



HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY

University Faculty Personnel Committee

March 4, 2011

TO: Robert Snyder, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

FROM: University Faculty Personnel Committee

SUBJECT: Department Standards and Criteria for RTP

A number of issues regarding the unevenness and obfuscation of the process of departments developing, adopting and applying standards and criteria for Retention, Tenure and Promotion (RTP) has come to the attention of the UFPC and the Senate Faculty Affairs Committee. The purpose of this memorandum is to outline some of the major issues. The UFPC, as signatory to this memorandum, also offers a suggestion on how to move forward in resolving some of these issues.

Major issues:

1. Appendix J, Section IX.A.1.c) states: *“Department/unit criteria and standards are subject to ratification by a majority of tenured and probationary department/unit faculty members voting. Once approved, the criteria and standards shall be used at all levels.”* It is unclear what the relation between “ratification” and “approved” is in this clause. If ratification means approval, then the logical implication is that this is the end of the approval process. In other words, it needs to be clarified whether indeed departments/units are the only ones that can approve standards and criteria.
2. Appendix J, Section IX.A.1.d) states that *“Departments/units shall, beginning Fall 2007 through Spring 2009, submit criteria and standards to be vetted by an ad hoc university review committee. ...”* It is unclear what the relation between “vetted” in this clause and “approved” in previous clause is. The “assumed wisdom” on campus seems to be that “vetted” is synonymous with “approved.” This is a problematic assumption that needs to be clarified.
3. Appendix J, Section IX.A.1.d) continues by stating: *“The [ad hoc university review] committee shall be comprised of two probationary or tenured faculty from each college ... and the college deans (or designees).”* If the answer to #2 above is that “vetted” is

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synonymous with “approval” and given that approximately a third of the committee consisted of administrators, it is unclear whether the committee had the authority to approve RTP standards and criteria according to the CBA. One reading of the CBA would be that the make-up and status of the committee, along with a stated mandate of approval authority, would have to be subjected to a faculty vote before such a committee could embark on the process that it seems to have undertaken between Fall 2007 and Spring 2009. In other words, as currently written in Appendix J, the ad hoc nature of the committee along with the vagueness of its composition and mandate preclude the faculty vote approving Appendix J from being considered as a faculty vote on allowing this ad hoc committee to approve faculty RTP criteria and standards.

4. Appendix J, Section IX.A.1.e) states: “Beginning in 2009/2010, departmental/unit criteria and standards will be subject to approval by the College/Library Dean, the UFPC, and the Provost.”
 - a) Because it is clearly spelled out which administrators and which faculty bodies are involved in the approval process at this stage, this is less problematic than the constitution and mandate of the ad hoc committee discussed in #3 above. In other words, the faculty vote approving Appendix J can be considered as a faculty vote allowing for the Dean-UFPC-Provost approval process.
 - b) It is commonly assumed on campus, but needs to be clarified, that the only department/unit criteria and standards subjected to this approval process are those that were not vetted by the ad hoc committee. However, if departments have the sole approval body, even if their standards and criteria were vetted by the ad hoc committee, then it is unclear why another layer of approval is needed for those departments that agreed to their standards and criteria after Spring 2009. At best, for consistency purposes, department standards and criteria that weren’t *vetted* by the ad hoc committee should be *vetted* by the dean, UFPC and Provost, but approval should remain with the department. In other words, there seems to be a fundamentally different process involved unless “vetted” is assumed to be the same as “approved,” which, as suggested above, is problematic.
 - c) The UFPC cannot take on an approval process in good faith for two reasons: (1) because only *some* departments’ standards and criteria will be approved by the UFPC (i.e., those that were not vetted by the ad hoc committee), there is an inherent inconsistency and lack of a baseline for comparison and uniformity that renders this approval process unfair and flawed; (2) the UFPC does not have the time or resources to review all departments’ standards and criteria, which would be the only way to ensure some consistency and fairness to both RTP candidates and review committees and evaluators.

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5. For many of those departments/units that have “approved” criteria and standards, the RTP process has become more complex, more ad hoc, and more obfuscating, often to the detriment of the candidate. At best, in these cases the spirit of Appendix J, Section IX. A.1.a)1.(1) [“the department/unit standards simplify and add specificity to the University’s policy on RTP”] is violated.
 - a) One problem is overly rigid standards. For example, the criteria in several departments state that candidates must have a 4.0-or above average score in “overall teaching effectiveness” on anonymous student evaluations. Yet there are many course evaluations where a candidate has a 4.0-or-above average for all items *except* overall teaching effectiveness. Also in these cases, what “average” refers to is often unclear (e.g., the average for the course, for all lecture courses, for all types of courses, etc.)
 - b) Another problem is that standards and criteria in some departments are so complex that it is nearly impossible to apply the criteria and standards. For example, each item under scholarly/creative activities or service has to be sub-categorized, then categorized, then assigned a value scale and then an actual value. It is nearly impossible for review committees to do this unless an individual reviewer spends hours trying to decipher how to categorize and evaluate material in the PDS. Often times the IUPC fails to give any suggestions on how to apply the criteria and standards and fails to give any evidence of having applied the standards and criteria in its own evaluation and review. If the candidate is left to do this, then there is a possible conflict of interest.
 - c) There are often no “clear requirements for documenting the quality and significance of faculty achievements” (Appendix J IX.A.1.a)(2). For example, many departments have standards that weigh peer-review publications more heavily than non-peer-reviewed. However, there are no mechanisms provided by which to document whether or not a publication is peer-reviewed.
6. The unevenness in criteria and standards across departments is fundamentally unfair. For example, whereas one department counts attending department meetings and graduation as minimal essential in service, another department considers these activities as part of the candidate’s basic job description and hence not even part of service. Some departments consider advising under teaching effectiveness and others as part of service, while for still others it depends on the number of advisees as to whether it is considered under teaching or service. Similar problems abound in the area of scholarly/creative activities (e.g., some departments consider producing syllabi for courses as scholarly activities whereas other departments consider this as part of teaching effectiveness).

The UFPC suggests that an ad hoc task force be established to make recommendations for clarifying and simplifying the approval process of departments’ standards and criteria RTP and their application in the RTP review process in conformity with Appendix J. The task force

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should have a preponderance of faculty members. The UFPC suggests that faculty members be drawn from the UFPC, the Faculty Affairs Committee and the College Personnel Committees. Administrative representation on the task force should consist of a College Dean.

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