**Oregon State University
Promotion and Tenure Process Review**

REPORT TO FACULTY SENATE
and
PROVOST'S COUNCIL

March 2007

Promotion & Tenure Process Review Project
Co-sponsored by:
AFAPC, PCOSW, and Faculty Senate P&T Committee

Introduction

Two years ago, a collaborative group sponsored by the Association of Faculty for the Advancement of People of Color (AFAPC), the President's Commission on the Status of Women (PCOSW), and the Faculty Senate Promotion and Tenure Committee came together to review OSU's Promotion and Tenure (P&T) system. This group sought to assess recent P&T experiences across a broad array of units and disciplines ten years after the current P&T Guidelines and processes went into effect. Experiences of faculty in historically underrepresented or marginalized groups were explicitly included.

In a 2003 report on faculty diversity, Harvard researchers Cathy Trower and Richard Chait asserted that rigid norms and practices have developed around tenure programs, contributing to an academic culture experienced by many (especially people of color and women) as "unaccommodating." They believe that this culture is a primary obstacle to achieving faculty diversity objectives in the academy. The problem, they suggest, is "less one of tenure as an *institution* and more one of tenure in its *implementation*." Frustrations with the tenure process are "well-documented: ambiguous standards; contradictory priorities and expectations; professional isolation; erratic feedback and inconsistent and incomplete performance reviews; ideological and methodological biases; and the multiple demands of teaching, research, and service…almost cruelly (coinciding with) the pressures associated with starting a family and establishing financial stability." An overarching intent of this review, therefore, was to determine what aspects of our own P&T system—and related aspects of our academic culture—may hinder OSU's ability to attract, employ, retain, and advance scholars from various different identity backgrounds in our professorial faculty positions.

Methodology

In late spring of 2005, faculty members were invited to participate in this assessment by providing information about their recent P&T experiences through either an interview or a focus group. Invitations went to all professorial faculty promoted or tenured during the

previous three years, to the listservs for AFAPC and the Faculty Women's Network (FWN), and to individuals who heard about the project by word-of-mouth and expressed an interest in participating. For reasons of confidentiality, Academic Affairs did not provide names of candidates who were denied promotion or tenure. Several faculty members who were denied tenure in 2005 heard of the project and volunteered to participate; several tenured faculty members who had been denied promotion to associate or full professor also participated. Those who were denied tenure and/or left OSU before June of 2005 are not represented in this study. (See Appendix A for further details.)

During summer and fall 2005, data were collected from 23 interviews and 4 focus groups (a total of 36 individuals) using a standard set of open-ended questions about: the P&T process; roles and relationships with department head/chair, P&T committees, and colleagues; position description; factors affecting the outcome; and other issues. Dr. Court Smith, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology, volunteered his qualitative research expertise to perform the data analysis and interpretation. Using a grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin 1990), he read the summaries to identify themes and hypotheses. His report (available upon request) includes description of his methodology, comments from the interviewers about their observations, a discussion of the hypotheses that emerged from the analysis, and possible areas of further research. To ensure that multiple perspectives were considered, members of the original review group also read the data to identify key themes and concerns (summary list available upon request). Dr. Smith affirmed the validity of this approach, stating that "the nature of qualitative analysis is that more iterations and more evaluators lead to a more valid and reliable product." (e-mail C. Smith to A. Gillies 1/17/06)

During fall 2006, a preliminary report of findings was written and presented to the three sponsoring organizations and to the Faculty Senate Executive Committee for reaction and feedback.

Qualitative Analysis Results

Four critical concerns emerged from the iterative process. The circumstances described in these areas of concern have three common characteristics: (1) they are beyond candidate control; (2) they do not seem to emerge from candidate strengths, weaknesses, or potential suitability for promotion and/or tenure; (3) they are seen to have significant differential impact on candidate viability in the bid for promotion and tenure.

