



Rutgers AAUP-AFT

Primer for Department Chairs

Annual Evaluations

The role of a department chair is a critically important one – especially important to junior faculty who rely on the experience and wisdom of Chairs to provide guidance during the probationary period and in preparation for a tenure evaluation -- probably the most significant review of one's academic career. The University Policy with Respect to Academic Appointments and Promotion requires Department Chairs to “evaluate periodically members of their department and to report these evaluations as required.” University Regulation 60.5.6 requires that “the Dean or director of each academic unit solicit annually from each department chair a report indicating that a thorough review of each non-tenured faculty member of the department has been undertaken, that its results have been communicated verbally and in writing to the faculty member concerned, and that a copy has been placed in his or her departmental personnel file.”

Annual evaluations provide a terrific opportunity for junior faculty to talk with their Chair about concerns or issues related to their research and/or problems they may be experiencing in the classroom or elsewhere. Equally important, though, is the opportunity an annual evaluation presents for Chairs to provide the “supervision, advice, and training” required by University Policy.

What does this requirement really mean? The importance of meeting to expressly review how candidates are progressing in the areas of teaching, research and service (or other applicable areas of clinical work, artistic accomplishment, extension practice or librarianship) cannot be overstated. Are there areas where help and assistance are needed? If so, might other members of the department be called on to mentor and guide? If there isn't a formal mentoring process established in the department, Chairs, at a minimum, should be meeting with faculty on a regular basis (or make arrangements for other senior faculty to do so) to review the progress of research and publications, to ask questions about plans and timetables, and to be certain that things aren't falling through the cracks. Are classes observed by colleagues and reports written to bolster the teaching portfolio? Is someone advising the candidate of the importance of attending conferences, etc. for the purpose of exposure in the field and development of contacts? Are candidates establishing an independent research record?

Sending a clear and supportive message to junior faculty that you are available and eager to provide guidance will go a long way to alleviating stress and potential problems down the road.

All tenured faculty members have a role in the evaluation process. Tenure provides (as a corollary to academic freedom and job security) an obligation to share faculty responsibilities necessary for the appropriate governance of the institution. Participating

in the process of evaluation of colleagues is paramount in the exercise of faculty prerogatives and governance. An active and engaged faculty in the review process is critical to the goal of retaining the very best scholars, teachers and colleagues.

Advising Candidates

1. Personal statements matter – we've heard it many times from deans and members of the PRC. Personal statements allow candidates to explain what their research means, where it's been, where it's going and how it all fits together. A member of the PRC should have a sense of the person behind the Form 1 and "see" the candidate's trajectory – one that's on course for making lasting contributions to his/her chosen field and to the University. Urge your faculty to have others review their personal statements before they are included in the packet.

It may be appropriate for candidates to prepare two personal statements, one that is sent to the outside referees (and included in the packet's supplementary materials) and one that is included in the packet for internal evaluators. This allows a candidate in a highly technical field to discuss his/her research in terms appropriate for the benefit of the outside experts while describing the work in more accessible terms for internal levels of evaluation that may be far removed from the area of research.

2. Candidates are permitted to inform evaluators if time has been excluded from the probationary period – the goal here is to ensure that evaluators know that, though the record shows a longer probationary period, the candidate must be reviewed in the same manner as the record of a faculty member with a "normal" probationary period.

3. Candidates should carefully consider whether there are outside experts who should **not** be solicited for a confidential letter of evaluation. It's better to raise an objection beforehand – if there's some expert out there who is known to be biased against or hostile to the candidate or his/her research, it's better to have the objection on record before the letter is solicited – an objection after the fact of a negative letter means little in the normal course of things.

4. Note that, new to the 2008-09 Instructions is the requirement that department chairs indicate on Form 3a who recommended the referee, e.g., candidate, chair, colleague or dean. This procedural change to the Instructions is objectionable, in the view of the AAUP-AFT, because it potentially serves to undermine referees recommended by the candidate through a form of guilt by association. At best it serves no meaningful purpose. The relevant information is whether the referee has standing in the field and has knowledge of the candidate's work and abilities. Ample information regarding the referees' qualifications and suitability is provided in the packet, as is disclosure of the referee's relationship to the candidate, if any.

