

## **ON BUILDING A PROMOTION OR TENURE FOLDER\***

In attempting to apply the Mission Seminar criteria uniformly [in 1977], the University [Faculty] Personnel Committee discovered a remarkable range in what various faculty and administrators believe a promotion or tenure folder should contain. To some extent, of course, such diversity is quite proper, since different situations call up different responses; yet all too often the Committee found faculty members' cases inadequately made and comparison between parallel situations very difficult because essential interpretive materials were left out or because misleading or trivial materials were included instead. Out of the Committee's frustrations, a series of do's and don'ts was collected, and two members of the group were charged to organize the jottings into a document to be distributed to the faculty at-large--an informal set of guidelines which might help faculty and administrators build the most informative folders possible. The following material, prepared after lengthy consultation with members of the Alpha and Omega [Faculty] Personnel Committees, represents the best "Dutch Uncle" advice from several faculty who have read both effective and ineffective folders, and have tried to preserve equity between. Please understand that these remarks have no official standing in the University. Although they have been checked for objectionable material by members of the Committee that gave us our charge, there are likely to be observations here with which men of goodwill may differ. We believe, however, that this document accurately reflects the experience of [the 1977] University [Faculty Personnel] Committee and the experience of the College [Faculty] Personnel Committee members consulted.

### **THE IDEA OF A FOLDER**

The central facts about a folder are (1) that it builds a documented case and (2) that it is the job of the faculty member to make the case as strong as possible. The burden of proof is on [the faculty member]; in the short time allotted a committee probably cannot, and certainly should not, go fishing on its own for evidence that no one took the trouble to include. Though technically the chairperson (or, in the case of the chairpersons, the [dean/division head]) gathers the recommendations and interpretive material together, the faculty member would be foolish not to seize the initiative by directing his superior to information pertinent to building his case. If the assessment of your teaching requires an examination of special materials, the materials should be provided so your chairperson can give his professional evaluation. If some professionals outside the University can best estimate your scholarly contribution, those names and their testimony should be made available. If the accomplishments of your service or counseling need to be detailed, you yourself know best how to provide the documentation. Those who recommend you, whether they be your superiors or those who write letters for you, will be persuasive to the extent that they can back up their judgments with hard data. It's not that we recommend puffery or a snowstorm of trivia; we'd be hard pressed to say whether feeling bored or feeling hoodwinked is more likely to prejudice a committee; but recommenders and reviewers alike need aid in interpreting *vitas*, and no one is so qualified as you to provide that aid in a brief and informative manner. The faculty member who starts at the last minute, who does not build his folder with the stated criteria specifically in mind, who neglects to "birddog" the process until the folder leaves his department, will inevitably suffer in a competitive situation against faculty who do.

Administrators, chairpersons, and above have an obligation to help the faculty make their cases as effectively as possible. One would hope that last minute decisions to stand for tenure or promotion will become a thing of the past; if additional documentation is needed, the deficiency should be discovered long before the folder "goes up." On the other hand, officials have a prior obligation to the University

and the taxpayers of Florida to see to it that all truly pertinent information finds its way into the folder. It is simply unprofessional and inequitable for a committee to be told that recommendations were made, pro or con, on the basis of issues not mentioned in the folders. Nor is it professional or equitable for officials to waive the stated criteria in selected cases by ignoring them. If a faculty member has failed to do significant service or research, it might be nice to have that fact stated explicitly, if necessary with such mitigations as will stand the light of day, and not to leave the failure to be read between the lines. Omissions, vague phrases, and lack of specifics increase neither the recommender's credibility nor the likelihood that any of his other opinions will carry weight with a disinterested observer. Verbal stuffing like "a competent teacher" or "needs more seasoning" or "shows promise," if unaccompanied by examples and distinctions, can be replaced by "yea-yea-yea" or "boo-boo-boo" with no loss in persuasive power. The job of discursive language, we suggest, is to replace opinion, which can only be registered, with argument, which can be weighed, tested, and agreed or disagreed with. Reading folders need no longer be, as one distressed colleague expressed it, "like shoveling cottage cheese." Faculty can encourage the move toward precision by providing those in the review process with the data with which to be precise.

