

Frequently Asked Questions About the Reappointment, Promotion and Tenure Task Force Report

Q: Why did the provost convene the task force? What problem was she addressing?

A: In 2006, the CU system completed a review of tenure that resulted in a number of changes to the policies and procedures that govern the tenure process on all the CU campuses. As a result, each primary unit (department) is required to revise its criteria in response to these policy changes. At the same time, the provost had led the campus in a discussion of faculty work in a spring 2006 retreat, and the CU Presidential Teaching Scholars had been exploring the nature of faculty work, as well. To meet the requirements of the regents, and in response to UCCS faculty concerns, the provost convened a broad group of faculty from across the campus, under the leadership of Dr. Tom Huber, to take a closer look at how the reappointment, promotion and tenure (RPT) process might better recognize and reward the full range of contributions faculty make to UCCS. Fundamentally, the task force's charge was to propose ways for the campus to better reward what we say we value.

Q: What is different about the proposed model as compared to the current system?

A: The most basic difference is that departments will have more flexibility in tailoring criteria about what faculty contributions will lead to tenure and promotion. Emphasis will be on the department mission and on the strengths of individual faculty, particularly after they have earned tenure. The current system allows a certain amount of flexibility, but the proposed system is intended to encourage departments to define many, equally rigorous, paths to tenure and to promotion to full professor. It accomplishes this through a number of mechanisms:

- 1) The possible inclusion of a category for professional practice for those disciplines that are most closely linked to a profession.
- 2) A broadening of the definition of "research" to include a wider range of scholarship and alternative ways of defining peer review.
- 3) A reconceptualization of teaching as a scholarly activity.
- 4) A reexamination of service to more clearly and precisely include the various ways in which faculty make valued contributions inside and outside the institution.
- 5) The creation of the Faculty Responsibility Statement (FRS) as a means to allow different faculty, even within the same department, to strike somewhat different balances between these elements of faculty work at different stages in their careers.

Some departments may design their new criteria to be very similar to their existing criteria, but others should be able to more nearly match their formal criteria to the real contributions their faculty can best make to the institution. Put another way, departments are expected to be able to employ the new system to better capitalize on the different strengths of different disciplines and different individual faculty members.

Q: Will the new approach diminish standards for tenure and promotion? Will UCCS' reputation suffer? Will institutional and program accreditations be affected? Will it become more difficult for our faculty to maintain their mobility?

A: Leaving aside the question of how an institutional reputation is achieved or measured, there is nothing inherently less rigorous about the proposed system. It may be true, for example, that some individual faculty will produce somewhat less scholarship than is currently the case as the minimum acceptable level to achieve tenure, but it is equally likely that other faculty will produce more scholarship than they otherwise might have. So, even if institutional reputation depends primarily on scholarly productivity, since there is no necessary connection between adopting the new system and overall faculty scholarship productivity, there is likewise no clear reason to expect a decline in reputation.

Since each department will be setting its criteria, there is no reason at all that there should be any impact upon accreditation at the program level so long as the department writes its criteria in compliance with its accreditation standards. Likewise, institutional accreditation is tied explicitly to institutional mission, so as long as the criteria reflect UCCS' mission, the standards will be in congruence with accreditation.

To the extent that it becomes true that individual faculty may, in fact, achieve tenure with somewhat lower scholarship productivity (or with productivity not as easily translatable into the job market), there is some potential for eroding mobility, at least with regard to more research-focused institutions. Individual faculty need to be aware of this as they negotiate the FRS, which means that strong mentoring is even more essential than it otherwise might have been.

Q: What will the effect be on the relative weights of teaching, research and service in the tenure decision? In actual workloads? Will some faculty end up performing little or no scholarship (or little or no teaching)? Will allowing different distributions of workload across teaching and scholarship lead to a two-tier tenure system? How will faculty who emphasize teaching be different from full-time non-tenure track faculty (instructors)?

