

## Brown University Faculty Forum

### Subject: Report of the Faculty Executive Committee reviewing Faculty Governance

March 18, 2008

At 4:04 the chair of the Faculty Forum, Professor Thomas Banchoff, opened the forum in Salomon 001. Professor Banchoff introduced the chair of the Faculty Executive Committee, Ruth Colwill, to make introductory remarks about the Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) report. Prof. Colwill previewed the main motions to be brought to the April 1<sup>st</sup> faculty meeting: 1) A proposal for the Committee on Faculty Equity and Diversity (CFED) to consolidate the FAC, CDH, and CSW, 2) Automatic review of the first negative tenure decision, whether by the Tenure, Promotions and Appointments Committee (TPAC) or the Provost, and 3) Modifications to how associate professors are considered for promotion to full. Prof. Colwill introduced the chair of TPAC, Prof. Martin Maxey, to review the third item. Prof. Maxey said this motion from TPAC arose from a number of situations the committee has had to deal with and also from questions asked by the Provost and President. There is a lot of variation between departments in the promotion from associate to full, which contrasts with the tenure procedure. The motion to provide a guideline as to when a promotion review should be done arose because TPAC has seen cases where departments have unnecessarily delayed promotion. Another motion is for a regular review period and discussion to assist and mentor faculty in the years following tenure, perhaps every 4 years. TPAC believes that a number of non-promotion cases would have been avoided if this had been done. Prof. Maxey closed by saying that there are strong sentiments around and there has been a lack of discussion.

Prof. Banchoff solicited in advance the major topics of discussion from the audience. A show of hands indicated that approximately ten of the thirty faculty members in attendance were associate professors. All of the topics centered on TPAC issues rather than CFED.

The first topic of discussion was the membership composition of TPAC as it is currently specified by area. A professor from the Humanities asked if it would be best for humanities faculty reviews to consist of committee members that are mostly from the humanities rather than the sciences. Prof. Dill asked a related question about recusal: within the tenuring unit, a committee member with a conflict of interest must recuse themselves, but at some other universities these members could still discuss cases but would not vote. She suggested that two "at large" members, not representing either the life sciences or humanities, could be added to TPAC, so that there is an alternate system in place for recusal.

An associate professor expressed support for the TPAC proposal but not until TPAC is more transparent. They cited an example: University records say a minimum of five letters are needed for promotion, but this is not the practice. There is enormous inconsistency because the Dean of the Faculty may request six, eight, or thirteen letters. This slowness to adjust published procedures to actual procedures has caused a moving target which generates a lack of trust. Someone suggested that a proposal to limit the number of letters should be discussed by the faculty. At that point Dean Vohra responded by saying that he tells department chairs every fall that the faculty handbook requires a *minimum* of five letters from non-coauthors. There is no rule against a department soliciting a letter from an advisor in addition. There is no maximum number of letters. The departments are making a case to convince others (TPAC

and the Provost), and so a lot of departments get more than five letters. One always begins by soliciting ten to twelve letters because fewer come back. Dean Vohra concluded by saying he did not believe we ought to have rules on the number of letters.

Professor Dill raised a concern that TPAC reads into the refusal to write letters, such as if twelve are requested and only eight come back. She suggested confining the evaluation to the letters in hand. She continued that it seems as if the normative number of letters is higher than five and there is an implicit penalty for only five; and regarding flexibility, the request was for transparency, not rigidity. Dean Vohra pointed out that the policy on letters is spelled out on the Dean's website. Prof. Maxey responded that TPAC is just a group of faculty trying to decide if the department has made a good case without a specific number in mind. For example, cases promoting lecture to senior lecturer will have fewer letters, or a faculty member may work in many fields and therefore need more than five letters. He concluded by saying that TPAC does not make decisions based on what is not there, and the committee's composition changes every year.

A faculty member thought that the rules for tenure have changed because a unanimous vote does not seem to have the same weight it used to have relative to outside letters. A complaint about transparency was made; it was claimed that a document from TPAC contained no information about why a case was turned down and did not help to clarify the issues.