In order to assist you in building more effective folders, we would like to make specific suggestions in various areas of performance mentioned by the official criteria. These follow. We would like to add, moreover, that the review process is not a forum for debating the criteria but for interpreting them and applying them in context. Approved departmental statements, not individual folders, can usefully address the necessity of special adaptations of the rules. Nor is a folder the place to attempt to [evade] the rules by suggesting that somebody in the past wouldn't have met the criteria either.

Since we would also like to give you a sense for what can go wrong in folders, we offer as Appendix A (at the back of this paper) a list of phenomena we trust we shall not see again. A run through the list while you and your chair are polishing up your folder might save some trouble later. You might think of the listed items as the "Before" in the "Before and After" ads in magazines. A copy of the official University criteria and a list of procedural guarantees that President Robinson gave Alpha Council [in the summer of 1977] are also attached as appendices.

## **TEACHING**

Anyone who would base his case substantially on "good teaching" should recognize how little information student evaluation forms provide. No one who has escaped reading a wad of these things can realize just how monotonously generous student ratings and comments are. And if, as things now stand, only the numbers generated by compilers will automatically become part of the permanent record, student evaluations are at present almost totally useless for detecting anything other than disaster cases. Positive student evaluations and mild commendations from superiors may suffice for those whose main strength lies in research, but other evidence is needed if a claim is to be made for more than instructional mediocrity. Peers seem to find one another uniformly outstanding teachers, so unsubstantiated opinion from that quarter is practically no evidence either. The opinions of superiors, if supported by examples and comparisons, will carry weight, so long as the official uses his superlatives sparingly.

In most cases, the best approach is for the faculty member to submit materials that establish not only his popularity but also the substance of his teaching. Over a year ago, [In 1976,] the Academic Council endorsed a list of possible materials that, submitted, might help evaluators judge the quality of teaching.

We can do no better than repeat this list for you. The Council suggested that faculty include in their reports, AND CHAIRPERSONS INTERPRET," any evidence bearing on the following considerations":

- Quality of course-related counseling, including student conferences, DIS, theses, supervision of interns.
- Quality of course syllabi and other handouts, if the nature of a particular course makes the latter useful.
- Intellectual demands made upon students, including quality of tests and other assignments.
- Students' progress in mastering course content.
- Instructor's estimate of his success in fulfilling course objectives.
- Revisions of established courses and development and teaching of new courses.
- Activity undertaken for professional growth that will enhance the instructor's value as a teacher.

Here, as always, the emphasis should fall not on the bare materials submitted but upon the measured professional evaluation of the chairperson, the official most familiar with the candidate's departmental context and field. Too often in the past, chairs have allowed themselves to slip into the role of either apologist or postal clerk; they should see themselves instead as the most immediately qualified interpreters and judges.

### **SCHOLARSHIP/CREATIVE ACTIVITY**

Several factors make the evaluation of scholarship a very tricky business:

- The extreme diversity of the University, including as it does traditional disciplines, performing disciplines, applied disciplines, service groups, and every hybrid between. Each has its own form of tangible productivity.
- The wide range in what might delicately be called "candor" in claiming activities as legitimately creative acts. Everything from learned monographs to talks to the Rotary Club end up on vitas, and they all look very official.
- The failure of faculty to provide ancillary materials which will help a committee interpret the listings.
- The reluctance of administrators and colleagues to make discriminations between various levels of performance--in particular, to substantiate their often generous opinions with evidence that can be weighed.

Item three can be addressed most directly by the individual faculty member. Remember that probably no one on the committee will be in your specific field and that even your chairperson is not likely to be conversant with the finer points of your specialty; yet it is the judgment of your work by your fellow specialists that determines the stature of your accomplishment. Suppose, for example, that you are a widget craftsman and have shown four times at the Cantonment Widget Exhibition. How is anyone except another widgeteer to know that the Cantonment exhibition and the New York exhibition are the two most prestigious invitational exhibitions in the nation? Those four invitations may tell more about the quality of your work than twenty listings of the Chicago exhibition, which might in fact be little more than a flea market. Somehow the requisite interpretive material needs to be worked into the folder, whether in your own personal statement or in your chair's letter or in the letters of recommendation. Otherwise, Cantonment will look like just Cantonment to us. The information will of course be as diverse as your fields. Was that grant the outcome of stiff competition? How and by what agencies were the results of your grant work assessed? In what professional journals of stature has your book been

reviewed? What did the reviewers say? Is the journal you published in refereed? Where does it stand in the pecking order of journals in the field? What textbooks devote how much space to the results of your investigations? No doubt tooting one's own horn has to be done tactfully and briefly, but it is your responsibility to build your case if there is one to be made.

