

# **Committee on Scholarly/Creative Activity & Service Report on Service at the University of Northern Iowa**

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## **I. Areas of Concern: Criteria, Evaluation & Standards for Service**

The committee strongly believes that service is an important responsibility of faculty at the University of Northern Iowa and an essential aspect of faculty development. The committee also views professional service as a key component of successful faculty governance and a major source of the cultural and intellectual life of the community. As a result, we believe that university citizenship and a culture of service need to be promoted across campus, for the well being of faculty, the university and the community. The committee recognizes that there are a wide range of activities that are considered under the rubric of service at UNI, and believes that faculty in each department are the best judges as to what is appropriate to their professional field. After a preliminary discussion, we reviewed the service sections of PAC procedures from all departments and the service sections of the Faculty Activity Reports used by colleges. In reviewing these documents and in our discussions, the committee identified several areas of concern:

1. Many departments either did not explicitly mention service as a requirement for tenure and/or promotion or provided vague general references.

2. Given the general “lore” that service does not count for much in tenure and promotion decisions, it is not surprising that most PAC procedures lack an explicit mention of how service contributes to professional development.
3. Many PAC documents and Faculty Activity Reports require a mere listing of committees/activities that “count” for service without an elaboration of the effort, time or outcome of such service.
4. The absence of specific benchmarks and definitions of the quantity and quality of service obligations required for tenure and/or promotion.
5. The lack of any mention as to how service activities should be documented for tenure and/or promotion.
6. The unequal burden that falls on women and minorities in the area of service. As the university strives to ensure diverse representation on committees, women and minorities are likely to be called upon more frequently for service. For instance, with women making up 41 percent of tenured and tenure track faculty at UNI (fall 2007), there is clearly a greater likelihood they will be selected for committees more often than their male counterparts to ensure diversity. In our discussions with Phyllis Baker, Director of the Women’s and Gender Studies Program on campus it was revealed that studies have found women generally spend more time on committee service than their male counterparts; with attitudes on gender roles playing a major role. Given that the current reward structure in tenure and/or promotion traditionally undervalues service, women and minorities are clearly disadvantaged for their service activities.

## **II. Recommendations on Criteria, Evaluation and Standards for Service**

Based on the concerns expressed, members of the committee voiced a strong belief in the need for clearly stated criteria in the area of service with precise language on how service contributes to tenure and/or promotion. The committee also believes that service needs to be more explicitly part of the mix in the tenure and/promotion process. The object of PAC documents in this area should be to provide faculty with transparent and objective guidelines. To address these issues, the committee suggests 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 service:

- All department PACs are encouraged to explicitly state in their procedures that service is considered a requirement for tenure and/or promotion at the University of Northern Iowa.
- The committee strongly believes that service is an important part of the tenure and/or promotion process, and would urge PAC documents to make explicit that service is considered part of the mix when PACs and Heads consider the professional attainments of faculty. In this same vein, we suggest that department, college, and university documents dealing with promotion and tenure provide a general statement regarding the importance of service in professional development and its centrality in maintaining and promoting faculty governance.

- The committee encourages PACs and Heads to focus on the quality of service done by faculty and to move beyond lists of committees and activities. Just as teaching and scholarship evaluations for tenure and/or promotion attempt to assess the contribution of faculty in these areas, we believe the focal point in assessing service should be the contributions of faculty in the area of service.
- The committee urges PACs and Heads provide specific benchmarks and definitions of the quantity and quality of service obligations that are considered important in tenure and/or promotion decisions.
- PAC procedures should clearly explain the evidence required to document service activities, just as teaching and scholarship files include evidence of accomplishments. Such documentation could include letters of evaluation from committee chairs on which faculty have served, certificates of participation, copies of final reports from the committee or the minutes of committee meetings, or copies of media reports about key off-campus events involving a faculty member's participation.
- To address the unequal burden of service that fall on women and minorities in the area of service, the committee urges PACS and Heads above all, to be sensitive to the often heavy burdens borne by minority and women faculty who disproportionately serve on committees, mentor students and engage in other service oriented activities. In practical terms however, the committee suggests that departments address this inequity by a) valuing service when figuring merit pay on an equal basis with teaching and scholarly/creative activity, b) make service activities a greater part of the mix in determining

tenure and/or promotion, and c) adoption of the idea of Alternative Assignment Portfolios (AAPs), proposed in the committee's earlier report on scholarly and creative activities, to provide alternative portfolios for tenured Associate Professors. This would allow those faculty with tenure to not be disadvantaged if they choose to focus more of their efforts in the area of service.

### **III. Impediments to Service at UNI and Recommendations for Change**

In discussing the role of service at UNI, the committee explored the challenges and difficulties that faculty face that might explain the generally low ranking given to service obligations. What follows are some of the key impediments the committee focused on and recommendations on ways by which these impediments can be reduced.

