

Stimulating Faculty Involvement and Leadership: Encouraging and Recognizing Faculty Involvement in Outreach

The University of Wisconsin at Madison has struggled to develop methods to evaluate quality of faculty outreach activities. Three members of the UW-Madison campus who are heavily involved in extension discussed evaluating outreach activities for tenure purposes, the process they used to decide, and the product generated as a result. They further described issues they faced, answers UW-Madison came to, and then gave examples including an analysis of a fictional tenure promotion packet.

Integration Into Academic Units

In 1985, the regents decided extension services (Cooperative Extension and continuing education) and associated faculty needed to be brought closer to the teaching and research bases of the university. After integration, the Office of Outreach Development was created within the provost's office to provide leadership for outreach, which is now decentralized throughout the schools and colleges. One way this leadership is shared is through the Council on Outreach, made up of associate deans from every school and college. Committees on outreach develop the outreach mission and strategic planning for that school or college.

As one result, most of the about 250 "integrated outreach faculty," whose primary function is in noncredit education, were integrated into the academic schools or colleges. They brought with them the tenure status they had earned in Extension. For those on a probationary track at the time of integration, a special committee set up for tenure reviewed all faculty using the criteria by which they had been hired.

Tenure is initiated in the department. The probationary faculty member usually has a mentoring committee and may also have a separate tenure committee. When an application for tenure has been approved, it is sent to the dean, who then requests the recommendation of a divisional committee. The chairpersons of the divisional committees change every year.

Demonstrating Excellence in Outreach

"We were examining what was needed to facilitate outreach on the campus," Peg Geisler, chair of the Council on Outreach, explained. "One of the things we needed to do was to reexamine the reward system." Does "a faculty member engaged in outreach activities which fulfill the outreach mission of his or her department" receive an appropriate reward, whether it is promotion, merit or tenure, because of that review process? Furthermore, "Is there a way to demonstrate excellence in outreach as opposed to its mere performance?"

In 1993, the chairs of the divisional committees met with the chancellor. After discussing the importance of outreach on campus, they decided they

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needed an umbrella statement on outreach that each divisional committee would use as it drew up its own criteria. The Council on Outreach was directed to write the outreach guidelines for the departments and the probationary faculty members, as well as the umbrella statement on outreach.

Ann Hoyt, associate professor of consumer science (with a predominant appointment in Cooperative Extension), noted the council was faced with a crisis. On one hand, they were told that outreach is critical to the future of the university and to the public's understanding of the value of the university. On the other hand, they found that the faculty who were producing good outreach products suffered for it in tenure decisions.

The goal was to encourage a clear and comprehensive means of demonstrating excellence for faculty with significant outreach responsibilities. UW defined outreach as the integration of knowledge, practice and ethics to achieve survival and to sustain a world of quality and integrity. "Our vision is that we would live in a society and environment that is both wholesome and life sustaining," said Hoyt. "So our goals were very idealistic."

Handbook Produced

After gathering information documents from UW and other universities around the country, and after many meetings around campus, the Council on Outreach put together a handbook (entitled *Outreach Scholarship Reflected in Promotion and Tenure Decisions*) on preparing and evaluating a tenure dossier, designed for use by tenure track faculty members, by peer review and mentoring committees, departments, and possibly by the divisional committees. The handbook has four major parts: 1) defining outreach scholarship at UW, 2) general suggestions on how to prepare tenure materials (the University of Illinois heavily contributed to this section), 3) an appendix of general examples on evaluating outreach activities, and 4) a second appendix of specific examples of outreach activities, focusing especially on their impact.

The Council on Outreach felt that its demand that outreach scholars "show they've had a definite impact on the world around them is a much more stringent demand than is placed on our more traditional faculty colleagues." Thus they hoped accurately and vividly to describe the actual impact of the outreach work, and that knowledge of it would spread more widely throughout the university.

Outreach and Tenure

Two items that the committee worked on were not included in the handbook. One was a description of an outreach scholar. The other was a tally of what it took to get tenure, using the cases in the second appendix.

The divisional committees are reviewing the handbook presently, and they may expand it to consider all faculty evaluations for merit increases, promotion to full professor and for post-tenure review. Consideration has also been given to the idea that every tenure case should include an evaluation of outreach activities, although this currently pertains only to those with outreach responsibilities. It is not intended that every faculty member should perform outreach activities. Finally, discussions have occurred about having the divisional committees include members who have had significant outreach responsibilities and can therefore understand the differences involved in such work, such as differences in publishing, different kinds of audiences, and the idea of collaborative work.

The critical issues addressed include: 1) fundamentally defining outreach; 2) determining who bears responsibility for tenuring faculty with outreach responsibilities; 3) understanding the conditions of appointment for the faculty member when he or she was originally hired, and that those conditions should dominate the criteria used to evaluate success and worthiness for tenure; and 4) standardizing the committee criteria from one committee to the next, so that evaluations are more consistent with each other and with the university's mission.

Further, the council worked on defining the difference between a professor and an academic staff member. Also addressed was the issue of balance of responsibilities. How much outreach is acceptable? Do you have to do research, and does your research have to be basic research in order to gain tenure? Can you get tenure at UW if you are an excellent teacher and you do excellent outreach, but your research is not as strong as an "average" tenure case? Was the evaluation different for those faculty members whose letter of appointment required that they bring in program revenue?

The last issue discussed by the committee was the fact that most of the cases described in the second appendix would have received tenure without the outreach activities. These activities were in excess of the other material needed for tenure.

Assessment Guidelines Produced

An assessment outline (*Assessment of Promotional Recommendations*), developed by UW-Madison, should not be a template for judging faculty performance, according to Alan Knox, who is currently conducting research on those tenure cases that involve a significant proportion of outreach work. "Faculty members are too varied in terms of what they've actually been doing, differential appointments, and expectations of the department and college level, and so on, to have one size fits all." Once you acknowledge the diversity of faculty performance, it becomes more difficult to suggest one set of criteria and guidelines for all cases.

In assembling the assessment outline, the committee gathered a dozen or so examples of tenure packets from other universities. These packets varied enormously. They created some fictional tenure candidates from this material so that no one would know who the original person was. Then the information considered essential for an authentic tenure packet was put together in a way that made it easy to go through. These fictionalized tenure packets were part of the information used to prepare those either going through the tenure procedure or those involved in evaluating the tenure candidate.

Aspects rated through the assessment tool were institutional expectations, previous evaluation and recognition especially related to outreach, and assessment of quality and promise regarding professional performance as reflected in promotion materials. The last section calls for comments on general performance. The form would be completed by those involved in the evaluation process at the department, college, and campus level. After looking at the fictionalized tenure packets and filling out this assessment, the review committee would ask certain questions: 1) Is there any agreement at all? 2) Are there any correlations between the ratings on any of these items and the global assessment? 3) Who would use any generalizations coming out of this effort? The process would help evaluation committees to standardize their review and to more consciously value and evaluate outreach activities within the context of the university's mission.