Provost’s Task Force on Promotion and Tenure

Background

The Provost’s Task Force on Promotion and Tenure was appointed to examine promotion and tenure (P&T) policies at Purdue University. While practices and procedures surrounding P&T have evolved over the years to address changing issues and expectations, the policies themselves had not been comprehensively reviewed since the 1970s. Purdue’s policies regarding promotion, tenure, and extensions of the tenure clock are currently addressed in several different documents.

The Task Force addressed its charge in the context of eight working groups.

1) Collegiality  5) Review
2) Impact  6) Tenure Timeline
3) Interdisciplinary Initiatives/Joint Appointments  7) Concept of Tenure
4) Teaching & Learning  8) Post-Tenure Review

The Task Force discussed and voted on findings and recommendations from each group and made twenty-five resulting recommendations. The Task Force did not address grievances and appeals related to tenure. Additionally, this review was limited to policies related to tenure-track faculty.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

1. Collegiality

Findings: Collegiality is not mentioned or implied in any criteria used for promotion, nor is it mentioned specifically as one of the criteria for termination similar to the 13 Committee on Institutional Cooperation Institutions (CIC) institutions. HR handbooks in these institutions often address “concerns of civility” or “relations with colleagues.” Many universities recognize the importance of collegiality and expect faculty members to be cooperative, constructive, and respectful however inclusion in evaluations could hinder academic freedom.

Recommendations: Collegiality expectations should be included for all reviews of faculty since they will have a positive effect in improving the social climate and collaborative environment but not as a dominant discriminator in the assignment of merit raises.

2. Impact

Findings: Alternative, non-traditional forms of impact are being recognized more frequently at Purdue and clarity about what will be valued, measured, and rewarded is important at all levels, but especially for junior faculty. Faculty in a particular discipline can best determine what should count as “impact.”

Recommendations: Regular discussion and identification of indicators of impact should occur within departments/schools/colleges and they should be clearly communicated to all faculty.

3. Interdisciplinary Initiatives/Joint Appointments

Findings: Interdisciplinary efforts are important and Purdue, recognizing this, has provided physical space for such efforts (Discovery Park) and formed the Interdisciplinary Initiatives Committee to address the role of these efforts in promotion cases. Interdisciplinary activities are currently not commensurate with the incentive, reward, or promotion systems that support it.
Recommendations: The P&T policy should explicitly recognize interdisciplinary activities in learning, discovery, and engagement. Candidates may include a statement highlighting their interdisciplinary activities and these activities should be reviewed by the primary committee in conjunction with additional advisory input if needed.

4. Teaching & Learning

Findings: Many peers, including the Big Ten, have a clear commitment to teaching and learning in their P&T processes but there is only a brief mention of teaching in Purdue’s Terms of Employment and Tenure policies. In addition, there is much variation in its evaluation across Purdue’s campuses, colleges and schools.

Recommendations: The Purdue system should adopt a clear commitment to teaching and learning in the P&T process and require documentation of ability and diligence in the teaching role for any tenure commitment. Purdue should also implement a flexible policy on documentation of teaching effectiveness, using “University Senate Document 97-9” as a foundation.

5. Review

Findings: Each campus, college and school implements review committees differently to meet unique needs, sizes, roles and missions. Currently, representation of faculty is strong as compared to seven peer universities.

Recommendations: Levels of review are generally working. Procedures and processes used to determine review committee membership and the process of the review at all levels should be written and disseminated to all faculty. Each college, school, or campus must determine and clearly disseminate expectations for letters of assessment that are to be included in a candidate’s documentation for promotion. In addition, conflict of interest should be specifically addressed in the promotion and tenure committee review process.

6. Tenure Timeline

Findings: Many national leaders support creation of a flexible tenure-track faculty career path. Some institutions have considered (or instituted) a 8-10 year tenure clock.

Recommendations: Assistant professors should be reviewed annually and be given written feedback. All associate professors should be reviewed and provided with written feedback not to exceed two years. Guidelines for extension of the tenure clock should be incorporated as an integral part of the revised tenure and promotion polices.

7. Concept of Tenure and Post-Tenure Review

Findings: Purdue lacks a process for assuring sustained faculty performance or for providing faculty with important mid-career feedback for full and associate professors. Purdue should implement a constructive, unit-initiated and Provost approved process of post-tenure reviews for all faculty.

Recommendations (Concept of Tenure): New language, specific to the Tenure Policies section and the Procedures in Cases for Termination for Cause section of the Principles and Policies for Academic Freedom, Responsibilities, and Tenure, and Procedures for Termination for Cause should be added.

Recommendations (Post-Tenure Review): Each unit should identify a constructive post-tenure review process appropriate to the mission of the unit subject to Provost [or Chancellor] approval. The process developed should build on processes already in place such as annual review. The process is intended to be initiated at the College, School or Campus level on the assumption that one process will not fit all Purdue University academic units.