

MEMO

To: Diane Kelley, Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs

From: Equity, Fairness, and Inclusion Working Group, Faculty Review and Promotion Taskforce

RE: Recommendations

Date: June 1, 2021

The Equity, Fairness, and Inclusion Working Group consisted of Stephanie Bohon (Sociology) and Michael Higdon (Law), co-chairs, and Libby Barker (MABE), Mike Galbreth (Business Analytics), Martin Griffin (English), Andy Kramer (Arts & Sciences), Mitsu Misawa (Educational Psychology and Counseling), Bonnie Ownley (Plant Pathology), Amber Roessner (Journalism), Matthew Theriot (Social Work), Steven Waller (Recreation & Sport Management), and Lisa Yamagata-Lynch (Ombuds Services). We met bi-weekly during Spring 2021 to discuss issues of bias in the annual review and promotion process. Our fact-finding, to date, is extensive, and included inviting faculty to share their stories and experiences as well as attending venues across campus where people discussed issues with the process. We still have much work to do. However, we make the recommendations detailed in this memo now and look forward to the opportunity to continue our work into Fall 2021.

Our committee recognizes that faculty from groups that have been culturally, historically, legally, and politically excluded from the professoriate continue to face structural barriers to retention, tenure, and promotion and are subject to implicit bias. Additionally, these faculty often do more invisible and emotional labor than their counterparts. Overall, we note five areas of concern that especially create problems for faculty from underrepresented groups: 1) ambiguous benchmarks; 2) department or college failure to follow university procedures; 3) moving goalposts; 4) gatekeeping culture; and 5) inadequate mentoring. Our recommendations for reducing problems resulting from these issues are detailed below.

The list of recommendations in this memo is not exhaustive, but it provides a starting place for action. Other items that we have discussed but need more consideration include tenure timing, composition of tenure and promotion committees, accounting for invisible and emotional labor, measuring teaching effectiveness, and crediting and valuing DEI work.

Ambiguous Benchmarks

Unclear Departmental bylaws about the standards for retention, tenure, and promotion create problems for Assistant Professors in the retention, promotion and tenure process. Assistant Professors who have tenure clock suspensions or extensions and faculty with time in rank at other institutions are uncertain about *when* they can stand for tenure and promotion and this creates unnecessary delays. Assistant Professors who do work in fields other than those mostly done in the Department or who are innovative teachers see their work devalued and unclear standards used as an excuse to deny retention or promotion. Vague benchmarks like “two publications a year” can be alternatively interpreted as “ten publications are needed for tenure” or “one publication in Year 2 is insufficient even if the candidate published three papers in Year 1” and different faculty are held to different interpretations of the same policy, and those differences can fall along gender and race lines. The anxiety surrounding unclear benchmarks is heightened when Assistant Professors receive some “no” votes on retention without a clear

explanation of why those votes were received. Even Departments that have clear standards for tenure and promotion to Assistant Professor often have unclear standards for promotion to Professor. Because of this, Associate Professors are unwilling to stand for promotion to Professor because they are unsure if their record is sufficient, and UT internal data shows that women seem especially vulnerable to delay, which may be due to lack of clarity. At the same time, we worry that standards that are too rigid may disadvantage faculty members who have specializations different from most Department members.

- Departments should be encouraged to create clear but not rigid standards for retention, tenure, and promotion *at all ranks*.
- The outcome of retention votes (retain versus not retain) should be shared with Assistant Professors, but the exact vote count should not be shared for those being retained.
- A clear case should be made for casting a “no” vote for retention, tenure, or promotion and a discussion of such a case must be included in the department tenure or retention letter. “No” votes should be discarded if there is no clear explanation for a vote against retention, tenure, or promotion in the department tenure or retention letter.
- Department standards should specify the body of work necessary for a faculty member to be eligible for promotion to Associate Professor and Professor.

Failure to Follow Procedures

Some Departments fail to follow guidelines as specified in the Faculty Handbook. For example, some units require Associate Professors to stand for internal review before being “allowed” to submit materials for consideration for promotion to Professor, in violation of University guidelines. Some departments misinterpret guidelines. For example, some units require all external letter writers be taken from OIRA’s list of peer and aspirational peer institutions and do not allow letters from experts who are not academics.

- The Provost’s Office should create a best practices document on retention, promotion, and tenure for units to follow.
- The Provost’s Office should create a procedure that allows faculty to ask for a procedural audit if they are denied retention, tenure, and promotion. Procedural audits are designed only to ensure that university policy was followed correctly in the retention, tenure, and promotion process. Audits will be conducted by a committee designated by the College or University.
- Each College should convene a committee to audit all Department bylaws with regard to retention, tenure, and promotion in order to ensure that all Department bylaws are in conformity with university policy. (This committee may also be able to identify Departments that need to clarify their tenure, promotion, and retention standards.)

Moving Goalposts

Assistant Professors find that the standards for tenure and promotion increase from the time of hire until tenure.

- Entering Assistant Professors should be evaluated based on the tenure requirements in place at the time of hire unless the faculty member opts to be evaluated based on the tenure standards in place at the time of evaluation.

Gatekeeping Culture

Overall, we found that processes that most often negatively impacted tenure and promotion (especially for women and Black, Latinx, AAPI, and Indigenous faculty) were often about institutionalized Departmental or College gatekeeping culture rather than the codified procedures for retention, promotion, and tenure. For example, faculty voting on tenure or promotion can negatively view taking time off for having a baby, seeking additional support from the Office of Research or other entities on campus to supplement start-up costs, or conducting research that is outside of the typical areas of study conducted by most faculty members (but still a legitimate area of study within the field). We strongly encourage Departments to view their retention, promotion, and tenure benchmarks as something that *most* faculty should expect to attain through the day-to-day conduct of their job rather than an exclusive club that moves the Department in an aspirational direction, and we believe that university leadership should strongly stress this point in every appropriate venue. Changing culture is not easy, but a first step is to create a system of accountability that puts the onus for a failure to retain, tenure, or promote a faculty member on the Department. We recommend the following:

- If a faculty member receives a majority vote to not retain, tenure, or promote a faculty member, the unit Head shall write a letter of explanation to their College that assumes the failure to retain, tenure, or promote a faculty member is a failure of the Department. Where did the process break down? Did they hire badly, and, if so, why? Was mentoring insufficient or poorly done? Was start-up insufficient? Did the annual review process clearly communicate current and potential problems? Were expectations not clearly communicated?
- Faculty shall not be all allowed to abstain from tenure, promotion, or retention votes unless faculty are on leave or if there is a clear conflict of interest. (An example of a clear conflict of interest would be if the voting faculty member is the spouse of the person being considered).

Inadequate Mentoring

Black, Latinx, Indigenous, AAPI, women, and LGBTQ+ faculty members report problems with inadequate mentoring. Problems mentioned include mentors who fail to meet (or even talk to) those they are mentoring, mentors who fail to provide adequate support or good advice, and mentors who do not strongly advocate for those they are mentoring during retention and tenure discussions. A common problem is that Assistant Professors often think they are doing well and then are denied tenure after a succession of strong retention votes. This can happen if mentors do not adequately convey faculty concerns to those they were mentoring. We recommend the following:

- The Provost's Office or Colleges should provide faculty training in how to mentor junior faculty;
- The Provost's Office should provide training for Department Heads on best practices for selecting mentors and how to spot problems;
- College Deans should encourage Department Heads to recognize and reward good mentoring.