

March 12, 2014

Dear Colleagues:

I have just completed my first faculty promotion and tenure cycle as Provost. I reviewed the dossiers of almost four dozen candidates for promotion and tenure. Our decisions on the academic advancement of faculty are among the most important we make. In addition to shaping our future as a leading academic institution, the process provides an opportunity to review the outstanding accomplishments of our faculty in scholarship, teaching, and service. I was extremely impressed with the many achievements of our faculty and I am very proud to be leading academic affairs on our campus.

Because I know that some members of our faculty are now preparing for their promotion and tenure reviews next year, to help you best prepare I want to explain how I gauge excellence in each of the three areas—scholarship, teaching and service—in which candidates for promotion and tenure are assessed.

My starting point, of course, is the University promotion and tenure policy, which is set forth in Section 4 of the Faculty Handbook. At every level of the process, including the level of Provost's review, the University is guided by standards of excellence and fairness captured in this passage from the Handbook:

The ultimate objectives of promotion policies at the University of Delaware are faculty excellence and procedural fairness. In order to preserve and enhance its reputation as an institution of higher education, the University must establish and maintain high standards of teaching, scholarly and artistic activity, and service. At the same time, it must treat each faculty member with decency and respect.

It promotes transparency and fairness for me to describe the principles I will apply to my assessment of promotion and tenure dossiers. The section in the Handbook titled "Provost's Review of Promotions" (Section 4.4.7) is relatively short. This letter reflects my effort to explain how I intend to determine whether performance in scholarship, teaching and service merits promotion and/or tenure.

The Faculty Handbook states that faculty should strive for excellence in all three areas of faculty performance: scholarship/creative activity, teaching, and service. How these three areas are weighed varies for tenure and tenure-track faculty on the one hand and continuing non-tenure-track faculty on the other, given the fact that the workload of faculty members in the latter category may be limited to a particular area.

Scholarship/Research/Creative Activity/Service:

Typical methods to determine the significance of scholarship include the number of citations attributed to various articles or other published works by the candidate; the number of licenses that derive from a patent; successful competition for major grants, fellowships, or prestigious awards; the quality (not just quantity) of peer-reviewed publications; and, in appropriate cases, performance venues. Measures of the impact of one's scholarship will vary in different disciplines. It is incumbent on the individual candidate to make the case for how consequential one's work is, such as in the candidate's statement.

The Handbook makes clear in Section 4.4.9 that "peer evaluations are always required for promotion." Although the number may vary by rank and department or division, "every dossier must include outside peer reviews solicited by the departmental committee and written by individuals with established reputations in the candidate's field."

For all faculty members, it is imperative that there be objective peer review by external reviewers who are in a position to judge the impact and the importance of the candidate's work. External reviewers should be asked to judge the impact and significance of the candidate's work. External letters should come from accomplished, top scholars in the candidate's field.

Teaching

The Handbook commands in Section 4.4.1 that “a major goal of any educational institution is to encourage and to demonstrate excellence in teaching.” I expect the dossier to contain a thorough assessment of the quality of the candidate’s teaching. This documentation should not be limited to student evaluations or other testimonials, although those can provide important information. I also expect to see the faculty member’s teaching objectives, evidence of assessment of these objectives, documented efforts to meet the needs of diverse student learners, and evidence of a continuous effort both to make appropriate refinements in approaches to teaching and to demonstrate objectively that teaching skills are evolving and improving.

For continuing non-tenure-track faculty who are appointed primarily for teaching, I expect to see an objective and thorough assessment of the effectiveness of the faculty member’s work by those in a position to make such a judgment.

If the candidate’s department or field of study has a graduate program, I expect to see evidence of support for the program, such as in teaching graduate courses, advising master’s and doctoral student to completion, and, where appropriate, seeking external support for graduate students.

Service

Service is an “integral part of the University’s mission and must not be neglected on the ground that scholarship and teaching have higher priority” (Faculty Handbook, Section 4.4.2). The expectations for service, of course, differ for faculty at different ranks, but strong performance as a citizen of the University, a contributor to one’s profession, and active membership in the University community are all important indicators of excellence in service. For faculty whose primary appointment is for service, I expect to see an objective and thorough assessment of the effectiveness of the faculty member’s work—as judged both by colleagues and by those in a position to make such an objective and thorough assessment of the impact of this work.

To repeat the central tenet of this letter, the University of Delaware takes the promotion and tenure of its faculty with utmost seriousness of purpose. Like all first-tier universities in the United States, we have an extended, multi-level process for reviewing dossiers. We are explicit about the standards we expect candidates for promotion to meet. We utilize procedures that stress fairness and respect. We expect candidates to assemble strong dossiers. We review dossiers carefully. I have been very impressed by the care at all levels the University has taken to ensure that applications for promotion and tenure receive close attention and judicious consideration. I look forward to continuing this crucial work next year and in the years that follow.

Sincerely,



Domenico Grasso
Provost