Whatever you include should emphasize the professional scrutiny which your work has undergone. Exercises that are not tested by the mechanisms of your discipline, no matter how commendable as acts of service provide no indication of scholarship or creative activity. If your field is crab metabolism, a plethora of talks to high school biology classes or fishermen's clubs will fail to give conclusive evidence of such scrutiny. How can these audiences tell whether you are talking arrant nonsense or are simply parroting textbook materials? On the other hand, if you are invited to present the results of your research to a prestigious symposium of other physiologists, then the listing begins to mean something. In making their cases, members of the more traditional disciplines perhaps have the easiest time of it, since they can invoke the conventional machinery of reports from journal of referees, book reviews, citations, places of publication, and so forth. The studio and performing arts have various awards, showings, and invitations within explicable pecking orders, participation, and the like. The applied disciplines have grants, appointments, and contracts of varying significance, although they (we suggest) more than any other group on campus need to become more articulate in helping outsiders understand the ways in which various levels of creative accomplishment may be determined. Our two goals should be to ensure:

- That no one is wronged through being tried by the laws of another country.
- That though the manifestations differ among disciplines, no one is subjected to more or to less strenuous demands because he is in one field rather than in another.

You might recall in making your case that "creative activities" by definition bring something new into the world, whether a new idea, a new application, a new performance, or a new work of art--whatever brings one's professional skills together and tangibly manifests them in a non-routine way. The rest is service.

The question of external checks becomes most important when the issue is one of full professorship. The official criteria speak of "favorable acknowledgment in the disciplines outside the University." As with all matters concerning creative activity, this demand must be interpreted according to the opportunities offered by the faculty member's field; but equity and the spirit of the criteria demand that the quantity and quality of the creative accomplishment be viewed in an extramural context. Successful candidates have in the past allayed any suspicions of (how shall we say?) institutional solipsism through the agency of book reviews, letters of evaluation from leaders in the discipline outside this University, acknowledgments in the literature, and professional analyses of contributions to the field of knowledge. There must be a dozen other means. Just remember that the sheer number of items listed on the vita and the testimonials of friends and neighbors, immediate colleagues, and local academic superiors do not address this criterion.

In all cases, the primary task of interpretation and analysis is the responsibility of the chair, who must serve as mediator between the candidate's specialty and the rest of the academic community. A chair who leaves the necessary professional judgments and discriminations to others must be judged as having shirked a crucial duty and having contributed to the erosion of disciplinary autonomy. Chairs, for instance, can certainly be expected to read and evaluate reprints of articles, grant reports, and the like--

time-consuming and quite specialized tasks beyond the capacity of other reviewers, except perhaps in the case of a sample or two.

We would also like to register a plea for each chair to see to it that **EVERY** folder contains a copy of the departmental statement on creative activities. Faculty would do well to check whether the departmental statement is one they can really live with. It hardly seems fair to complain after the fact that you are being held to alien standards unless you have helped formulate a statement that adapts your particular situation to the spirit of the Mission Seminar criteria.

## **SERVICE**

Bare lists of services, like lists of research items, are not very illuminating. After the last section, the general desire of the Committee to distinguish between levels of performance should be clear. In some areas of on-campus activities, we possess sufficient information to make judgments, a half-way alert committee ought to be able to distinguish between "guiding the Faculty Scholarship Committee through its most difficult first years," and "chairs the Transylvanian-Carpathian Exchange Committee, which met once for fifteen minutes back in '68," even though both take up one line on a vita. We all know folks who get elected or appointed to committees whose meetings they attend every February--if those don't fall on Wednesdays, of course. Just what did your membership accomplish? In cases of extramural service, especially, interpretive materials are indispensable. A few sentences would certainly be in order pointing out what you believe to be your major area(s) of tangible service to the University. And, please be careful not to claim as "service" what you have also claimed as "research"; the impression made is not a favorable one.

