

May 4, 2020

TO: The General Faculty, Humboldt State University  
FROM: The University Faculty Personnel Committee (UFPC)  
SUBJECT: 2019-2020 Annual Report

*The UFPC recognizes that AY 2019-2020 generated unprecedented challenges for the entire campus community. In Fall 2019, campus closures stemming from Public Safety Power Shutoff events disrupted course schedules, research and creative activities, and engagement in service. In Spring 2020, the public health response to COVID-19 required all face-to-face instruction to move online and the cancellation of all non essential university travel through the end of the academic year. The UFPC appreciates how these events had a cascading effect on the capacity of HSU faculty to achieve teaching/librarianship excellence in Spring 2020. Moreover, shelter-in-place orders led to the cancellation or postponement of research and creative activities as well as service opportunities. Though these events are still unfolding, the UFPC urges all personnel review committees to consider the extenuating circumstances facing the campus community in AY 2019-2020 when reviewing candidate files in AY Fall 2020-2021.*

The annual end-of-the-year open information meeting with the UFPC is scheduled for Thursday, May 7 at 11am. Given campus closure due to COVID-19, the forum will be held online.

Serving on the 2019-2020 UFPC were continuing members Joshua Meisel (Sociology, Chair), Christopher Abernethy (Psychology, Spring only), Marcy Burstiner (Journalism and Mass Communication) and Nikola Hobbel (English), and new members Yvonne Everett (Environmental Science and Management) and Beth Wilson (Economics, Fall only).

During the 2019-2020 academic year, the UFPC reviewed the following numbers and types of files:

Group 3 Retention (reappointment) for Probationary Faculty	23
Group 5 Retention with Tenure/Promotion	12
Group 6 Promotion of Tenured Faculty	<u>2</u>
Total	37

While this number represents a substantial decrease from the 67 files reviewed in 2018-19, the UFPC is projected to receive a similar number of files in 2020-21 as it did in 2018-19. The number of files reviewed in 2019-2020 is consistent with historic trends; between 2008-2009 and 2017-2018, the UFPC reviewed 42 files, on average, annually (range 27-57). Effective 2019-2020, the UFPC no longer reviews Range Elevation Portfolios.

The UFPC continues to be impressed with the quality of teaching/librarianship, scholarship/creative activities, 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 acknowledges the considerable work individual faculty and review committees have accomplished to address many of the issues identified in the AY 2018-19 UFPC report. For example, the UFPC observed more widespread and careful use of departmental retention, tenure, and promotion (RTP) standards during WPAF preparation and file review than in years past. However, other issues persist and are described in this year's annual report. Candidates up for review, committee members at every level, faculty involved in writing collegial letters, and administrators who will be involved in the RTP review process in 2020-21 should refer to this letter to avoid common issues outlined throughout.

### **Early Tenure and Promotion**

Probationary faculty and faculty hired at the rank of associate professor without tenure have submitted their WPAF for early review with greater frequency in recent years. Nine of the 10 Group 5 files in AY 2017-2018 involved early tenure decisions. In AY 2018-2019, five of 14 Group 5 files were early tenure cases and during AY 2019-20, eight of the 12 Group 5 files represented candidates seeking early tenure and promotion.

These cases are challenging because Appendix J does not provide clear guidance on early tenure and none of the departmental standards addressed early tenure criteria. The UFPC is concerned that the absence of clear early tenure criteria will result in arbitrary decision making. For example, there are no clear standards regarding what constitutes a reasonable amount of teaching during the probationary period nor are there specific definitions of the levels of achievement necessary for early tenure.

In the absence of such criteria, as in past years, the UFPC relied on our own interpretation of Appendix J and detailed this approach 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 each tenure case.

1. Consistent with Appendix J (IV.F.5.c), a candidate must show a sustained pattern of teaching/librarianship 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).

In AY 2019-2020, members of the UFPC collaborated with the Faculty Affairs Committee and the RTP Criteria and Standards Committee in drafting an amendment to Appendix J to address deficiencies in policy regarding early tenure. While the proposed amendment to Appendix J was tabled until AY 2020-2021, the UFPC is pleased to see movement toward a clear policy that provides a framework for evaluating early tenure cases.