A question was raised: is it the case that the Dean gives a letter to the Provost with a recommendation in addition to TPAC's vote, and is that public? Dean Vohra replied that the Dean's recommendation to the Provost is not public. Deans are no longer working members of the committee and their recommendation is not required to be in writing. A faculty member asked whether that is faculty governance and whether that is a good rule. Prof. Savage, who chaired the task force on faculty governance, explained that the intention was that TPAC should be chaired by faculty and so the Dean should not be on the committee; the Provost felt that the Dean's opinion could now be independent from the committee's vote. Prof. Banchoff commented that it is interesting to hear two contemporary colleagues who don't agree, and suggested that this forum isn't about changing the recent changes to faculty governance. Prof. Savage said that revisiting it every five years or so is a good idea. Another faculty member said that recent changes to the nominations committee were not working, so that was revisited; therefore if something needs to be revisited, let's do it.

A professor asked about confusion as to what is required from TPAC. He said that he has chaired several cases in the last several years in which TPAC has been erratic, and this seems to reflect a change in criteria that are not spelled out. For example, he has supplied more than five (but less than ten) letters and has been asked by TPAC why there weren't more letters even though he verified that nothing was wrong with the letters that were supplied. As another example, there was unusual emphasis placed on the promise of a second book rather than the whole file – such as articles and other projects underway. He asked where this is coming from, and if the FEC has vetted this process.

A professor in Asian Studies said that his department's standards and criteria spell out the criteria for associate to full promotion. To what extent do these govern TPAC's decisions as opposed to university-

wide criteria? Prof. Banchoff asked: if we agree that the associate-to-full criteria are not clear, can we agree that the assistant-to-associate criteria are clear? Prof. Dill, former chair of the FEC, stated that the FEC was charged with two years of work on assistant-to-associate promotion, and she felt that the shifting of the bar for tenure review has emerged simultaneously with these other issues and is worth discussion in its own right.

Prof. Banchoff asked the Dean if in fact there are “an alarming number of associate professors at Brown,” as one questioner had put it, and whether departmental standards are used in TPAC reviews. Dean Vohra responded that specific criteria are detailed in the department’s standards and the department uses those to make a recommendation. The University criteria are broader: first in importance is research, followed by teaching and service. One standard (department or university) does not take precedence over the other, and there has been no inconsistency in this. Departmental criteria are important but TPAC looks at both. There is no document written that can be as precise and objective as a list of all requirements that guarantee promotion; that is why you have committees and letters to decide these things.

A professor from History asked for clarification of whether research is more important than teaching and service for tenure only, or for associate-to-full as well. He thought that policy seemed different from the procedure for merit increases which is 45-45-10 for research, teaching, and service, and that it doesn’t make sense to make research and teaching equal only after you “get in”. Dean Vohra replied that merit and salary policies are different from tenure and noted that the President wrote an article on this policy in the faculty bulletin in 2004. The charge to TPAC is that teaching and service are not sufficient conditions.

An FEC member pointed out that the proposal under discussion pertains to associate-to-full promotion and there are some major changes which have not yet been discussed.

A professor of English questioned whether an automatic review with a set number of years is the right way. She suggested that scheduled conversations with the chair about whether one is ready to come up might be appropriate. It was asked how much discussion there has been with respect to the reasons for long periods as associate professor. One faculty member took advantage of tenure to embark on long projects, and wondered why the desired number of years before becoming full is only six.

One faculty member commented on the perception that there are a large number of associate professors at Brown as being a conflation of issues: if the number of years as associate professor was greater than ten, the assumption is that there was a mistake in granting tenure. There is a contradiction in remedies – better mentoring, clear criteria, etc., versus trying to solve the problem in advance during tenure review by judging the likelihood that a candidate for tenure will be promoted to full in the desired amount of time. A member of the FEC responded that he was not aware of having done a systematic comparison of Brown with other schools as far as the number of associates; this is difficult because some universities fire all their assistant professors. A faculty member asked if there was any information on the gender configuration of long-term associate professors. Dean Vohra responded that they could look at categories like that, but comparisons are hard because our structures are different

from others'. We have 140 associates out of 680 faculty. Forty have been in rank for ten years or more. About twenty have been in rank for ten to fifteen years, about twenty have been more than fifteen years, and several have been associates more than twenty years. Dean Vohra said that this suggests something to worry about, but he doesn't know whether it is comparable to other similar institutions and he doesn't know why these cases exist. He pointed out that granting of tenure is a much more grave decision than the promotion to full professor because for the latter we have already decided we want them to be here forever. He hopes we can devote more resources right after tenure to help people move on faster to full. Money was requested of the URC to help clarify the expectations and number of years for associates; due to competing resource needs, this did not happen. But the raise for becoming full did increase from \$5,000 to \$7,000. Dean Vohra was asked if there is information on the number of cases of associate promotions that have been turned down. Dean Vohra stated he did not have the information but the number is very small.