1. **Fairness**—the question of fairness was the greatest overall concern about the P&T process among informants. The degree to which candidates experience the process as *fair* relates to multiple factors outside the candidate's control, including the candidate's majority/minority status, process transparency, communication/feedback to the candidate, and consistency/flexibility in application of the promotion and tenure criteria at each level. Regardless of outcome, study participants report being disadvantaged by inexperienced department heads/chairs. In several instances a single powerful colleague is seen to sabotage the candidate's bid for promotion. Candidates denied promotion or tenure may perceive that the P&T criteria were selectively applied, or that criteria not known to them were used. How the criteria are interpreted and applied at the college and departmental levels can evolve or change during a candidate's probationary period, making promotion and tenure a moving target.

2. **Majority status**—majority/minority status is a key factor in the promotion and tenure experience of this group. Multiple aspects of identity contribute cumulatively to these candidates' perceptions of minority status, including race, ethnicity, gender, geographic location, scholarly interests, and tenure status. Minority status is viewed as having a negative impact on colleagues' assessment of candidate collegiality and service. In particular, minority candidates' personal and professional decisions related to their minority status—including where to live, whether to study/teach in identity-related sub-disciplines, whether/how much to provide identity-related service, and how to engage in identity-related interests—were seen to provoke negative reactions from colleagues; for

multiple reasons, minority status may be seen to limit the ability of colleagues to evaluate the P&T dossier fairly and in an appropriate context.

3. **Transparency**—many informants (successful *and* unsuccessful) referred to the P&T process as a "black box." Information may flow readily to the candidate (via formal or informal channels), or the candidate may have no idea what is going on. At the unit level, meeting notes, memos, and letters may be added to the dossier without the candidate understanding the reason, or in some cases without even being told that this has occurred. As the dossier proceeds upward in the University hierarchy, informants report that transparency decreases, and the candidate may have little or no information about how the dossier is being treated, how the promotion/tenure criteria are being evaluated, and what procedures are being followed. Informants who were denied promotion or tenure typically describe only being informed of the outcome, not the reasons for the decision.

4. **Commitment to candidate success**—there is great variability in units' level of demonstrated commitment to their faculty members' success. During the pre-tenure/pre-promotion period, departmental differences occur in: unit head communication; specificity of expectations and evaluations; colleague understanding/support/feedback; availability and effectiveness of mentorship/co-mentorship; unit support; and access to resources. These differences can create relative advantages and disadvantages for P&T candidates. This may be compounded during the tenure/promotion year due to differing beliefs about how the department head/chair, P&T committee, and disciplinary colleagues should engage in the P&T process—behaviors vary between advocacy, support, neutrality, and challenge, apparently depending upon unit norms.

APPENDIX A

METHODOLOGY DETAILS

Excerpt from Qualitative Analysis Report *Introduction* (Dr. Court Smith)
Overall Objective: As described in the Consent to Participate, the study is "designed to assess faculty experiences with OSU's promotion and tenure process…across units and disciplines…(paying) particular attention to the experiences of marginalized groups…"

The P&T Project Committee's objective in selecting interviewees and completing interviews and focus groups was to take a thoughtful approach to the project with the intent of ensuring a broader representation of experiences. Interviewers sought informants with positive and negative experiences in the promotion and tenure process. A few informants were involved in pre-tenure evaluations, familiar with the process, or had administrative experience with the process.

Excerpt from Qualitative Analysis Report *Approach* (Dr. Court Smith): Because the interviewees were purposively selected, quantitative analyses of occurrences of themes were not tabulated. Table 1 gives the outcomes for the 36 interviewees and their success in 41 promotion and tenure decisions (Two pre-tenure reviews and one person was interviewed because of knowledge of the promotion and tenure process. These three interviews were not counted as a promotion and tenure decision.). Interviewees came from 11 different colleges, extension, and the library. Fifteen percent were persons of color. Twelve percent had extension appointments.

Table 1 – Outcomes

Identity	Promotion & tenure decisions (n=41)	Outcome Successful (n=28)	Tenure Only (n=4)	Failed or Withdrew (n=9)	Other (n=3)
Male	12	5	2	5	3
Female	29	23	2	4	0
White	35	23	3	9	2
Persons of Color	6	5	1	0	1