1. **Downplaying service obligations by Heads, PAC and other faculty:** Many junior faculty members are told either explicitly or implicitly that service should not be a priority for tenure and promotion, and should therefore be minimized. The message is reinforced by the unclear expectations and criteria for service obligations in PAC procedures. The committee believes that if first year faculty engage in no service and service obligations are kept to a minimum during their probationary period, service will be viewed as a burden later on, making it more difficult to develop a "culture of service" that will remain with faculty throughout their careers.

**Recommendation:** All members of the faculty during their first year of probationary status should be expected to do service and be judged on this criteria by the PAC as a way to instill and maintain a sense of professionalism and community in the university. The committee believes this is essential if a culture of service is to be inculcated in faculty.

2. **Poorly organized committees and meetings without clear objectives:** Faculty often associate “service” with committees that have poorly defined goals with little impact on the running of the university. Time is seen as eaten up by a “black hole” of service commitments that produce either no impact on the university, or else a miniscule result in comparison with the time dedicated to meetings.

**Recommendations:** Standing committees should produce annual reports of their accomplishments that are widely circulated throughout their respective colleges or the university. Ad-hoc committees should produce a final report that is made available to the university community. Committees should explore the usefulness of a web page link that provides updated information on committee activities. In addition, a review of college and university committee structures should take place on a regular basis, focused on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of committees on campus and phasing out committees whose tasks can be more effectively done through other means.

3. **No tangible rewards for service:** Aside from a bit more merit pay, there is no clear reward structure for doing service, let alone for developing a sustained commitment to service.

**Recommendations:** Departments should think creatively about incentives and rewards for faculty who excel in the area of service. Measures ranging from formal recognition and appreciation during department meetings or other events to departmental awards in recognition of service (perhaps involving special fund raising coordinated with the Foundation), should be considered. Moreover, the committee suggests that the distribution of merit should provide for an equal valuation of service with research and teaching, as a way to emphasize to faculty the importance of service. As was noted in the scholarly/creative activity report issued by this committee earlier, we recommend the idea of Alternative Assignment Portfolios (AAPs) to provide alternative portfolios for tenured Associate Professors. The committee believes this system will encourage greater service among faculty by leaving open the possibility of promotion to full professor based in part on exceptional performance in the area of service.

4. **The Competency Gap:** As with research and teaching, engaging in service requires a specific set of skills, particularly inter-personal skills and knowledge of how a modern university functions. Faculty who are deficient in these skills are often sidelined in the service area, as Heads and Deans turn towards more “effective” faculty to engage in service tasks. This in turn results in an unequal distribution of the service load in units.

**Recommendations:** Just as the university offers support to improve scholarship/creative activity and teaching, the committee believes UNI should address the competency gap by offering greater support for faculty in the area of

service. Faculty development in this area could be coordinated by the new Center for Teaching and Learning and involve workshops on such topics as how the university works, issues in higher education or managing committee meetings. The committee believes that since competency in the area of service depends upon inter-personal, communication and management skills, much like teaching effectiveness, the new Center might be the place where remedial efforts and mentoring of faculty in these areas would occur.

5. **Declining Community Identity:** Social scientists have noted for sometime now the decline of “social capital” in the US, and a concomitant growth in individualist orientations and atomistic behaviors. Among faculty this means a decline in institutional loyalty and a growing focus on their own agendas and career paths. The appeal to service as an obligation to the university community clearly has less resonance with such faculty.
  
6. **Burn Out:** Senior professors may justify avoiding service obligations by noting that a) they have already done their “fair share” b) issues are viewed as the same dealt with earlier in their careers and no improvements are possible c) a disconnection with the university in general takes hold as they move into an unofficial early phased retirement period.

**Recommendations for points 5 & 6:** The committee strongly believes that a commitment to service cannot be fostered without maintaining a strong sense of

being part of a larger community working toward common goals. Greater efforts need to be undertaken here, both for junior and senior faculty, based on extending networking opportunities, friendships and collaborative intellectual dialogues and projects. At the most basic level, more “space” needs to be created where faculty can interact freely. This can range from a common faculty lounge or dining space on campus (which was phased out a decade ago) where faculty can meet informally, network and socialize to more organized activities targeted for the professional development of faculty at all levels.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

With the completion of this report, the Committee on Scholarly/Creative Activity and Service has concluded its mission. We believe there are serious deficiencies in the way service is currently promoted and evaluated and urge serious consideration of our analysis and recommendations. Our purpose here is to present to administrators and faculty across campus with what we see as the main problems and challenges in the area of service as a starting point for serious discussions and changes that can enhance the academic life of the university and contribute to faculty development.