

CONFIDENTIAL

Date: October 1, 2010
To: Tenure-Track Faculty
From: Committee on Faculty Appointments (CFA), 2010-11
Re: Reappointment and Tenure Review Process
Cc: Tenured Faculty

In 2007-08, the College participated in the COACHE survey of junior faculty satisfaction. The survey highlighted some concerns about junior faculty morale, which were extensively discussed by the CFA and the Advisory Committee to the CFA (AC-CFA) during the 2008-09 academic year. One of the recommendations that emerged from these discussions as well as from a comprehensive follow-up study conducted by the AC-CFA was that the CFA should prepare an annual letter to tenure-track faculty describing the CFA's processes and, as appropriate, addressing misconceptions about the tenure process and standards. This letter provides in written form information and advice that previous CFAs have communicated orally in meetings with reappointment and tenure candidates. Our hope is that an annual letter written by the current members of the committee will clarify issues that are sometimes misunderstood and will improve communication within the College community regarding the review process. It is not our intent here to provide a comprehensive account of the appointments process or to paraphrase or repeat what is amply described in College legislation (*Articles of Government*, Book 1).

How does the CFA do its work?

In reappointment and tenure reviews, the role of the CFA is to respond to the recommendations of Reappointments and Promotions (R&P) committees. The form that our decisions take is that we either accept or reject a recommendation coming to us from an R&P or (in the case of split decisions) from one part of an R&P.

If the CFA feels that it does not have sufficient information to respond to a recommendation, the Committee may ask questions (either written or oral) of an R&P. This is done frequently and routinely. Written requests for information or clarification should not be interpreted by candidates as necessarily foreshadowing a negative decision. In many cases, written questions simply indicate that an R&P did not provide adequate information or that the CFA wishes to receive further guidance on the interpretation of the available information. The same may be said of requests for copies of annual conversation reports and/or class visit reports – requests that the CFA is authorized to make.

Each case that comes before the CFA is considered on its own merits. The CFA does not compare candidates to one another. The College does not have reappointment or tenure quotas or caps.

Faculty members on the CFA holding an appointment in the same department or program as a candidate (or who are outside members of a candidate's R&P) recuse themselves from consideration of that case. Instead they participate as members of the R&P. The Provost/Dean of the College and Dean of Faculty Affairs (formerly "Associate Dean of the College") are the only exceptions to this rule, because they serve on the committee in their administrative capacity. The recusal rule is strictly enforced; no CFA member participates in any way in the committee's conversations about a candidate in her/his department or program.

As you are no doubt aware, the College's appointments process has long been characterized by its relative transparency. The candidate receives a copy of the R&P's recommendation as well as of any correspondence between the CFA and the R&P (with appropriate redactions). At any stage of the process, the candidate is free to communicate in writing to the CFA. The CFA does not share such communications with R&Ps, so if a candidate wishes his or her R&P to see a copy, he or she should provide one directly. The transparency of our process is intended for the benefit of the candidate and not others; members of R&Ps and the CFA are expected to adhere scrupulously to the principle of confidentiality.

The CFA gives thorough and careful consideration to each case before reaching a decision. It has been the practice of the committee never to make a decision about a reappointment or tenure decision at the first meeting at which it is discussed. Every case is considered on at least two occasions, and frequently more than that. As a result, an extended period of time may elapse between the time at which a case is first considered (and written questions submitted to an R&P) and the time at which a decision is made.

How does the CFA evaluate teaching?

From the AC-CFA's conversations with junior faculty, we know that the CFA's interpretation of Student Evaluation Questionnaires (SEQs) is an area of particular concern. While SEQs are an important part of a candidate's dossier, they are examined critically and read carefully by the CFA in the context of the overall teaching portfolio, which includes class visit reports, unsolicited student letters, enrollments, syllabi, and other pedagogical materials. Rather than focusing on specific individual comments, CFA members identify persistent or prevailing themes (positive and negative) in the student comments and significant trends in the quantitative and qualitative data. We do not make the assumption that excellent teaching is necessarily and invariably synonymous with high scores and laudatory student comments. The committee recognizes that some attributes of excellent teaching (high standards, demanding or challenging coursework) or some legitimate pedagogical methods (for example, cold-calling) might be characterized negatively in some student comments. The CFA places primary emphasis on the quality

of student learning, as revealed in the SEQs as well as in the other materials bearing on a candidate's teaching record.

