

# HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY

## University Faculty Personnel Committee

May 6, 2019

TO: The General Faculty, Humboldt State University  
FROM: The University Faculty Personnel Committee (UFPC)  
SUBJECT: 2018-2019 Annual Report

The annual end-of-the-year open information meeting with the UFPC is on Monday, May 6th at 11:00pm, in the Goodwin Forum.

Serving on the 2018-2019 UFPC were continuing members Christopher Aberson (Psychology, Chair), Marcy Burstiner (Journalism and Mass Communication) and Joshua Meisel (Sociology), and new members Nikola Hobbel (English) and Robert Zoellner (Chemistry).

During the 2018-2019 academic year, the UFPC reviewed the following numbers and types of files:

Group 3 Retention (reappointment) for Probationary Faculty	34
Group 5 Retention with Tenure/Promotion	16
Group 6 Promotion of Tenured Faculty	6
Group 7 Temporary Faculty Range Elevation	11
Total	67

Between 2008-2009 and 2017-2018, the UFPC, on average, reviewed 42 files (range 27-57). Sixty-seven file reviews represents a substantial increase over previous years.

The UFPC remains impressed with the quality of teaching, scholarship, creative activity, and service demonstrated by the outstanding faculty of Humboldt State University. Serving on the UFPC raises awareness about what a special place HSU is and the dedication of our colleagues. We are proud of the remarkable work being conducted across campus.

The UFPC is compelled to note we raised many of the issues addressed in this report in 2017-2018. In fact, much of the text in this document appeared last year yet, the same issues persist. Candidates up for review, committee members at every level, faculty involved in writing collegial letters, and administrators involved in review in 2019-2020 should refer to this letter to avoid common issues outlined throughout.

### **Early Tenure and Promotion**

Appendix J does not provide clear guidance on early tenure and no currently approved departmental standards address early tenure criteria. In the absence of such criteria, the UFPC relied on our own interpretation of Appendix J and detailed this interpretation in each letter. This

not a formal policy nor is it proposed as a solution. Rather, the committee provided our working definition to ensure transparency.

Appendix J IV.F.5 states:

The President may award tenure to a faculty unit employee before the normal (6) year probationary period (13.3, 13.19) if the following criteria are met:

- a) Such consideration is initiated by the faculty unit employee's department or equivalent unit or by the faculty member with the knowledge of his/her department or unit.
- b) The faculty unit employee demonstrates clear evidence that s/he has achieved, before the normal probationary period, a record of accomplishment that meets the standards and level of performance for tenure indicated in this appendix.
- c) The length and breadth of the faculty unit employee's service are sufficient to provide a high expectation that the prior patterns of achievement and contribution will continue.

Without specific departmental guidelines regarding early tenure, the UFPC applied Appendix J to evaluate this early tenure case.

1. Consistent with Appendix J (IV.F.5.c), a candidate must show a sustained pattern of teaching excellence.
2. As stipulated in Appendix J (IV.F.5.b), a candidate "... achieved, before the normal probationary period, a record of accomplishment that meets the standards and level of performance for tenure," Scholarly/Creative Activity contributions must meet or exceed standards for a six-year period (e.g., if a department requires four contributions per year, the candidate would need 24 contributions, regardless of the current probationary year).
3. As stipulated in Appendix J (IV.F.5.b), a candidate "... achieved, before the normal probationary period, a record of accomplishment that meets the standards and level of performance for tenure," Service contributions must meet or exceed standards for a six-year period (e.g., if a department requires 90 hours per year, the candidate would need 540 hours, regardless of the current probationary year).

The UFPC again urges development of department-specific criteria for early tenure and promotion for all departmental RTP Standards.

### **Evaluations of Teaching**

The UFPC reminds faculty that Appendix J [Section IX.B.1.a.4] states,

Teaching effectiveness is assessed primarily through collegial evaluation of classroom teaching and summary analysis of student evaluations by peers. Evaluations of teaching effectiveness shall be based primarily on written statements from colleagues within the candidate's academic discipline(s). The statements should be supported by direct observation of the candidate's performance. Such observation can take place in a variety of ways, such as classroom visitations, team teaching, guest lecturing, etc. Multiple observations, conducted over a period of time, are preferable to a single observation conducted solely for personnel purposes.

In several cases, files lacked collegial observations or provided too few observations. We urge IUPCs to review Appendix J with departmental colleagues to reinforce their responsibilities in the RTP process.

The IUPC is responsible for ensuring that department faculty evaluate the candidate's teaching based on direct classroom observation. Having numerous colleagues observe the same class session is less effective than having numerous class sessions observed by different faculty members over time. Collegial evaluations of teaching performance should include review of syllabi, materials, and Canvas pages.