It should be pointed out here that service as a faculty member is quite distinguishable from service in an administrative position. Promotion and tenure are awarded to persons in their capacity as faculty only. The "service" of someone on half an administrative line does not include those good deeds for which administrative funds have specifically been paid. Decreased teaching loads and extra pay are appropriate compensations for managerial services; promotion and tenure are not.

## **CONCLUSION**

Tenure and promotion are perhaps the single most important expressions of the way we think of ourselves as a university: they determine the character and quality of the institution for decades to come; they shape the careers of individuals; they express our responsibility to the tax-payers and students of Florida; and perhaps, most of all, they manifest our academic values and our sense of obligation to the academic community as a whole. The seriousness with which committees and officials take the review process is expressed in the substance of the arguments they offer for their opinions, and faculty have every right to feel aggrieved if recommendations are perfunctory, impressionistic, or evasive. The principle of accountability should extend everywhere: faculty committees, including our own, certainly share the blame for some of the errors of past years. But, a serious folder--professional, specific, and candid--will go far toward encouraging an equal seriousness on the part of reviewers.

We can hardly say too often that responsibility for seeing to it that the best case is made lies ultimately with the faculty member. The general quality of the folder, however, is also the responsibility of the departmental chairperson; and when inadequate, sloppy, or irregular folders are submitted, we believe that the chairperson should be made to pay smartly on his own annual evaluation. The faculty member will suffer quite enough by having an unprofessional job submitted to represent him. Finally, one of the

major responsibilities of the President is to call reviewing officials or reviewing committees to task for taking their responsibilities less seriously than he and the faculty have the right to expect.

Insofar as argument replaces opinion and the principle of accountability prevails, the often-heard accusations of personalism, inequity, and arbitrariness will disappear. Where differences of opinion occur--as they should--the President should be presented with differing judgments based on documented arguments which show explicit evidence that the analyses of the previous reviewers have been taken into account. The President must be able to base his judgments on argument and evidence, not simply on a mechanical tally of go's and no-go's accumulated up the line. No doubt, human nature being what it is, unsuccessful candidates will continue to see their cases as having been misjudged; and therefore, we wish we could offer a simple checklist or recipe for the most successful of all possible folders. Every situation, however, is different and we can only suggest strategies and kinds of evidence which, when adapted to your peculiar situation, will make your merits most plain and least disputable. A good folder is work to build, but then so is the professional career which a folder must adequately reflect.

## APPENDIX A

The following is a list of things we would like not to see in a folder again.

- Glowing tributes to the faculty member's enthusiasm for tennis, his ability to select a handsome mate, his sincerity as a Sunday school teacher, and such irrelevancies to matters academic.
- Sets of peer evaluation forms in which practically all items are checked "outstanding" for every faculty member considered in the department.
- Peer evaluation forms which indicate "insufficient knowledge" in areas where nothing whatsoever is shown on the vita.
- Covert alteration or suspension of the stated criteria according to race or sex.
- Negative recommendations explicitly based upon the failure of a faculty member to conform to an official's mental "image" of the position.
- Non-rebuttal statements that a candidate is "nearing the time" when he can be promoted or that he "needs more seasoning."
- Attempts to paper over deficiencies in a candidate's credentials by lyric evocations of the candidate's geniality, cooperative spirit, earnestness, or whatever.
- The selective appeal to extenuating circumstances in cases of academic nonfeasance.
- Letters of recommendation which in a single letter recommend more than one candidate.
- Outside evaluations unsigned and transcribed from telephone conversations.
- Letters addressing only tenure which are nonetheless made part of a promotion file.
- Unsigned, retyped, or Sno-painted and redated letters of reference.
- References to student evaluation forms that no one has bothered to include in the folder.
- Unexplained conflicts between a chairperson's evaluation of a faculty member's teaching and the prima facie implications of the student evaluations provided.
- Refurbished, edited, or predigested student comments when the method of selection is not made explicit, much less when they are passed off as the real thing.
- Student evaluation forms no fresher than six years old, with no explanation given.
- Activities claimed as "research" by a chairperson which the candidate himself lists under "service."
- Assurances that a candidate has scholarly work in progress when there is no indication that the chairperson has seen and assessed such work himself.