A: The Report recommends minimum weights in teaching (30% pre-tenure, 20% post-tenure) and scholarship (40% pre-tenure, 20% post-tenure). Differentiated workloads already exist, at least for tenured faculty, so the potential for eliminating teaching or scholarship from an individual faculty member's workload may potentially be lessened, not increased (at least for associate professors). In effect, the real potential is to bring tenure and promotion into greater alignment with both merit review and actual workloads. As for a two-tier tenure system, that will depend on the institutional culture the campus creates. UCCS has historically said it values teaching and scholarship equally, as well as the synergy between the two. If this is true, then there is no reason that a tenured faculty member who emphasizes one more than the other should be a "second-class citizen" in the faculty. The discussions we've had of the nature of faculty work strongly suggest that the optimal balance between teaching, scholarship and service varies across an individual faculty member's career. The hope is that allowing a greater degree of that flexibility to be exercised at earlier stages in a person's career will have the overall effect of enriching the campus.

The minimum weights required for scholarship for tenured and tenure-track faculty also mean that there will continue to be a clear distinction between tenure-track and non-tenure track faculty. Many instructors engage in activities that might qualify as scholarship, but we are only allowed to evaluate and reward them on their teaching and service contributions.

Q: How can the campus be sure that some departments won't adopt criteria that are insufficiently rigorous?

A: Deans and the provost would have a serious responsibility to review and approve primary unit criteria, just as they do now. In some cases, program accreditation serves as an independent way of assuring rigorous standards for faculty.

Q: How will this affect the annual merit evaluation? Won't some faculty be disadvantaged in the merit review process if they pursue a different path to tenure?

A: The regents have decided to continue to treat RPT and annual merit reviews as completely separate processes. However, the adoption of the FRS system should make creating differentiated workloads for merit review and professional plans for post-tenure review much more straightforward, as well as better aligned with the RPT process. Given that differentiated workloads and professional plans already exist in policy and practice, there is no reason any faculty should be disadvantaged in merit review or post-tenure review by the adoption of the report.

Q: How will the FRS for each faculty member get defined? What might it look like? How will departments insure that all the work that needs to get done is accomplished? What if a faculty member's FRS needs to be changed?

A: Negotiating the FRS will likely be the biggest change for most departments. Department chairs will need to think through the matchup between each faculty member's strengths and the department's needs. The greatest challenge will probably occur if a large majority of faculty in a department all want to emphasize one area over the others (e.g., all want to reduce their teaching load and have more emphasis on scholarship). Colleges will need to set guidelines for *average* teaching loads and the circumstances that will allow a chair to negotiate a lower teaching load, as well as norms for the tradeoffs between the weight attached to teaching, scholarship and service. As a practical matter, a particular faculty member will probably need to make the case for deviations from departmental norms in each area. The FRS will not automatically be re-negotiated every year, but it is subject to change by mutual agreement at any time.

Q: What does "alternative ways of defining peer review" mean? How does broadening the definition of peer review make UCCS a better institution? What if a department feels it is better to stick with a narrower definition?

A: Traditional peer review is based on fellow scholars evaluating the “quality” of a manuscript or other product, often without knowledge of the author’s identity. Non-traditional external review would take place when someone (a user or observer of some form of scholarship) is able to offer an evaluation of the usefulness and rigor of the work. For example, a non-traditional review might result from asking a faculty member at another institution who engages in similar work to comment on the quality of a technical report submitted to a public agency. The non-generalizability of the results may inherently limit the possibility of publishing (and thus obtaining traditional peer review for) this piece of applied scholarship, but it is nevertheless original, rigorous and substantively important. The non-traditional peer review allows that claim to be validated.

Traditional peer review is specifically designed to maximize objectivity and high standard-setting, but we know that it is far from perfect. More importantly, because it is triggered by publishability or grant opportunities, its availability is systematically biased toward certain forms of scholarship. A department that believes in the value of multiple forms of scholarship, some of which may not necessarily generate traditional peer-review, will need to seek out alternative ways to validate the quality of that scholarship. It should be noted that some UCCS departments already include language in their criteria to provide guidance on the evaluation of the quality of scholarship that does not generate naturally-occurring peer review. A department that believes that the important forms of scholarship that apply to that discipline are all well-served by traditional forms of peer-review will not need to broaden the definition.