Faculty members serving on personnel committees (at any level) can and should write collegial letters that include evaluations of teaching effectiveness based on classroom observations. Serving on a review committee does not excuse the responsibility to observe colleagues. If there are relatively few faculty in a department, the IUPC or the candidate should solicit teaching observations by faculty members from other departments.

Candidates should respond to and reflect upon collegial and student evaluations of their teaching performance in their teaching philosophy and/or course descriptions in the Personnel Data Sheet (PDS). It is good practice (and helpful to evaluators) for the candidate to comment upon or explain low or otherwise unusual student evaluations or patterns in evaluations. Candidates should explain plans to improve evaluations as well as reflect on how new strategies affected course effectiveness. Reflection that focuses exclusively on refuting student criticisms does not support an impression of growth as an instructor.

Neither candidates nor reviewers should average across evaluation items because averaging anonymous student ratings as this ignores variability of item ratings. Instead, address the range of scores with a focus on areas for improvement and strengths.

Departments should monitor evaluation response rates and work with candidate to develop strategies to address low response rates. This is particularly an issue for evaluation to promotion to Professor as there is no intermediate (i.e., retention) following promotion to Associate Professor.

Evaluative letters are those submitted to the IUPC as part of the review process. Student thank you notes, emails, and other forms of direct communication are non-evaluative. These materials should not be included as evaluative letters in Section 7 the WPAF.

### **Evaluations of Scholarship and Service**

Appendix J [IX.B.2] notes,

Faculty are expected to engage in an ongoing program of scholarly/creative activities and be guided by their department/unit criteria and standards. Scholarly/creative activities may be defined using the five interrelated dimensions of scholarship proposed by Ernest Boyer in *Scholarship Reconsidered*: Discovery, Integration, Application, Teaching, and Engagement. Scholarly/creative activity shall be characterized by clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, effective presentation, and reflective critique.

*Collegial/peer review appropriate to the discipline is required and shall be defined in the department/unit RTP criteria and standards [emphasis added]*

The issue of what constitutes peer review and effective presentation appropriate to the discipline is central to evaluation of scholarship. This remains the most challenging issue raised by the expanded definition of scholarship offered by Boyer. Many departmental standards do not clearly define peer-review of these activities. Some departments have no approved standards, meaning that there is no working definition of peer review for their candidates. If candidates and review committees wish to count activities that occur outside of “traditional” peer review as scholarship then there need to be clear guidelines for rigorous evaluation of those activities. In the absence of such peer review, the UFPC encourages candidates to classify these activities as service.

External reviews of scholarship are particularly useful for tenure and promotion evaluations. IUPCs, in consultation with candidates, should work to secure such letters well in advance of file close.

Descriptions of scholarship that is not yet published should include clear indications of the status of the work. Despite a discussion of this in the 2017-2018 End-of-Year report, candidates continue to use terms like “in progress” or “forthcoming” inconsistently. Some used forthcoming to indicate work that was accepted for publication but not yet published. Others used forthcoming to indicate work that they expected to publish but had not yet received acceptance. The UFPC urges candidates to provide a narrative explanation of the status of their work (e.g., accepted for publication on 3/4/2019 vs. plan to submit a revision on 3/4/2019).

Collaborative work should include a clear description of the candidate’s role and responsibilities. Similarly, the UFPC urges the candidate to clearly describe activities and responsibilities in service roles.

The UFPC observes that reporting of some community service activities appears to differ across faculty. Of particular note, are volunteer activities with local schools, preschools, and other youth groups. The UFPC encourages faculty to report all such activities. Regardless of the reason for the community service (e.g., volunteering at your child’s school), these activities do constitute important community service. Appendix J (IX. B. 3.g) states “Community service contributions which relate directly to one’s discipline or position will be given greater weight.” Documenting how community service contributions relate to the discipline lends additional significance to the activity, however, service unrelated to the discipline is also valued.

Candidates should explicitly self-assess contributions based on departmental standards. That is, candidates should highlight how they meet standards for Minimum Essential, Good, or Excellent across Scholarship and Service.

Many faculty letter writers focus only on teaching in their evaluative letters. Colleagues who work in related fields should address the candidate’s scholarship to attest to the strength of contributions, where appropriate. Colleagues should also address the candidate’s service. Departmental colleagues are well positioned to address service as most serve on departmental committees together.

Faculty letter writers should focus on evaluation. Many letters report on candidate's activities but read as a list drawn from the PDS rather than an evaluation of the quality of scholarship or service.

In some cases, review committees discounted service activities that received assigned time. The UFPC disagrees that such service should not count toward departmental standards, particularly since such activities generally overrun assigned time. In making the case for including such service, candidates should clearly detail all activities and discuss time commitments for such activities in relation to assigned time. For tasks leveraging the award of assigned time, candidates should clearly detail contributions over and above the assigned time compensation.

