

Pre-tenure Faculty Meeting with Provost McNamee and Associate Provost Hyer  
Notes taken by P. Layne, 10/29/2007  
Participant corrections included on 11/12/07

Background and introductions

After the participants introduced themselves, Hyer explained the COACHE survey of pre-tenure faculty in which Virginia Tech participated last spring and reviewed the executive summary of the findings and highlights of PowerPoint slides presented to promotion and tenure committees on September 7 (both are available online at [http://www.advance.vt.edu/Measuring\\_Progress/COACHE/COACHE.html](http://www.advance.vt.edu/Measuring_Progress/COACHE/COACHE.html)). She noted that the findings were also presented at the August orientation for new department heads and university leaders, and asked whether the study had been mentioned in any department or college level meetings. The Biological Sciences Department executive committee has discussed the findings.

Reasonableness of expectations

Hyer noted that one of the areas in which Virginia Tech had more negative responses than those of its selected comparison institutions was "reasonableness of the standards of scholarship" expected for achieving tenure, and asked for comments.

Responses/comments from participants:

- Faculty in veterinary medicine see a conflict between expectations for research and service (service = clinical responsibilities); vets choose to work in higher ed because of their passion for the work and desire for flexibility to do research, but clinical work loads make it hard for them to make time for grant writing.
- Perception is that performance is judged by the amount of grant funding in some departments, others value different products, variations by discipline.
- Some departments have systems to calculate a composite performance score for salary adjustments based on a faculty member's activities; one department gave all junior faculty members the same raise.
- It is not always clear how a department's system for determining salary adjustments correlates to promotion and tenure decisions.
- Perception of reasonableness changes over time, as faculty make some progress on grant writing, publications, teaching, etc. the expectations seem more reasonable.

"Protected time" for junior faculty: The university does not have a policy regarding time off from teaching to focus on research during the pre-tenure period. McNamee asked how different departments addressed this.

Responses/comments from participants:

- Biological sciences give pre-tenure faculty three semesters off from teaching in the first four years
- Nine of the departments offered one course release (apart from buy-outs using grant funds)
- IDST allows one semester of research leave, by tradition and negotiation, but not by right.
- HNFE and Biochem allow two semesters off from teaching
- Having a choice regarding when to take the time off from teaching was felt to be very helpful. A number felt it would be most helpful to have the release time in year three or four to be able to write up findings. Sometimes better to teach the very first semester since this is a quicker way to get oriented to the department.
- Many felt that it would be helpful to have a policy about pre-tenure research release. A number negotiated the course release as part of their start up package, but should not be dependent on individual negotiations. Should be available to all.

#### Disciplinary and resource differences:

- Expectation for some humanities scholars to achieve tenure is a book and three articles in top journals, but they have to produce those with no research assistants (some departments have few or no graduate programs) and no travel money, and top journals often have long publication lead times (up to two years).
- The perception in veterinary medicine is that standards for tenure are a moving target. One reported that he is learning that not all grants are alike – those that do not include overhead are not valued as much as those that do, although he was told otherwise earlier. (Shifting, or mixed messages?)
- CLAHS departments are working on developing written guidelines for expectations for tenure.
- College of engineering has shared data on recent tenure cases with pre-tenure faculty so they have a pretty clear idea of the range of performance that has been successful in recent reviews.
- Policies and standards in biology seem pretty clear.
- Some departments have had a big gap in hiring and they have not been through the tenure process in quite a while, so pre-tenure faculty have no recent precedents to draw on and standards may have changed. Concerned that senior faculty have lost practice and may not be especially effective at mentoring.
- Geography is concerned about the impact of disciplinary differences between their department and other departments in their college (Natural Resources). They will be having their first tenure cases since the reorganization of colleges.
- Many faculty note the increasing competitiveness of federal research funding agencies.

#### Expectation of achieving tenure

In the COACHE survey, Virginia Tech pre-tenure faculty expressed more uncertainty about their chances for achieving tenure than their counterparts at other institutions. McNamee noted that Virginia Tech had a few years when very few new faculty were hired, so that a higher percentage of pre-tenure faculty at Virginia Tech have less than four years of experience compared with other institutions. Most faculty going through the tenure process at Virginia Tech are successful, data on actual tenure success rate could alleviate some concern.

#### Responses/comments from participants:

- The message that pre-tenure faculty get in order to achieve tenure, especially in the humanities, is not to do service, do minimal teaching, focus on research and scholarship.
- Majority faculty can be “invisible” (not around much) and allowed to focus on their own work, while minority faculty are asked to serve on more committees at all levels.
- Faculty who are particularly good communicators or agreeable university citizens (i.e., they say yes) often end up doing more service. Service load is also a big issue for many women faculty members.
- Work/life balance falls by the wayside during pre-tenure years.

#### Impact of 4/16 on pre-tenure faculty

Should the university automatically extend the tenure clock to accommodate time lost due to the events of April 16, 2007?

#### Responses/comments from participants:

- Responses seemed to be mixed, no clear call for an automatic extension
- Some expressed concern that a case-by-case approach may allow for resentment among colleagues or perceptions of abuse/taking advantage.
- Clearly some faculty were negatively impacted and unable to get much work done for some time after the event, these individuals could request an extension.

### Plans for January 9 workshop for pre-tenure faculty

Plans are underway for a workshop for pre-tenure faculty on January 9 to further discuss the COACHE findings and provide input on ways to address the concerns identified. Hyer requested input on how to structure the workshop.

Responses/suggestions from participants:

- Provide a better understanding of how the process works beyond the individual departments.
- Provide opportunity for review of dossiers by P&T committee members outside the department.
- Discuss what makes junior faculty feel that they can be successful.
- The panel of individuals who had served on the university P&T committee, and who participated in the September 7 P&T Information Session, were particularly enlightening for someone who is pre-tenure. I recommend this as a strategy for "providing a better understanding of how the process works."