

Faculty Senate

Message from Faculty Senate President, Beauvais Lyons

Dear Colleagues:

For two years, our [Faculty Senate](#) and the [University Faculty Council](#) worked with the UT System Administration and the UT Board of Trustees to improve the post-tenure review system, which was just implemented this fall. This new Enhanced Post-Tenure Performance Review (EPPR) policy modified the Cumulative Performance Review (CPR) post-tenure review policy which had been in place for two decades. Having served on two CPR committees in the past, I have direct knowledge that our post-tenure review system works on the UT Knoxville campus.

In today's Knoxville News-Sentinel, as well as an [email sent to the UT community](#) last Thursday, UT President Joe DiPietro wrote about faculty concerns about a new addition to the recently enacted EPPR policy that would trigger an EPPR process as a result of weak "program reviews," as well as requiring "comprehensive peer reviews" of all tenured faculty on a six-year cycle. This represents a significant addition to the current policy. He asserted that the process of vetting this new proposal has included involvement by the University Faculty Council and faculty leaders on each campus. In truth, the process has been rushed and policy itself has lacked clarity.

While the August 17, 2017 Board of Trustees workshop in Nashville may have involved discussions about adding additional components to post-tenure review, it was not on the agenda of the monthly meetings of the University Faculty Council until last month. The first time we received the proposed revisions to board tenure policies was on February 5 in the form of a [48-page document](#) for discussion at our February 7 meeting. We were given a March 2 deadline to respond to an extensive set of proposed changes. In a paragraph not listed in a table of major changes, a sentence on page 12 stated:

“The Board of Trustees reserves the right to direct the administration to conduct an Enhanced Post-Tenure Performance Review of some or all tenured faculty of a campus, college, school, department, or division at any given time or at periodic intervals, as the Board in its discretion deems warranted.”

This provision, which would have granted the Board of Trustees the latitude to target individual faculty members or programs, would have a negative impact on academic freedom and our reputation. That such a proposal would be considered appropriate for university governance concerned me deeply, and I communicated this to the UT system administration.

In response, on February 17, the UFC received the [version that is under consideration now](#), and a few days later, our Faculty Senate sent a survey to all UTK Faculty seeking their input. Even this draft, despite affirming principles of academic freedom, raised concerns for many people. Based on responses from 665 UTK faculty, 509 (76.54%) objected to the proposed policy, with their comments expressing concern about what is defined as a “program review” which has usually meant national accreditation or THEC mandated reviews. Subsequent conversations with administrators now indicate that “program effectiveness” metrics from an outside data and finance company, EAB, might also meet that definition. Another area of concern is the meaning of “comprehensive peer review,” which is understood to mean external reviewers, as is the case for promotion and tenure reviews. Because of the ambiguity in the proposed language, some faculty perceived this as an effort to undermine tenure itself. For a 10-page summary of the survey findings, [click here](#). Other UT campuses also received faculty comments similar to those we collected. Many are concerned about the impact of the proposed policy on our ability to recruit and retain the best faculty, including joint appointments with ORNL and governor’s chairs.

Unfortunately, as a result of an anonymous email, on February 27, the proposed policy was the subject of a story by Colleen Flaherty in [Inside Higher Education](#). In communications to me, Greg Scholtz, Associate Secretary and Director of the Department of Academic Freedom, Tenure, and Governance at the American Association of University Professors wrote that he and his colleagues had never seen anything like this proposed policy, and that it would “undermine normative standards of academic governance.” The negative press in national and local media was very unfortunate, but was not the result of faculty concerns, and resulted instead from the proposed post-tenure review policy itself.

Last week the UTK Faculty Senate Executive Council, though an electronic balloting

process approved a [Statement on the Expansion of EPPR](#). We advocated for following the recently implemented EPPR policy to assess its effectiveness rather than creating additional reporting and assessment burdens on top of our annual reviews and peer reviews of teaching. If some form of expansion to the new EPPR system is implemented by the Board of Trustees, our recommendations seek to ensure the new policy language specifies what is meant by, and who implements the program reviews, as well as focusing the six-year reviews on the “clarity, consistency and candor” of the annual reviews themselves.

We already have a robust system of post-tenure review built around our annual reviews. The commitment by the UTK Faculty Senate to [audit department and college bylaws](#), as well as collect [recommendations for improving the ELEMENTS reporting system](#) are examples of ways that we are working with the administration to create accountability in the evaluation of faculty performance.

In his message on Thursday, President DiPietro has signaled his willingness to consider additional changes to this document. Faculty representatives appreciate this. In a more perfect world, we would have been involved in the formative stages in development for such an important policy. Under the pressure of a very abbreviated timeline, this weekend the University Faculty Council submitted 32 specific suggestions to the proposed policy. It is my understanding that Chancellors and Provosts will also be able to provide input, and that they share many of the concerns expressed by the faculty.

Last week President DiPietro celebrated the tremendous accomplishments of the university in his [State of the University of Tennessee Address](#). The faculty on the Knoxville campus also share in this achievement. Moving forward, I hope we can work together to make improvements in our tenure policy where it adds value to our mission. We all want what is best for our university, the protections of academic freedom and a setting of mutual respect, where faculty are held to the highest standards in their research, teaching and service.

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