FPC as often as necessary to share the load. This would reduce the work load required of each member while ensuring that every unit pulls its share.

Other ways exist to help ease the burden as well—what is crucial is that something be done. The present system is not working, and coercing people into accepting one-year appointments is not the answer.

The FPC did not elect a chair for the 2009-2010 academic year. The three eligible returning members are all associate professors who do not believe they can take on the substantial workload of chairing the group without critically retarding their own careers at this point. The FPC as a whole agreed that the position of chair is best held by someone who has already achieved professor rank because of the workload involved. The committee disagreed, however, as to whether someone who had not served on the committee before but who had been elected for a term beginning next year would be capable of chairing the committee. Thus the question of how best to identify a chair for the next academic year remains unresolved.

Respectfully submitted for the members of the FPC,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patricia A. Curtin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Patricia A. Curtin, FPC Chair

July 7, 2009