The Role of the RPT Review Committees in Holistic Faculty Review

Overview of Relevant Law, Policy, and Procedures.
Decision-making Process

- Maintain the highest standards of integrity, fairness, and professionalism, and ensure the process and decision are consistent with applicable University, College, and Department policies.

- For each of the relevant criteria under review, consider and then describe whether the candidate either does not meet, meets, or exceeds the relevant expectations.

- Procedures.
Clearly Applying the Criteria

- Weak:
  "Dr. K should endeavor to increase her/his number of peer-reviewed publications."

- Better:
  "Dr. K has fewer peer-reviewed publications than expected at this stage. At least six peer-reviewed publications of similar quality are expected for a positive tenure review."

- Even better:
  "Dr. K has only two peer-reviewed publications at this stage. At least six peer-reviewed publications of similar quality are expected for a positive tenure review."

From: http://provost.uiowa.edu/faculty-review-common-problems
Importance of Applying Relevant Criteria Clearly and Consistently

• Fairness and Transparency to the Candidate
  • Mitigates the likelihood of valid Discrimination, Personal Malice, and Material Procedural Irregularity Claims
• Mitigates the impact of implicit bias in the decision-making process
• Fairness and Transparency to the Candidate

Consistency

Importance of Applying Relevant Criteria Clearly and
Grounds for Appeal of RPT Decisions

1. Decision Based on Impermissible Grounds including (1) exercise of First Amendment Rights; (2) discrimination based upon the Faculty Member's race, color, creed, sex, disability, sexual orientation, religion, age, national origin, veteran status, or other forms of discrimination prohibited under policies adopted by the Board of Trustees; or (3) personal malice.

2. Decision follows Material Procedural Irregularities, which are "departures from prescribed procedures governing reappointment, promotion, or the conferral of Permanent Tenure that cast reasonable doubt upon the validity of the decision not to reappoint, not to promote, or not to confer Permanent Tenure."

3. To determine whether discrimination impacted review, the law requires considering whether similarly situated individuals were treated differently (whether more or less favorably) in the same or similar circumstances.

4. Personal Malice is defined as permitting the decision to be made because of dislike, animosity, ill-will, or hatred based on the Faculty Member's personal characteristics, traits, or circumstances not relevant to valid University decision making.

5. To determine whether the decision was made because of dislike, animosity, ill-will, or hatred based on the Faculty Member's personal characteristics, traits, or circumstances not relevant to valid University decision making, the law requires considering whether similarly situated individuals were treated differently (whether more or less favorably) in the same or similar circumstances.
Chair, Dean, and Provost Reviews

Each Administrator is encouraged to solicit additional information from the underlying recommendations or otherwise apparent from the underlying recommendations—the bases for discrepancies should be clarified.

BOG Review focuses on discrepancies in decision-makers’ insufficient.

Insufficiently how the committee reached that decision will generally be deemed.

Not meet several other criteria, without an explanation regarding how the criteria were applied. The candidate did include a clear explanation regarding how the criteria were applied from reviews committees if the recommendations made does not.

Each Administrator is encouraged to solicit additional information.
Confidentiality

- All discussions and decisions during the tenure and promotion review process are CONFIDENTIAL.
- All committee members are expected to adhere to the strict confidentiality requirements.
- From University Policy:
  - All documents submitted or created in connection with the process as well as all confidential records and information shall be held in closed session, with only those present whom the committee deems necessary to its deliberations.
  - Any deliberations by a department or College Review Committee shall be held in closed session, with deliberations open to all committee members.
  - All committee members are expected to adhere to the strict confidentiality requirements.
  - All discussions and decisions during the tenure and promotion review process are CONFIDENTIAL.
Importance of Confidentiality in RPT Review Process

- Encourages necessary candor in committee discussions;
- Protects the candidate’s reputation;
- Ensures confidentiality in RPT Review Process.

Ensures compliance with System and University policy.
Ensures integrity of review process and
Hypo #1:

- Dr. Motts is a candidate for Associate Professor in the College of Education. Dr. Haynes is currently chair of the College Review Committee considering Dr. Motts' file. Dr. Haynes once served on a curriculum committee with Dr. Motts, on which Dr. Motts critically assessed the scholarship and student interest in programming initiated by Dr. Haynes several years prior, unwittingly offending Dr. Haynes in front of his colleagues. Dr. Haynes also sought and failed to receive an institutional award that Dr. Motts was ultimately awarded. Although Dr. Haynes persuades the committee that Dr. Motts is not someone the committee should support, citing character issues and concerns that Dr. Motts would not be a good long-term fit for the college, the committee noted in its recommendation that Dr. Motts generally met expectations for teaching, and exceeded some, fell short in some areas, including in her contributions toward course and program curriculum development.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Are Dr. Haynes' concerns appropriate for consideration in the context of this review? Why or why not?
2. Please refer to the College’s guidelines for tenure review and share any concerns you have regarding the Committee’s explanation regarding the basis of its recommendation. Why or why not?
3. Can you identify any actual or potential policy breaches here?
The Chair of the DRC, wary of another protracted review season, offers to review candidate dossiers and draft proposed recommendations for the committee's consideration. She shares that, given the sensitive nature of the reviews and the fact that everyone knows and expects the rumors to fly, she will accept feedback via email from individual committee members rather than ask them to share any concerns they have with the entire committee. One committee member expresses concern about the approach, but the other committee members like the chair's suggestion about the reviews and the fact that everyone knows and expects the rumors to fly. She will accept feedback via email from individual committee members rather than ask them to share any concerns they have with the entire committee. Given the sensitive nature of the reviews and the fact that everyone knows and expects the rumors to fly.
Final Takeaways

