



MEMORANDUM

Date: August 30, 2018

To: Faculty and Student Policy Committee
Academic Senate
cc: Provost Academic Council (PAC)
Department Chairs

From: Debra S. Larson, Provost 

Subject: RTP Observations from 2017-18 and Request for Improvement

In the spring of 2017, shortly after I had joined Chico State and had completed the 2016-17 RTP review cycle, I wrote a memo to the campus about suggested improvements to the process of early tenure and promotion. Over the course of the 2017-18 academic year, the Faculty and Student Policy Committee (FASP) of the Academic Senate considered the issues and revised the language of the FPPP. The Academic Senate approved revisions to sections 10.4, 10.5, and 11.1 of the FPPP on May 10. Those revisions are effective for 2018-19.¹ I appreciate the care and debate that the Chico State faculty gave to this topic. The new language provides the campus with greater clarity and definition to the process of accelerated tenure and promotion. These revisions will be helpful to candidates and to reviewers, while also clarifying the common interests of the faculty. Thank you for this effort.

Like last year, my spring semester review of the 2017-18 RTP cases identified a number of practices and issues that need attention. At a minimum, these items confuse candidates and reviewers. They can invite hard feelings and misunderstandings. In the extreme, the practices erode the integrity of our RTP process at Chico State and diminish the importance of RTP towards the role of the academe and our personal responsibilities to academic freedom and professional standards. By way of this memo, I am asking the FASP, Academic Senate, and Colleges to discuss the following items and to identify improvements.

1. Late additions of materials or information into the review process:

In some instances, effective management of the WPAF materials was lacking, compromising the integrity of the review. Materials, explanations, and other information were inappropriately entered into the review process at different levels and steps in the process. Candidates added new items or revised existing items into closed WPAFs after one or more levels of review were completed. New items appeared through rebuttal statements. Reviewers entered new evidence or explanations of impact into the record through their evaluation documents. The provenance of the additional information was not documented, which jeopardizes the process and confuses the resulting decisions. These practices are out-of-compliance with the provisions of FPPP 8.1.2.c.

¹ FPPP 2018-19 changes are posted on the Office of Academic Personnel's website.

2. Establish and adhere to the appropriate period of review per case:

Across the entire division, I saw many examples of mistakes in the establishment of the accurate period of review. Sometimes these mistakes were easily corrected (e.g. caught early enough, presentation and reviews were compliant even if dates on the RTP forms were not) without consequential impacts to the review process. Other times, these mistakes seriously confounded the review process. FPPP 10.4.4.a spells out the period of review for tenure candidates. FPPP 10.4.5.a establishes the period of review for promotion. It is important that we adhere to the FPPP tenant that “Only evidence of the faculty member’s record of performance during the review period shall be taken into consideration.”

3. Clarify the role of significant administrative appointments and those related accomplishments to RTP evaluations of faculty:

Our FPPP does not clearly speak to the integration of administrative accomplishments and evaluating such appointments within the context of RTP. Yet, we have faculty who often take on these important assignments (such as department chairs, program directors, etc.) to the benefit of the institution. Across the campus, we have differing assumptions about the relative merit of administrative accomplishments. The FPPP and department standards create a system of protocols focused by the traditional faculty portfolio of instruction, professional development and scholarly activities, and service. Some department evaluation standards are synchronized to heavy teaching loads with scholarly expectations balanced against the assumed instructional load. Service expectations, depending on the department, may receive limited treatment.

In other words, keeping in mind the purpose of the RTP process, I ask the FASP to grapple with the question of granting tenure and/or promotion when a candidate’s work is not typical of a full-time member of the faculty. This could be, for example, service as an academic administrator, a voluntary reduction in employment to something less than full-time, etc.

4. Require a simple accounting of annual work load in the WPAF:

Our evaluation process is premised on the notion that all applicants carry a nearly similar distribution of workload such as 80% to instruction and 20% to service and professional development. This assumption – whether or not it is applicable to the case at hand - then informs the evaluation results. I find that this can result in unfair treatment of cases where, for example, scholarly productivity is evaluated equally across the candidate pool, regardless of teaching load and number of students served. The scholarly productivity of a candidate with greater release time might be evaluated differently than a candidate who carried the 12 WTU teaching load along with heavy student enrollment numbers. It is also important that our broader RTP culture catch up with the valued benefit to new probationary faculty in CBA Article 20.36 that requires reduced teaching loads for their first two years of employment. I encourage the FASP to discuss a WPAF requirement of an annual accounting of teaching assignments and the number of students served over the period of review.

