

Committee on Scholarly Activity & Service

Report and Recommendations on Research/Scholarly Activities

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I. Areas of Concern: Criteria, Evaluation and Standards

The Committee was asked to examine research and scholarship criteria and standards at UNI. After a preliminary discussion, we solicited the PAC procedures from all departments on campus and carefully examined research and scholarship criteria as set out in those documents. As would be expected, PAC procedure documents showed significant variation in scholarship & research tenure requirements. However, the committee also found significant weaknesses that call into question both the rigor and clarity of the standards used to judge research and scholarship. Findings from this review that were of special concern to members of the committee include:

- The absence of specific guidelines as to what counts as scholarship and research activity, or in some cases the absence of any mention of scholarship, among numerous departments.
- The inclusion of either vague criteria (“continued study”, “inquiry”, “innovation and experimentation”) or criteria that are extraneous to a traditional understanding

of research/scholarship (“curriculum development”, “major curriculum revisions”, “consulting”).

- The lack of an explicit mention in many PAC Procedures that work that is part of a file submitted for tenure and/or promotion should have been subject to external peer review.
- In virtually all departmental PAC procedures, there was not a separate set of criteria and standards for the promotion to full professor that specifies requirements distinct from tenure and promotion to associate professor.

II. Recommendations on Criteria, Evaluation and Standards

Based on the concerns expressed, members of the committee voiced a strong belief in the need for clearly stated criteria for tenure and promotion rooted in scholarly work. The object of PAC documents in this area should be to provide faculty with transparent and objective guidelines. To address the weaknesses of current tenure and promotion standards on campus, the committee urges the adoption of the following recommendations by all Deans and Heads, their inclusion in departmental PAC procedures and where relevant, in university documents pertaining to research and scholarship:

1. The listing of specific research and scholarship requirements, spelled out in clear and concise language. Faculty should be able to know with reasonable accuracy what counts and what does not count for tenure and promotion.
2. A prioritization of requirements in the area of research and scholarship. Core requirements (e.g. publication in peer reviewed outlet) should be spelled out and separated from a listing of secondary requirements (e.g. pursuing external funding). The balance between primary and secondary requirements should be clearly stated so that faculties have a clear understanding of where to put most of their effort in working towards tenure and promotion.
3. A statement of the minimum goals needed to achieve tenure and promotion to associate professor, as well as for full professor. A statement of minimum goals would offer both departments and tenure/promotion candidates a road map to research and scholarship success, while not offering any explicit guarantees. The committee encourages colleges and departments to set specific goals and benchmarks, including indications of both the quantity and quality of work expected for tenure and promotion.
4. There should be a clear statement in all PAC Procedures that major works counted in the core requirements of research and scholarship, including publications, exhibitions or performances should be subject to an external peer-review process. The committee strongly believes that a peer review process,

involving pre-screening of publications or letters of evaluation for creative performances or presentations, is not only the best guarantee of quality research and scholarship, but also serves as an important external validation of the quality of scholarship that is being conducted on this campus, and through the wider exposure of external review, enhances our regional and national reputation. As a result, external peer-review for works of scholarship should be considered a baseline in measuring the quality of research and scholarship produced at the University of Northern Iowa. It is the obligation of faculty members to offer evidence that works of scholarship they are presenting in the area of research/scholarship have undergone an external peer review process, and it is the obligation of both the PAC and the department Head to question candidates and request additional documented evidence for tenure and/or promotion if they have concerns regarding the peer review status of individual works being counted for tenure and/or promotion.

5. For those departments that encompass activities not normally subject to a standardized peer-review process involving pre-screening prior to acceptance of a work, which is the case for some creative activities, the committee suggests the adoption of Tenure Evaluation Dossiers (TEDs), whereby those works accomplished during the probationary period are gathered as artifacts or in such forms as CDs, DVDs, or web-based files, and sent out for external peer-review. The expectations and procedures for TEDs should be explicit in all PAC documents.

6. Elimination of all current criteria not specifically linked to faculty research and scholarship in this area of PAC requirements, particularly those criteria more appropriate to service or teaching requirements, such as consulting, curriculum revisions and student paper supervision. Works involving the scholarship of teaching or the scholarship of service that are subject to an external peer review process should count in the area of research and scholarship, while those not involving external peer review should be listed in the teaching and service categories.

7. Although the committee recognizes and appreciates the importance of the independent Head review of faculty during tenure and promotion, it nonetheless believes that the Head and members of the PAC should work with each other in forging departmental standards and criteria for tenure and/or promotion. Where there is a significant divergence regarding departmental standards and criteria, it is important that there be open, honest and timely communication with candidates for tenure and/or promotion concerning these differences.

8. Recognizing that faculty have different interests and strengths and keeping in mind the mission and goals of UNI, the committee believes that promotion to full professor should be judged differently than tenure and promotion to associate professor, allowing for greater flexibility in the balance between research, teaching and service while at the same time making promotion contingent on the

quality of work as a post-tenure faculty member. Members of the committee do not believe that criteria and standards used in the promotion to full professor should necessarily mirror those used for tenure and promotion to associate professor. While continuing to be productive in teaching, research and service, candidates for full professor should have demonstrably excelled in at least one specific area. To achieve this rebalancing, the committee recommends the adoption of “Alternative Assignment Portfolios” (AAPs) for post-tenure professors. Versions of this system can be found at the University of Iowa, Boise State University, and the University of Indiana. This system would allow post-tenure faculty to negotiate an agreement with their Heads, subject to approval by their respective Deans and in consultation with their PACs, to allocate their time and effort differentially between research, teaching and service over a limited period of time, renewable and subject to a mid-point review. The committee believes that such a rebalancing of activities can allow senior faculty to explore in depth their own areas of interest while addressing an important need of the university. This could range from a program to develop a new innovative teaching technique which through workshops, presentations and publications is shared with the campus and broader academic community, to a faculty member taking on a particularly intensive service obligation on campus or in a regional or national association, to an extended period of field research abroad. Much as faculty currently “buy-out” of other obligations due to research that is funded or course reduction requests, the AAPs would allow faculty to rebalance their obligations at the university for a set period to focus on specific projects. It is the view of the

committee that AAPs can assist senior faculty in their professional development and allow them to broaden their contributions to the campus and the academic profession. It should be noted that rebalancing does not imply a dedication to one specific area, whether research, teaching or service. While reduced for a designated period, faculty still must maintain obligations in other areas and promotion should be based on faculty members overall record. During the period of participation in an AAP, faculty would be evaluated on the documented quality of work carried out and decisions regarding merit and promotion would be based on the progress towards achieving the agreed upon goals set out in the initial agreement, which should be as specific as possible. We urge the Provost and Faculty Senate to work with United Faculty in designating a committee with the specific task of designing the policies and procedures to govern AAPs.

9. The committee believes that high standards and expectations in the area of research and scholarship should not dilute the commitment of faculty to other areas, especially to service. In this regard, the committee urges department Heads and Deans to ensure that all faculty, including junior faculty, understand the importance of service to professional development and to good university citizenship. We ask that administrators ensure that service obligations are part of all faculty assignments and are distributed equitably to help foster a culture of service on campus.