

Fall 2003 Roundtable – Promotion & Tenure

The following is a summary of the Fall 2003 roundtable on Promotion and Tenure that as held on Saturday, Nov. 1, at Plymouth Bluff. I have attempted to collect the many thoughts expressed during the meeting into logical subdivisions as much as possible. Obviously not all topics related to P & T were covered (e.g. promotion for non-tenure-track faculty, maintaining integrity of the P & T process), and not all topics covered received equal attention. Thus this summary does not constitute a set of conclusions; rather it represents an exploration of ideas. Three important points emerged: It is desirable to increase standards constantly and incrementally at all levels. Departments should not be penalized (e.g. loss of a position) for upholding P&T standards.

The overwhelming percent of problems with P&T occurs because of failure in process rather than failure in standards.

Thanks go to everyone who made this a very successful roundtable.

Walter Diehl, President, Robert Holland Faculty Senate

A. Participants

George Adebisi - Engineering
Kimberly Brown – Architecture
Jan Chambers - CVM
Jackie Deeds – CALS
LaDonne Delgado – Library
Walter Diehl – A&S
Stephanie Doane – A&S
Pat Donohoe – Engineering
Edmond A. Emplincourt – A&S
Randy Follett - Engineering
Connie Forde – Education
Jerry Gilbert – CALS/Engineering
Cathy Grace - Education
Paul Grimes – COBI
Charles Lee - President
Liam Lightley – Forest Products
Nancy McCarley – A&S
Joe McGilberry - Outreach
Roy Montgomery – Vet Med.
Duane Motsenbocker - Extension
Phil Oldham – Dean, A&S
Ruth Prescott – Provost’s Office
Peter Rabideau - Provost
Nancy Reichert – CALS

B. Preamble

Some of the topics that were discussed have subsequently been incorporated into a proposed revision of the University P&T document that is currently before the Robert Holland Faculty Senate. These revised document has been submitted to the Robert Holland Faculty Senate in accordance with procedures for modifying the document as currently written. The revised document will be presented to the Faculty at the spring meeting of the General Faculty at 3:30pm on Monday, Feb. 9, 2004, in the Hunter Henry Center. A draft of the new document may be found at the faculty senate website

(http://www.facultysenate.msstate.edu/faculty_senate.html).

Because the roundtable participants were not necessarily representative of the faculty as a whole, the roundtable did not constitute a “constitutional convention” on the revised document and did not have any authority to make changes in it. However any member of the General Faculty or Administration including roundtable participants may propose changes to the new document through elected Senators, and some of the proposed changes reflect discussions at the roundtable.

The proposed revision of the University Promotion & Tenure Document has been approved by the University Promotion and Tenure Committee and by the Faculty Affairs Committee of the Senate. The document is currently being debated by the entire Senate, and a vote by the Senate on the final version will occur on Friday, March 12. Please e-mail any comments about the draft document to Mark Goodman (mgoodman@comm.msstate.edu).

C. Proposed Revision to the University Promotion and Tenure Document

Motivation for New Document

The current document is confusing and awkward. Many of the sections are out of order, and there are conflicting statements. One such discrepancy occurs in the implied number of probationary years that can occur prior to the issuance of a tenured or terminal contract. Also there is a need to assure that practice is consistent with the text of the document, and there is a need for greater consistency in practice among units at the university.

Differences from Current Document

Timing (# Probationary Years)

The new document brings the text of the P&T policy into consistency with practice, namely in restricting the maximum number of probationary years to six before a tenured or terminal contract must be awarded in year seven. Six probationary years is considered appropriate and provides sufficient time to establish excellence. Early tenure, whether defined as awarding tenure with either less than 5 probationary years or only 5 probationary years (tenure awarded in sixth year), is controversial. The former would require a statement in the offer letter. Whether tenure & promotion should normally be awarded in sixth or seventh year was discussed. The tenure clock can be stopped and re-set for exceptional circumstances, thereby increasing the permitted number of

probationary years. Inclusion of “pregnancy” in list of circumstances was controversial and should be examined in context of need for these circumstances to be exceptional.

Pre-Tenure Review

Should a pre-tenure review by the Department P & T committee (or its representatives) be required or recommended? Should such a review be conducted annually, every other year, at the end of the third year? It should be independent of the annual review by the Department Head. Does a pre-tenure review necessitate the existence of a department P & T committee (see below)? Such a review corrects for discrepancies between the Department Head and P & T committees. A pre-tenure review is of great benefit to the faculty candidate. Should a faculty member be awarded a terminal fourth year contract if the pre-tenure review fails to show sufficient progress to tenure?

External Letters

Reviewers need to be impartial and informed, and reviews need to be confidential. Should the faculty member applying for P&T name the reviewers or should the list come from faculty member and Department Head and/or P&T Committee. Should policy for constructing list be uniform across the university or left up to local units? How many reviewers should be solicited? The request for a review should come from the Department Head of Chair of Departmental P&T Committee. The need to trust the professionalism of the reviewers is important. There was some confusion over terminology, especially whether these letters constituted reviews or evaluations. In this discussion “external letters” refers to reviews by anonymous, confidential external professionals not to peer reviews solicited non-confidentially by the faculty member. The latter are not to be prohibited. The distinction may be more a function of current terminology in local units than of conceptual problems with the need for external letters. Some individuals questioned whether another layer of review was needed. External letters would supplement local reviews. External letters help faculty and administrators make the best decision. They are a way to calibrate the departmental unit as scholars. They help external peers know about us. They help to protect faculty candidates who may have run afoul of Department Heads or Deans.