- The tenure and promotion review process is critical to quality assessment and control within the University;
- Given the sensitivity of the task at hand, the implications of tenure on the employment relationship with the University, and the long-term commitment made by offering tenure, evaluating tenure and promotion is one of the most difficult and demanding forms of service;
- Although review committees make recommendations rather than decisions, the recommendations are given serious consideration in the final decision;
- Evaluating tenure and promotion is often the most important employment decision made at a University;
- Given the implications of tenure on the employment relationship within the University, the tenure and promotion review process is critical to quality assessment and control within the University;
- Confidentiality is paramount.
Criteria and how they will be weighed should be articulable:

- How is quality assessed?
- What kinds of creative activity count?
- Do book chapters count as much as journal articles?
- Is there a benchmark range of peer-reviewed publications?

Fostering Transparency: Clear Review Criteria

Before you start looking at portfolios...
Implicit bias affects:

- Student evaluation of teaching
- Colleagues’ evaluation of research and service
- External evaluation of tenure merit
- Perceived likeability and “fit”, which can affect all of the above

Remediate implicit bias by educating yourself (see Resources):

- Clear, operationalized criteria
- Careful attention to relevant factors
- Ample time for assessment
- Challenge your assumptions and review your decisions and those of your colleagues

Be aware of implicit bias.

https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html
We ask that evaluators not provide comments as to whether a candidate should or should not be awarded tenure at your institution. All levels of review should be aware of bias in letters sent to external evaluators:

Criteria for External Evaluation

http://www.tomforth.co.uk/genderbias/
A slightly more current version of the tool is maintained on GitHub.

Since then, it's become very popular, but I have no opinion on the science/sociology that powers the tool. I made this tool in 2013, for no other reason than to show that building tools could drive more engagement than writing. I'm still using it to examine my own written recommendations. This calculator is inspired by this AVIS blog post on gender biases in recommendation letters. The blog post and the scientific paper it is based on also explain why this gender bias is important. I am grateful to Dr. Karen James for bringing it to my attention and leading me to examine my own written recommendations.

Female-associated words

Male-associated words

The male list will be added to the female list. Words that are more often associated with men will be added to your recommendation letter here. Words that are more often associated with women will be added to your recommendation letter here.
Promoting Fairness: External Evaluation

- Request letters from appropriate evaluators
- Seek evaluators who understand the candidate's specific topic, methods & approach
  especially where these differ from traditional department/discipline strengths
  (especially approaches that are not as common in the US)
- Encourage referees to avoid being restrained and too modest. American referees tend to write in an enthusiastic tone, using very positive and descriptive language. Thus, it is important that your referees keep the audience in mind and be aware of the fact that a standard UK reference may not be a sufficient complement to your US university application.
- Above all, advice from Fulbright UK website: Above all, encourage referees to avoid being restrained and too modest. American referees tend to write in an enthusiastic tone, using very positive and descriptive language. Thus, it is important that your referees keep the audience in mind and be aware of the fact that a standard UK reference may not be a sufficient complement to your US university application.
Prior to reviewing portfolios it should be clear how you will balance feedback from student evaluations, peer evaluations, and other indicators in assessing teaching quality.

Remember that there are known problems with student evaluations:

- Online courses: "The instructor students thought was male was given a 4.35 rating. The instructor students thought was female got a 3.55 rating." (MacNeil)
- Inversely correlated with quality of preparation for future courses (Carrell and West 2010)
- Afflicted with gender bias (MacNeil, Driscoll, Hunt 2015) and racial bias (Merrill)
- Afflicted with attractiveness and other irrelevant factors (Ambady)
- Heavily affected by physical attractiveness and other irrelevant factors (Ambady and Rosenthal 1993)
- Inversely correlated with quality of preparation for future courses (Carrell and West 2010)

Student Evaluations
Assess teaching through other methods

- Peer evaluations with clear criteria
- Evidence of rigor; appropriate content and forms of assessment
- Do not penalize women candidates, candidates of color, queer and trans candidates, etc., for students' bias

Chair and/or committee A letter can mention empirical studies on bias in evaluations

Promoting Fairness

Assess teaching through other methods
Criteria in evaluating service, leadership and community engagement

• Criteria should consistently assess engagement in service and community action.

• What are the unique challenges and contributions of underrepresented faculty and issues related to campus climate and student support?

• Community engagement

Criteria in evaluating service, leadership and community engagement
Further training if you are interested

https://addept.gatech.edu/activities