5. The Instructions require that letters of solicitation be consistent with the promotion criteria and model letters of solicitation are included in the Instructions. However, situations may arise where more information is needed and appropriate. We've seen a number of cases where this was so, e.g., when promised laboratory space or equipment was delayed; when candidates were required to spend an unusual amount of energy and time to support small or floundering departments; when teaching requirements exceeded the norm for one reason or another; when a candidate's research straddled two unrelated but emerging fields, etc. If there is a case where you believe it's important

to provide outside referees with additional direction or information, you may (and are encouraged to) make a request to revise the model letter of solicitation: “A department, with the prior approval of the dean and provost, or the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, may modify the text of the sample letter of solicitation.” [Section F of the Instructions.]

Outside referees are specifically asked whether the Rutgers candidate would meet the requirements for promotion/tenure at his/her (the outside reviewer’s) institution. This may increase the possibility that an outside expert will evaluate the accomplishments of the Rutgers faculty member by applying a standard appropriate at their own institution but not necessarily appropriate for the candidate being considered. If a Rutgers’ candidate has had especially heavy teaching/service requirements during his/her probationary period, or, for example, did not receive promised space or funding – these are the kinds of things you might request be included in the letters of solicitation.

6. Make sure that a candidate has clearly indicated his/her contributions to jointly authored papers or grant applications/research on Form 1.

7. The departmental narrative should be written to reflect the deliberations of the department. If there are problems with teaching that can be attributed to factors beyond the candidate’s control, discuss them at the meeting and explain them in the narrative. If there’s a problematic letter that individuals in the department feel is biased or not supportable, address it in the narrative. If lab space or other research support wasn’t available to the candidate, make sure later levels of evaluation know this. The golden rule is to “ensure that a thorough, rigorous and appropriately informed process of evaluation takes place for each candidate.”

8. Ask the Dean to inform A&P Committees that you are available to meet to amplify the department’s report if helpful/needed – it is especially important that you have this opportunity if an A&P committee has questions about the material presented in the packet and/or departmental narrative.

9. If the Dean informs you that he/she wishes to meet to discuss a candidacy, i.e., because he/she is considering making a recommendation different from that of the department, be certain to prepare for such a meeting. Refresh your memory by reading your notes of the departmental meeting, review the departmental narrative and outside letters, and/or ask a colleague who may be more closely aligned with the research to attend with you. Your ability to clearly and persuasively present the department’s position at this meeting can mean the difference between a positive and negative outcome.

Guidance Matters

As the Union, we are obligated to provide assistance to faculty members who grieve defects in the promotion/tenure process under the Article X grievance procedure. Grievance allegations are filed each year against the departmental level – for candidacies rejected as well as those supported by the department. The majority of junior faculty members who come to the union after a negative tenure decision are most critical of a department and/or Chair if they feel blindsided by a decision. That is, even if the decision is negative, a candidate is much more accepting and resigned to accept a negative decision if he/she was aware, well in advance of the evaluation, that concerns

existed and received specific and timely advice/guidance on how to go about addressing the concerns. A faculty member who has consistently received negative teaching evaluations should not be surprised that this fact will weigh significantly and negatively in the tenure evaluation. A faculty member in the sciences should not be surprised that an absence or low amount of grant funding might serve as a primary negative factor in an evaluation. Candidates should be aware that many things matter: the quality of the journals; the prestige of the Press; the number of publications; whether they've demonstrated an independent record of research; whether they've demonstrated that they can work collaboratively or independently; the caliber and reputation of outside letter writers; the prestige of the granting agencies; and so on. It's the department that is generally in the best position to determine whether a candidate has met the appropriate standards:

“Peer Review. Informed judgments concerning a faculty member's accomplishments can be made only by qualified colleagues. Such subjective judgment by persons competent to evaluate duties, responsibilities, services, and accomplishments will protect the interest of professors themselves, the department, the college, the University, and the students better than any objective rating that could be devised.” [U.R. 60.5.14 – Application of Criteria. . .]

If the Chair and department members have done their part and properly advised and mentored junior colleagues, the tenure decision should not be a surprise to anyone.