### **Evaluations of Teaching/Librarianship**

In several cases, files lacked collegial observations or provided too few observations given the number of tenure line faculty in a department. The IUPC is responsible for ensuring that department faculty and university librarians evaluate the candidate's teaching/librarianship 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/librarian performance should include review of syllabi, materials, and Canvas pages.

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 regards to evaluations of librarianship, Appendix J [Section IX.B.1.b.3] states,

Evaluations of effectiveness in librarianship shall be based primarily on written statements from faculty members within the candidate's area of service. 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, mutual service on department and library committees, etc. The library shall organize and promote a system of peer evaluation which will aid in developing the written statements of the candidate's colleagues.

Further, Appendix J [Section VII. A.1.a] states that "IUPCs shall ensure that there is adequate substantive peer evaluation of candidates." While only faculty at the rank of professor are required to provide written evaluations of candidates [Section VIII.B.3.a], the UFPC reminds IUPCs of their responsibility to invite all tenure-line faculty to provide collegial observations.

Faculty members serving on personnel committees (at any level) can and should write collegial letters that include evaluations of teaching/librarian 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 student course evaluations of their teaching/librarian 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 in item ratings. Instead, address the range of scores with a focus on areas for improvement and strengths.

Departments should monitor student course evaluation response rates and work with candidates 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/Creative Activities 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/creative activities. 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. If candidates and review committees wish to count activities that occur outside of “traditional” peer review as scholarship/creative activities 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/creative activities are particularly useful for tenure and promotion evaluations and represent standard practice in higher education. Moreover, peer review must be conducted by colleagues in the same specialty area as candidates and “where appropriate, from peers outside the university” (VII.A.1.b). IUPCs, in consultation with candidates, should work to secure such letters well in advance of file close.

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/Creative Activities and Service. A summary table that lists achievements in the contribution areas of Scholarship/Creative Activities and Service aligned with departmental standards is an effective way to illustrate how candidates meet RTP criteria. In the area of Service, if departmental standards require listing hours completed, candidates are encouraged to consistently report hours (by week or month, but not both) so review committees can identify whether candidates meet annual service expectations. The UFPC asks IUPCs to encourage candidates to include such tables in the WPAF.

Many faculty letter writers focus only on teaching/librarianship in their evaluative letters. Colleagues who work in related fields should address the candidate’s scholarship/creative

activities 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 activities but read as a list drawn from the PDS rather than an evaluation of the quality and significance of scholarship/creative activities 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 exceed 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 and Department Chair 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)

Invite written statements from the candidates' current HSU students and current student employees (VIII.B.3.b)

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.

The UFPC reminds department chairs that unless they serve on the IUPC, they are encouraged to provide a separate written evaluative statement relating to the three contribution areas of teaching/librarianship, scholarship/creative activities, and service.

The UFPC reminds all levels of review that parallel reviews must be independent. There should be no consultation between department chairs and IUPCs nor between college Deans and College Personnel Committees.

## **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. Others did not include all candidate activities for the review period. The UFPC urges both candidates and the IUPC to carefully review the WPAF prior to file submission to ensure inclusion of all required documentation and relevant activities. Further, all previous review letters from every review cycle need to be in the file. Probationary faculty should include all materials from all prior review cycles until the awarding of tenure and promotion.

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**

The UFPC is pleased that all departments but one (Journalism and Mass Communication) have approved standards. In some cases, however, candidates included incorrect standards in the file. Candidates should include only official documents (i.e., those posted on the Academic Personnel Services website). Additionally, the UFPC directs 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 (through 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 I contribution and require a certain number of Category I 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 provide guidance on how to weigh contributions. Departments with standards that include such qualifiers should revise for clarity.

### **Department Chair, IUPC and College Letters**

The UFPC reminds all IUPC and CPC members as well as college Deans that candidate evaluations must follow the departmental RTP standards. Committees should clearly detail decisions regarding excellence in teaching/librarianship 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 II, 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.

This report and all previous UFPC annual reports are available on the UFPC website (<https://senate.humboldt.edu/ufpc>).

Sincerely,  
Joshua Meisel, Chair  
Christopher Aberson  
Marcy Burstiner  
Yvonne Everett  
Nikola Hobbel