- Vitas padded by the inclusion of trivia (dissertation abstracts, TV interviews, letters to the editor, locally-duplicated course materials, remarks at banquets, etc.) under the rubric of "publication."
- A two-price system that asks more of fifth- than sixth-year candidates, who have had a year longer to confirm their nonfeasance.
- Unresolved conflicts among reviewers concerning the basis on which a candidate is turned down.
- One- and two-line recommendations from committees or officials who make no explicit reference to the detailed arguments of other reviewers in the process.
- Attempts to nullify the official criteria by the simple expedient of ignoring them.
- Rationalizations for sins of the present by appeal to sins of the past.

## APPENDIX B

The Office of the Academic Vice President informs us that the following represents the official University criteria for promotion and tenure. A copy will be distributed to all faculty once more when the material for evaluations is sent out later in the year.

- Excellent teaching and promising signs of good scholarship justify a period of yearly reappointment at the assistant professor level.
- Excellent teaching and significant evidence of scholarship, including a measure of tangible and public evidence, justify the decision to grant tenure.
- A strong positive reputation within the university as teacher and scholar justifies the decision to promote to associate professor. Significant tangible and public scholarship recognized as such by colleagues, is always a criterion, and this scholarship usually signifies the potential for recognition outside the university. Persons who develop the means of scholarship within the university are often honored by this rank.
- Very substantial tangible and public contributions to the profession measured by favorable acknowledgement in the disciplines outside the university--and excellent teaching--justify promotion to the rank of professor.

These additional criteria were approved at the January 8, 1988 Faculty Senate meeting for the use during the 1989-90 evaluation cycle:

- Except in unusual circumstances, faculty members lacking an acceptable degree defined as the highest degree one can normally receive in a given field, may not be tenured, and may be appointed only at the rank of instructor or lecturer. Each discipline is responsible for adhering to the said policy and informing the Dean and Provost/Vice President of what is to be considered an acceptable degree as defined herein. The letter of appointment and the promotion and/or tenure files shall include such a statement as approved by the Provost/Vice President.
- A.B.D. candidate hired with the intention of obtaining a tenure track position, would hold the title "Instructor" until such time that a letter is received from the degree-granting university stating that all criteria for the acceptable degree, as defined herein, have been satisfied. At that time, the title is automatically changed to that of Assistant Professor. This procedure, as well as any difference in salary arising as a result of an appointment to Assistant Professor, should be clearly stated in the letter of appointment.
- Tenure and/or promotion shall not be awarded partly or solely for duties which were part of assigned administrative duties.

The University of West Florida's [1975 and 1988] mission statement contains the following definition of the meaning of scholarship. *"Scholarship includes all the varieties of research and artistic activity as they are defined by academic disciplines. Scholarship fields ideas, theories, products, criticism, techniques, data, and works of art. There is no limit to its forms. Publications, performances, and exhibits are powerful but not exclusive ways to display the result of scholarship. Development of the means of scholarship--laboratories, research centers, libraries and collections, analytical machinery, and so on--can be considered scholarship. Whatever its forms, however, scholarship is evident, useful, educative, and testable only when it has become tangible and public."* It is also assumed that faculty members shall be engaged in appropriate service activities essential to the functioning of the University and in response to the needs of the institution's constituencies.

These additional criteria were approved at the January 8, 1988 Faculty Senate meeting and were first used during the 1989-90 evaluation cycle:

- Except in unusual circumstances, faculty members lacking an acceptable degree defined as the highest degree one can normally receive in a given field, may not be tenured, and may be appointed only at the rank of instructor or lecturer. Each discipline is responsible for adhering to the said policy and informing the Dean and Provost/Vice President of what is to be considered an acceptable degree as defined herein. The letter of appointment and the promotion and/or tenure files shall include such a statement as approved by the Provost/Vice President.
- A.B.D. candidates hired with the intention of obtaining a tenure track position, would hold the title "Instructor" until such time that a letter is received from the degree-granting university stating that all criteria for the acceptable degree, as defined herein, have been satisfied. At that time, the title is automatically changed to that of Assistant Professor. This procedure, as well as any difference in salary arising as a result of an appointment to Assistant Professor, should be clearly stated in the letter of appointment.
- Tenure and/or promotion shall not be awarded partly or solely for duties which were part of assigned administrative duties.