Q: What does a “wider range of scholarship” mean? Why would a department desire to adopt a broader definition of scholarship, and will departments be required to do so?

The RTP Task Force Report defined the possible categories of scholarship this way:

Scholarship of Discovery – this is what most now view as basic research.

Scholarship of Integration – this is where meaning is given to facts across disciplines in the larger context. It may mean working with non-specialists in collaboration or consultation.

Scholarship of Application – this is where we use our expertise in our special fields of knowledge and apply that expertise to real-world problems.

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning – this is the rigorous study of teaching and learning that evolves into the sharing of pedagogical research.

Scholarship of Creative Works – this is the artistry that creates new insights and interpretations.

Some departments at UCCS already include more than one of these categories (sometimes under different names) in their criteria under research now. Even under the new system, few departments will end up adopting all of them into their scholarship criteria. However, the proposed system does encourage departments to be more inclusive and to reward all the ways in which faculty make contributions through their scholarship. Under the current system, most departments have chosen to construe “research” much more narrowly, and it is likely that some will continue to be more restrictive than others.

Q: How will this new approach impact the valuing of service, particularly to the community, in faculty governance and in faculty administrative roles (such as department chair)?

A: In part due to the regental requirement of “excellence in either teaching or research” (but not in service), and in part due to the predilections of many faculty, the current system is often thought not to reward service appropriately. There appears to be a near-consensus that pre-tenure faculty should not engage in service to the detriment of their development in teaching and scholarship, but a much broader range of opinion about the role service should play post-tenure. Adoption of the proposed system should, at the very least, provoke a serious discussion in each department about the appropriate role and weight of service at different points in a faculty member’s career. Whether the Task Force Report is adopted or not, departments are being asked to look at the roles of community service, service in faculty governance and administrative service in RPT decisions.

Q. Will college and campus levels of review defer to departmental criteria? Will faculty from departments that choose to create a more flexible system be disadvantaged at those “higher” levels of review?

A: Dean’s Review and Vice Chancellor’s Review committees are currently, and will continue to be, required to base their recommendations on the department’s criteria. Their job is not to approve or disapprove of the criteria, but to evaluate whether those criteria have been fairly and rigorously applied in each case. Considerations along the lines of, “we wouldn’t grant this person tenure in my department” are not an appropriate part of the discussion. Of course, the clearer the department’s standards are, the less room there is for interpretation in making this judgment, but that is equally true under the current system as it would be under the proposed system. Whether the task force report is adopted or not, a department will be well-served to use the required revision of primary unit criteria to make as clear as possible to pre-tenure faculty and to later stages in the review process what its standards for tenure are.

Q. What happens to pre-tenure faculty who were hired under the “old” criteria?

A: To some extent this question applies whether the task force report is adopted or not, since all departments are required to revise their criteria this year. Formally, the decision has been made that everyone who has already completed comprehensive review will be able to come up for tenure under the existing criteria. For those who have not yet had their comprehensive review, the FRS under the new criteria could almost certainly be written to allow them to be essentially held to the same expectations they would have been. Of course, some faculty in the latter situation may very well prefer to take advantage of the additional flexibility afforded under the new criteria.

Q: How will adoption of the new system affect promotion to full professor?

A: The new system is intended to increase the flexibility of faculty in advancing their careers and to more consistently reward all of the contributions faculty make. In general, the amount of flexibility that makes sense at the stage of promotion to full professor is probably greater than at the time of tenure and promotion to associate. That said, the current system has more flexibility than many departments have written into their existing criteria due a change in regent policy a few years ago. Regardless of which system we go forward under, departments will have the opportunity as they write their new criteria to support the promotion to full professor of faculty with very different distributions of their contributions to campus. Adopting the new system should reinforce this possibility, but doesn't require departments to embody it in their individual criteria.