Prof. Savage thought it was reasonable to let associates know the expectations for becoming full and thought that we should investigate all 40 cases over ten years. Suppose you compare two individuals from the same department, one of whom progressed in six to seven years, and the other of whom has accumulated the same amount of material in ten years, at a slower rate: should their level of recognition and standing be okay or not?

It was commented that this proposal could be good for the faculty that we want to mentor, to make sure departments don't forget them, as long as it is not being done for statistics. There has been an internet debate among some faculty about their fears about a ten year trigger. Would there be a penalty associate with it? Would faculty need to teach more?

It was pointed out that many associate professors provide an inordinate amount of service (e.g. department chair) with no compensation for lost time towards promotion. A member of the FEC responded that an ambitious second book should not be penalized, and also that there should be more regular mentoring of associate ranks to facilitate their advancement and look at the totality of what a person is contributing to the University including service.

A faculty member claimed that often departmental politics are involved in these long-term associate cases. Dean Vohra replied that is one reason why we should not leave everything in the hands of departments, but that is how it is now. Unless the department puts an associate up for promotion, TPAC never sees it. The proposed way, there is a default to bring the person up and the individual can opt out. There is a feeling that after X years (the number is not settled yet) it should be clear that we have waited for the normal things to happen and they haven't. Research is most important for tenure. Service and teaching do play a role, so let's look at the whole picture and be smart about how we weigh different things. Should the number be ten, or twelve? Some universities have fifteen. We should have a discussion. It's one way of trying to ensure that people don't get lost. It is not an attempt to rush people.

Prof. Colwill gave her opinion as an associate professor who has been in rank a long time that there is a penalty for this status by being expected to produce at the same level as pre-tenure when there are additional pressures to advise, develop new classes, and advise freshman; in the meantime

competitiveness for getting grants is reduced when one is not full, and if you can't get grants you can't be productive and can never get promoted to full. For those administrators who don't want to deal with conflict within their department, it is easier to just let people languish. The standards are different: at tenure, we ask "why should we tenure and commit?" but for associate to full promotion, the question should be "why shouldn't we?" Remaining associate has an impact on one's reputation outside the university, and has an effect on salary. This proposal should just provide a way to bring people forward if they want to. Departments can also make a case not to promote someone.

One faculty member thought the due process procedure for the promotion process from associate to full was not clear, whereas the assistant to associate process is clear. Some others agreed.

Professor Colwill thought we should be judging departments rather than individuals. Different individuals may play different roles in the department. We could have great dynamic departments and would no longer require each individual to meet all criteria. Professor Dill explained that a few years ago the FEC was asked by the Corporation about reasonable ways to look at productivity of faculty members. Research on how productivity is evaluated at state universities showed that money is allocated to departments based on their productivity as a whole, rather than individuals. This recognizes that each individual may go through ebbs and flows in research, teaching, or service but we all work collaboratively to serve the University.

One faculty member stated the opinion that ten years is a good number before instigating a review.

Prof. Maxey, TPAC chair, said that the feedback at the forum had been interesting and helpful. The mentoring process was meant to provide context for each case, not a cookie-cutter approach. If a book project is taking twelve years, how can we see drafts to assess progress? The more you put into faculty rules the more complicated it gets, so it is best to keep it as a guideline.

Dean Vohra was asked if there would be any harm from opting out of the ten-year promotion timeline, and whether this was intended to assign an extra teaching load. Dean Vohra replied that the teaching issue is separate from this issue, since a greater teaching load could also be asked of a full professor.

The Forum was adjourned at 5:30pm in recognition of the fact that another university-wide meeting was scheduled to begin at that time.

Respectfully submitted,

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Secretary of the Faculty Forum  
(Cognitive and Linguistic Sciences)