The Mission Statement of The University of West Florida approved in 1992 contains the following additional remarks on "research and creative activity":

- Research and Creative Activity. A university whose first priority is the education of students requires a faculty committed to student learning and achievement. That commitment in turn demands intellectual vitality, which is primarily maintained and fostered through the research and creative endeavors that are expected of all faculty. We anticipate that these activities will result in contributions that are public and tangible and will provide opportunities for students to participate in the discovery of knowledge.

It is also assumed that faculty members shall be engaged in appropriate service activities essential to the functioning of the University and in response to the needs of the institution's constituencies. The 1992 Mission Statement addresses these responsibilities as follows:

- Service. An interactive university requires a faculty engaged in service to the public. Such contributions arise from their intellectual engagement and professional competence, the availability of student assistance, and the resources of the University. In addition, the faculty provide service to their professions, participate in institutional governance, and are encouraged to involve themselves in volunteer and community activities.

- Extended Learning. Because the University demands a high level of dedication, professional competence, and vitality from our faculty and staff, it must provide rich opportunities for professional growth and offer programs to increase work satisfaction and the opportunity for promotion and other advancement.

Among the region's many needs for extended learning, research, and service, particular emphasis is given to public education, business, industry and technology, environmental concerns, government, the military community, health and human services, communication, culture and cultural heritage, and quality of life in the region.

In 1994, the University Planning Council adopted the statement "UWF in 2008" which contains the following comments about creative/scholarly activity and service:

*"A university whose first priority is the education of students requires a faculty committed to student learning and achievement. That commitment in turn demands intellectual vitality, which is primarily maintained and fostered through the research and creative endeavors that are expected of all faculty. We anticipate that these activities will result in contributions that are public and tangible and will provide opportunities for students to participate in the discovery of knowledge.*

*An interactive university requires a faculty engaged in service to the public. Such contributions arise from their intellectual engagement and professional competence. In addition, the faculty provide service to their professions, participate in institutional governance, and are encouraged to involve themselves in volunteer and community activities.*

*Based on these principles, UWF in 2008 will continue to have instruction as its primary mission. Academic programs will meet national standards as measured by accreditations, external reviews, and the performance of our students. State funding for scholarly and creative activities and public service, together with grant and contract dollars, will account for approximately 30-35% of the University's expenditure budget, up from the current 25%. Faculty will be expected to teach well and to do research and creative activities for tenure, promotion, and merit raises. Scholarly and creative activities will be an important contributor to teaching and will involved students. There will be centers of research intensity, many closely related to regional strengths and needs, and some will be nationally recognized for excellence. The University will have a few doctoral programs, mostly applied in nature, and predicated on regional demand."*

## **APPENDIX C**

By a letter of July 8, 1977, President Robinson added his "endorsement" to each of the following procedural guarantees requested by Alpha Council.

- That tenure review will be a genuinely consultative process directed toward making actual discriminations based explicitly on the stated criteria;
- That any administrative understandings about the rigor or lack of rigor in the general application of the criteria (including any quotas for ranks or tenure) will be explained outright to the faculty committees before the review progress begins;
- That there will in future be no off-the-record understandings between candidates and administrators regarding the granting of tenure and that all tenure review will be conducted on the written record and in strict accordance with the publicly stated procedure;

- That all reviewing committees and administrative officers will be instructed to determine and write their promotion and tenure recommendations with explicit and specific reference to the stated criteria.
- That since a candidate's "right to rebuttal" is meaningless if negative recommendations are not rendered in specific detail, all reviewing committees and administrative officers will be instructed to support such recommendations with specific documentary reference to the written contents of the candidate's file.

*\*This document was originally created as a memo to the General Faculty, on October 7, 1977. The authors are: Ron Miller and K. Ranga Rao, University Personnel Committee; Philip Momberger, Alpha Personnel Committee; and Carl Proehl, Sr.*