### **IUPC Responsibilities in Preparing the WPAF**

Appendix J notes the following IUPC responsibilities,

Assist candidates in preparing WPAFs that contain supporting materials which address RTP performance criteria and standards. (VIII.B.1.b)

Advise candidates on materials which are necessary or beneficial for WPAF inclusion. (VIII.B.1.c)

IUPCs shall ensure that there is adequate substantive peer evaluation of candidates. (VII.A.1.a)

The UFPC notes that there appears to be considerable variation in how IUPCs approach their responsibilities. The IUPC must assist candidates in preparing WPAFs that contain supporting materials addressing RTP criteria and standards. This responsibility includes verifying and confirming information listed in the PDS and ensuring inclusion of all required documentation. The UFPC urges IUPCs to work with candidates in advance of file close to make sure that candidates -- particularly those undergoing their first review -- put forward the strongest file possible.

### **Range Elevation**

Range elevation files showed inconsistent review of lecturers at the department level. The strongest files included evidence of a yearly teaching evaluation and additional letters reporting on classroom observations by tenure-track faculty. Other files showed irregular evaluation and few, if any, collegial observations. As a best practice, there should be regular observation of lecturers.

Changes to Appendix K remove the UFPC from the review of Range Elevation files in future cycles. Although we will not evaluate lecturer files in the future, the UFPC wishes to express our appreciation for the excellent and indispensable contributions lecturers make across this campus.

### **General File Preparation**

The UFPC refers candidates to the "Guidelines for Preparation of the Personnel Data Sheet," available from the Academic Personnel Services' website, which is separate from the directions embedded in the blank PDS form. These guidelines are particularly useful for

faculty undergoing their first review.

Numerous files failed to include complete documentation of previous reviews. The UFPC urges both candidates and the IUPC to carefully review the WPAF prior to file submission to ensure inclusion of all required documentation. All previous review letters from every review cycle need to be in the file.

Do not add sections to the WPAF. In several cases, candidates created new sections for items such as external letters that made materials difficult to locate.

### **Departmental Standards**

There remain departments that do not have approved standards. The lack of standards can be detrimental to candidates as standards define peer review for activities under the Boyer model and establish an expected level of contribution.

In several cases candidates included incorrect standards in the file. Several files included draft standards and one included expired standards that were ineligible for use. Candidates should include only official documents (i.e., those posted on the Academic Personnel Services website). Additionally, the UFPC refers candidates to the Appendix J standards (summarized in the WPAF cover sheet) that explicitly limit use of expired standards to those expired for less than two years from submission of tenure/promotion files.

Several departmental standards provide criteria that are unclear. As many departments used existing standards from other departments as a template for developing their own standards, the same problems appear in multiple standards. For example, several departments distinguish between two types of conference presentations. Category I contributions require presentations where “peer review and dissemination are an integral part of the process (for example, when papers are circulated in advance).” Category II contributions are “Participating in academic conferences or forums by presenting original work, workshops, or acting as a discussant on a panel or roundtable.” This distinction is clearly confusing to candidates and review committees. The UFPC saw repeated instances of classification as Category I without evidence of peer review being *integral* to the process. The UFPC urges departments using such a standard to revise the standard or work with candidates to ensure they provide evidence that demonstrates how they met the Category I standard.

Another issue, is terminology requiring “peer-reviewed disseminations” without a clear definition for peer-reviewed dissemination. Whereas conference presentations are often peer-reviewed and disseminated (though presentation), the UFPC questions whether this is the intended application of the standard as such a definition creates a very low bar for performance, particularly as some standards require only two such contributions for a ranking of Excellent. The UFPC urges departments using this or similarly imprecise language to revise standards to clarify expectations.

Several departments have standards that qualify a quantitative standard. For example, standards might state that a peer-reviewed publication counts as a Category 1 contribution and require a certain number of Category 1 contributions for different rankings. The standard might also note

that activities where the candidate was lead author weigh more strongly in evaluations. In practice, the “weigh more strongly” piece is not being implemented. No standards using this qualification provides guidance on how to weight contributions. Departments with standards that include such qualifiers should revise for clarity.

### **IUPC and College Letters**

The UFPC reminds all IUPC and CPC members that candidate evaluations must follow the departmental RTP standards. Committees should clearly detail decisions regarding excellence in teaching and whether the candidate meets departmental standards for Minimum Essential, Good, or Excellent. Importantly, all levels of review should clearly explain how the candidate meets a standard. For example, if a standard requires five Category I contributions and 12 Category 2, detail how contributions reported in the PDS meet those standards.

The UFPC urges all levels of review to avoid excessive quotations. The committee regularly sees very long letters from lower levels of review where the majority of the text are direct quotes from evaluative and student letters. One or two short quotes that represent themes are helpful. Long strings of quotes are not.

Sincerely,

Christopher Aberson, Chair  
Marcy Burstiner  
Nikola Hobbel  
Joshua Meisel  
Robert W. Zoellner