Separate Votes

The new P&T document proposes to eliminate separate votes on Professionalism, Teaching, Research, and Service. There will be an overall vote on Promotion and/or Tenure. Is a separate vote on professionalism that incorporates collegiality desirable and can professionalism in this context be documented? Is there a problem with incorporating collegiality under teaching and research categories? Should it be a part of service? A vote on professionalism confirms the importance of collegiality, but it is very subjective. Well-liked faculty will tend to get the benefit of the doubt. Should the personnel file be used to document lack of professionalism? External letters may be helpful in this context. Courts have upheld universities that have denied faculty tenure because they were disruptive.

Should separate votes in addition to the vote on Promotion and/or Tenure be held at all? Separate votes makes it easier to document excellence in a particular category. Sometimes a faculty candidate chooses the wrong category in which to document

excellence; separate votes prevents others from reconsidering this. Separate votes tend to compartmentalize categories that are considered for excellence and make integration of academic activities which may be desirable difficult to evaluate. The current practice of voting separately on teaching, research, and service is not found in any document but was instituted by a former provost based on practice in the College of Arts & Sciences.

Other Differences Noted

Faculty Rank on Department and College Committees

Timing (Dates by which time materials must be submitted)

Additional Items that were Considered

Departmental and College Committees

All departments and colleges (and equivalent units) should have a Promotion and Tenure Committee composed of elected representatives or of the whole. Should departments/colleges be permitted to vote their committees out of existence? Several units have a culture of not having Promotion and Tenure Committees. There may be legal consequences to the university of having different procedures for P & T among units. Faculty have a responsibility to play an integral role in the P & T process, even though it may be difficult. How can P & T be a faculty driven process when faculty opt out of participating in it? P & T evaluation by departmental and college committees protects faculty from arbitrary administration decisions. A faculty candidate with recommendations from 2 faculty committees and 2 administrators has an advantage over a faculty member with recommendations from only 2 administrators.

Departmental & College P&T Documents

All departments and colleges (and equivalent units) should have a Promotion & Tenure Document. This document would specify any local requirements beyond those in the University P & T document. The local document should exist even if it is simply to state that the local unit will follow the University P & T document. The University P & T Committee needs to review all college (or equivalent) P & T documents. Each college P & T committee needs to review all department (or equivalent) P & T documents. Can departments set higher standards for P & T than colleges? Can colleges set higher standards for P & T than the university?

D. Service/Outreach/Engagement - Scholarship of Outreach

This topic seemed to generate more questions than discussion per se. Many of the questions did not produce immediate answers.

What is scholarship of outreach? There seem to be examples but no clear definition.

What would be the role of peer review? In this context “peer review” may have to be redefined. The scholarship of outreach is an integration across teaching, scholarship, & service. In this context, scholarship refers to “how to do something” and engagement is the application of knowledge, which may or may not be successful. It is distinct from

service, different from traditional extension, more outcome oriented, and may not involve traditional peer review.

Is the bar on service being raised such that satisfactory/excellence requires scholarship of outreach? This again brought up the question of a single vote on P&T rather than a series of votes on Teaching, Research, and Service since the present mechanics do not fit well with an integrated approach.

Are we talking about giving credit for what we have been doing or is this approach a new direction in service? We need a procedure to recognize outreach, possibly a paradigm shift.

Is there a barrier that these types of outreach/engagement not recognized by discipline?
Should promotion and tenure be based on excellence in service only?
How relevant is service? Does it contribute to regional/national reputation?
Do we need a more holistic approach to evaluating faculty?
Should we focus on outreach/engagement and steer away from service?

E. Expectations

Fairness

An increase in standards/levels is desirable. The increase in standards should be gradual not episodic. It is appropriate to compare ourselves with other institutions. There was a sense that expectations should not be lowered because we are at MSU.

Excellence

Should the area for excellence (e.g. teaching vs. research) even be specified by the candidate? The three missions are not incompatible with each other. All 3 missions are important, and the missions can be highly integrated. There are problems of compartmentalizing teaching, research and service. Again the issue of separate votes on 4 issues was discussed.

Process

95% of problems of P&T are due to problems with process not standards.

Should faculty hold a particular rank to serve on department and college P&T committees? Should lower rank faculty judge promotion to a higher rank? What about Department Heads who are Associate Professors and faculty promotions to Professor? How should one protect lower ranked faculty? There will be problems with small units with few professors with higher rank.

Is there a need for a university-level review committee? Does the existence of an ad hoc committee appointed by the Provost to advise the Provost violate confidentiality? Is there a need for such a committee? If so, should it be incorporated into the P&T document?

Mentoring

Is there a need for mentoring junior faculty? Is there a reward for senior faculty who mentor junior faculty? This emphasizes the importance of department leadership and the

need to be a supportive advocate of the faculty. There was a consensus that mentoring new faculty is highly desirable.

Timing

Should faculty notify department head of intent to go up in May?

Should all departments be required to have P&T documents? Appropriate documents at department and college level should exist and should be approved through appropriate channels.

Enforcing time granted for administrators

Start of the tenure clock for mid-year hires.