5. Promotion and tenure:

I ask that FASP discuss the FPPP requirement of two sets of review documents prepared at each level of review when a candidate is applying for both promotion and tenure. (FPPP 8.0.4) My observation is that review documents that have been prepared are identical, except for the title of the specific action. The FPPP provides criteria for each category and classifies the actions as

"independent personnel decisions." (FPPP 8.0.4, 10.4.4, 10.4.5). Could we clarify the distinction in the criteria underlying the two separate actions and cover both actions in a single review document per level of review?

I similarly ask the FASP to develop additional language in the FPPP about the qualifications of the rank of Professor. The FPPP's guidance on criteria for promotion to Professor is not robust nor does it provide criteria that adequately differentiates it from the criteria for promotion to Associate Professor.

6. Department standards:

Some of our department standards do not differentiate between ratings of superior and effective. In other cases, department rating guidelines are set lower than the definitions provided in the FPPP 10.3.

Departments are often generous with acknowledgment of "works in progress." This is reasonable during the retention process. However, a work in progress that spans multiple years without explanatory context begs a question about scholarly productivity.

7. Other observations:

Please remind and encourage the faculty candidates to put their best foot forward with an organized and complete WPAF that is consistent with their CV, attends to the period of review, and makes the case within the guidelines of the department and FPPP. Publication and presentation listings need to be fully cited utilizing standard format including dates and the title of the publication and/or presentation forum.

Department, chair, and dean level reviews, especially during annual retention process, should provide suggestions for improvement, when warranted. Differences in review conclusions between levels of review need to be explained.

The review comments of department committees and chairs need to be consistent with the language and criteria of department standards and the FPPP.

Please refrain from using the CSUC (C-Suck) acronym and refer to our University as Chico State; CSU, Chico; or California State University, Chico. University Communications has updated our style guide and CSUC is no longer consistent with the guide. It creates a negative connotation of our University.

These observations primarily focus on process. Process does matter, but having process without identifying the assumptions of the process and without articulating the underlying values we seek to protect and foster is troubling. I encourage the campus to initiate a robust discussion about our interests and reasons for the system of retention, tenure, and promotion. These reasons are more complicated than the originating and important AAUP principle of safeguarding academic freedom. It is in our best interest to agree to our "why" and adapt a process that facilitates that outcome. Unfortunately, when "taken in its entirety, the current American practice of academic tenure [and promotion] is guided largely by protocols²." Literary, succinct and modern-day presentations on the meta-context of why are missing. This is certainly true for our FPPP. Only Section 8 speaks tangentially to this through its reference to seniority and our interest in developing and promoting the highest quality faculty.

² Teichgraeber, R. F., 2014, Tenure Matters: A Historian's Perspective, *AAUP Journal of Academic Freedom*, Vol. 5.

We are part of an honored worldwide profession. Our University tenure and promotion processes and values should reflect this global context and reach beyond a local and statewide focus. As academics, we have had the opportunity to pursue advanced degrees in our disciplines for which we should be both grateful and humbled. Society has invested in us and subsidized our educations so we can think deeply and innovatively, so we can push society towards greater humanity, so we can challenge the boundaries that limit our world, and so we can professionally disseminate these insights to our students, our disciplines, and each other.

I end this memo by offering a few discrete quotes with the hopes of seeding a faculty conversation that might lead to our own articulation of the values of tenure and promotion and its associated processes. Thank you all for your continuing dedication, time, and effort towards improving our academic standards and thus, the Academy as a whole.

- Among all the inventions of modern life, few have been more important for promoting human freedom and social progress than the university, organized around the search for knowledge based on free inquiry and debate rooted in reason and experimentation³.
- Tenure came about to protect the ideal of free inquiry, but it soon found a role in the labor dynamics of the academe, too⁴.
- Tenure bolsters the sharing of information, the most critical function of the academe. The tenet should protect professors within the bounds of their disciplines, their labs, their classrooms, not license them to say anything they please on any subject³.
- From the beginning, therefore, the commitment to academic freedom was inextricably linked to commitment to nurturing and enforcing the norms of an expert, professional scholarly community. More generally, the integrity of the enterprise presupposes the existence of meaningful standards of quality and professional conduct that can guide decision making within the academy².

³ Chemerinsky, E. and Gillman, H., 2017, *Free Speech on Campus*, Yale, University Press.

⁴ Gardner, L., 2018, Want to Kill Tenure? Be Careful What You Wish For, *The Chronical of Higher Education*, June 22.