Our expectation is that, beginning this year, the College will implement a new five-point rating scale for SEQs (following the recommendation of a prior AC-CFA). We recognize that the new SEQ scale will change the data distribution, and we want to reassure faculty members that this will be kept in mind by the CFA. After a year or two, we plan to share data that will look at averages across the college and across all ranks.

The CFA recognizes the importance of independent study supervision as a form of teaching. Since there are no SEQs for independent studies, the Provost's office gets in touch with all students participating in 250s, 350s, and 370s at the conclusion of each semester, encouraging them to write letters.

Junior faculty members often ask how to balance their own research needs with collaborative work with students. The College highly values the extension of research opportunities to students, but also emphasizes that faculty members should feel comfortable involving students in their research projects to the extent that seems appropriate to the specific discipline or project. We also note that an extensive record of collaboration with students would not exempt a faculty member from meeting the College's high standards for research.

It is the responsibility of the Provost's office to publish a list of faculty under review each year. While letters from colleagues and students are welcomed and encouraged, the CFA does not judge a case based on the number of unsolicited letters received, nor do we encourage faculty to solicit them.

How does the CFA evaluate research?

The College has long held Wellesley faculty to high standards in terms of the originality and significance of their scholarly research or artistic production. The CFA does not equate these high standards with a particular number of publications or a set measure of productivity. In every case that it considers, the committee is concerned primarily with the quality of the contribution that a faculty member is making, has made, and will make to the scholarly or artistic field in which he or she is working. In order to evaluate the quality of scholarly work, the CFA considers all relevant evidence, including the assessment of R&P colleagues, the professional judgment of external evaluators (in tenure cases), the quality of publication venues, the standards and definitions of excellence appropriate to a particular field, as well as any relevant indicators of professional standing and distinction. The committee finds that significant contributions to a scholarly field generally involve a record of significant publication. But the committee does not reduce its overall evaluation of a research portfolio to the counting of publications.

Who is on the CFA?

There are eight voting members on the Committee – six faculty and two administrators. Five faculty members are elected by the faculty (either at large or within divisions) and one by the Black Task Force. The President and Provost/Dean of the College are voting members, and the Dean of Faculty Affairs is a non-voting member. Decisions are made by majority vote. The President or Provost cannot overturn a decision reached by a majority of CFA members.

Have the College's standards for reappointment and tenure changed in recent years?

The College has long had demanding expectations for faculty performance in each of the three main areas of activity (scholarship, teaching and service) considered at reappointment and tenure. In view of these high standards, negative appointments decisions are likely to occur from time to time. Over the past decade, 50 of 58 (86%) tenure cases that have come to the CFA have resulted in positive decisions, and 75 of 81 (93%) reappointment cases that have come to the CFA have resulted in positive decisions. Naturally, the past cannot necessarily be taken as a guide to future decisions, but the record of the last ten years does not show any trend towards an increased number of negative decisions.

Members of the 2010-11 Committee on Faculty Appointments:

H. Kim Bottomly, President
Andrew Shennan, Provost and Dean of the College (Chair)
Kathryn Lynch, Dean of Faculty Affairs (non-voting)
Dan Brabander, Geosciences
Emily Buchholtz, Biological Sciences
Selwyn Cudjoe, Africana Studies (Black Task Force Representative)
Roxanne Euben, Political Science
Nolan Flynn, Chemistry
Vernon Shetley, English

Clerk of the CFA: Ruth Frommer, Office of the Provost and Dean of the College