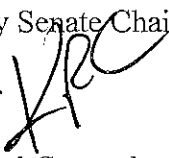


Memo

To: Dr. Ken Kitts, Provost
Dr. Susan Cannata, Faculty Senate Chair

From: Kyle R. Carter, Chancellor 

cc: Joshua D. Malcolm, General Counsel

Date: 5/9/2012 (Revised)

Re: Promotion and Tenure Process

Promotion and tenure is the most important decision in a faculty member's career. Ideally, the process should be unambiguous and transparent, providing a clear path toward its achievement. Faculty should know at any point during the probationary period whether or not they are on track for promotion and/or tenure. Developing a policy and procedures that accomplishes this ideal is very difficult because the evaluation of human behavior is subjective and complex, regardless of how quantitative we try to make it. Further, trying to identify one set of standards for all faculty is next to impossible because different disciplines value different criteria, and may weigh the same criteria differently. Regardless of these obstacles, it is incumbent on the institution to assure that the policy and procedures result in fair and consistent decisions.

Now that I have completed two P&T cycles at UNC Pembroke, I have a better sense of where our policy and procedures are strong and where they lead to ambiguity and inconsistency. I suspect some of the weaknesses that exist today are a result of the passage of time. It is my understanding that our P&T policies have not had a major revision in over two decades. That is a long time. I have experienced the same phenomenon at two other institutions. The faculty and I discovered that the policy that served the institution well in the past failed to accommodate changing institutional expectations, new disciplines and faculty values. That may be true here as well. We owe it to ourselves to review that possibility.

I would like to share with you a few observations that I made while reviewing several difficult cases where different evaluators disagreed on the recommendation. Although it is impossible to eliminate different decisions throughout the promotion and tenure process, the best policies/procedures assure its components minimize ambiguity, thereby promoting consistency and fair treatment. Fairness and consistency are the basic standards by which we should judge our policy and procedures. We owe no less to our faculty, and, as any university attorney will tell you, consistent treatment is the best defense against a lawsuit. With fairness and consistency in mind, I call your attention to several parts of our current policy/procedures that fail the test.

1. University Standards and Expectations. The current university standards, eligibility criteria, and criteria for promotion and tenure are open to interpretation. Although they need to be broad to apply to all disciplines, they can be revised to more clearly reflect the current values of the institution.
2. Promotion and Tenure Degree Requirements. Our current policy would be strengthened by clear and explicit degree requirements for promotion and tenure. It should take into account disciplinary uniqueness on terminal degrees and professional work experience. Not all disciplines require the Ph.D. Professional programs may legitimately recognize alternative credentials as proxies for terminal degrees. These should be established in policy with sufficient clarity to render consistent decisions. Further, it is my opinion that the decision should remain in the administrative realm, i.e. chair, dean and provost.
3. Peer Evaluation Committee. Since each faculty member can form a unique peer evaluation committee within a department, consistent evaluation of individuals within the same department is highly unlikely. A best practice is to have the same individuals review everyone, i.e. departments have a standing tenure and promotion committee comprised of all tenured faculty.
4. Department Chairs and Deans. The roles of the department chairs and deans must be clearly defined, holding them accountable for both mentoring faculty to be successful in reaching promotion and tenure, but also holding them accountable when they do not. They must use the annual evaluation to monitor progress. Faculty should understand whether or not they are on track to reach their goal. If it becomes clear they are not, these administrators have the responsibility of taking corrective action, and if that fails, they must inform the faculty they will not be supported. In this past evaluation there were several examples of faculty who had not met the expectations during annual evaluations, yet they were recommended for promotion and/or tenure.

Chairs and deans must be given training how to utilize the evaluation process to promote professional development and to make appropriate decisions relative to performance. Probationary contracts for tenure-track faculty should be structured in a manner that aligns with these expectations.

5. Promotion and Tenure Committee. This group appears to take its job very seriously and is making critical judgments in the best interest of the institutional standards. Still, it has a very difficult task because five individuals cannot know the nuances of all disciplines across the university. There are two ways to increase the committee's effectiveness: increase its size and provide them with disciplinary statements developed by the departments (see below). I have served at four other institutions where there was a University wide promotion and tenure committee. In each instance the committee consisted of a minimum of 12 individuals, half elected by the faculty and the other half appointed by the Provost to assure broad disciplinary representation. The Provost chaired the committee but did not vote. He was present to assure consistent interpretation of the policies and procedures and provide staff support. As Provost I found value in chairing the committee because the discussions better informed my final decision.
6. Disciplinary Statements. It is impossible to have a university standard that provides clear expectations for each discipline within a university. Although a general statement on the university standard is necessary, it is also important for each discipline to determine expectations for teaching, scholarship and service. These expectations must be consistent with the university standards. A specific disciplinary statement clarifies what each discipline considers important within each performance area. It also has other benefits: It provides guidance to faculty preparing themselves for tenure and promotion and it helps evaluation levels above the department better understand each disciplinary set of expectations.
7. Policy Organization and Presentation. The promotion and tenure policy in its present format is difficult to follow. For example, portions of the policy are actually in different sections of the faculty handbook.

The issues that I identified in the above paragraphs are not an exhaustive list, but illustrate the need to conduct a comprehensive review of the UNC Pembroke promotion and tenure policy. This will take time to do it right. By way of this memo I am charging Provost Kitts to form a task force to conduct a comprehensive review of the policy/procedures. The ultimate goal will be to clarify the policy/procedures to assure consistent and fair promotion and tenure decisions to benefit faculty.

The task force will be comprised of one member from each division similar to that of the promotion and tenure committee. The Chair of the Faculty Senate will serve as an ex-officio member. Two faculty members will be appointed by the Provost and three appointed by the Chair of the Faculty Senate. In addition to these members the University Counsel will serve as a consultant to assure the UNC Pembroke Promotion and Tenure policy adheres to the UNC Code. .

I am asking the taskforce to begin its work in the fall, 2012 and submit a draft of the revised policy/procedures to the Faculty Senate no later than the end of Spring Semester, 2013. The taskforce should benchmark the UNC Pembroke Policy/Procedures against those of other institutions similar in mission. App State, UNC Wilmington and Western Carolina University have all recently revised their promotion and tenure policies and should be included as benchmark universities. The full Senate will review the draft during the 2013-14 academic year and send its recommendations to me by the end of spring 2014.

I would like to schedule a meeting prior to commencement to discuss the logistics of this project and answer any questions you might have. I'll have someone from my staff arrange the meeting.