POST-TENURE REVIEW
APPLICATIONS TO ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

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Abstract

This paper attempts to take a broad look at post-tenure review by examining why institutions are doing post-tenure review, looking at some different approaches for such reviews and suggesting some different elements of the review process. It is hoped that in doing so, institutions currently doing post-tenure reviews might improve their processes and those who are planning on instituting post-tenure review would have the basic background necessary to develop an appropriate process.

Introduction

Weber State University has recently mandated post-tenure review for all tenured faculty. We in the College of Applied Science and Technology have been struggling with the issue of how to do these reviews such that they will serve the best interests of both the faculty and the institution. The purpose of this paper is to examine some of the whys and wherefores of post-tenure review especially as it might relate to engineering technology faculty. This in turn might provide ways for programs to improve their review processes or provide and approach for starting a post-tenure review process. If an institution is going to do post-tenure review, one of the major concerns is always how to make certain that the process provides the maximum benefit for the least expenditure of time and effort on the part of both the reviewer and the person being reviewed. If an institution is just starting a post-tenure review process, particularly if it is one where only a portion of the faculty get reviewed each year, it may take several years before it can be determined if the process is achieving the desired goals. If modifications are made to the process, it may take several more years to see if such modifications are effective.

Rationale

There are a number of reasons colleges and universities are now doing post-tenure review. In general, these reasons fall into two main categories; either they were mandated to do so by some external agency or they choose to do so themselves and hence it was an internal mandate. At Weber State, we have been required to do post-tenure review by our accrediting agency, the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges. In their Accreditation Handbook, one of the requirements for accreditation as stated in their Policy on Faculty Evaluation "…..is that every faculty member at every institution be subject to some type of substantive performance evaluation and review at least every third year." The interpretation of this is clearly taken to mean the inclusion of some kind of formal review mechanism even after a faculty member receives tenure.

In addition to accrediting agencies, there has been a push for post-tenure review from a number of quarters typically based upon the "accountability" catchword. Groups calling for accountability

and as a consequence post-tenure review include Boards of Regents or other types of governing boards, legislatures and the public. Further, court cases which have declared that post-tenure review is not a threat to the tenure system have buttressed the case for post-tenure review.

The public has started to demand post-tenure review because they see tenure as a mechanism for providing life-time employment without the attendant requirement for some type of formal review once tenure has been achieved. They tend not to see it as an approach for protecting academic freedom but rather as a means to keep unproductive faculty employed. While certainly not a panacea, a well thought out and appropriately administered post-tenure review program can help ameliorate these kinds of concerns.

Particularly in engineering technology, a case could be made for post-tenure review just in view of the rapid changes in technology. Thus such a review might be considered necessary just to help faculty stay current with these changes. As an extreme example, just because someone is knowledgeable about vacuum tubes and teaches about vacuum tubes very well, does not mean that person is making a valuable contribution to his or her program.   Also in engineering technology, the faculty all come out of industrial backgrounds and have had industry experience. Ongoing periodic reviews are the industrial norm, and are typically done annually. Certainly periodic reviews should not be something new to engineering technology faculty.

One final note regarding rationale. A very reasonable argument can be made that the faculty are the heart and soul of the educational enterprise. Any mechanism, including post-tenure review, which helps them to continue to be productive and motivated throughout their careers should be a basic part of institutional policy and practice.

Approaches

Broadly speaking, all employee reviews including those of tenured faculty, fall into two main categories, summative and formative and may contain elements of both. Summative reviews are for the purposes of some kind of personnel decision including such things as promotion, pay raises, or tenure. Such reviews may also result in some type of recommendation for remediation which if not followed through on, may eventually lead to termination. Formative reviews on the other hand, are for the purposes of faculty development. Part of the development process may include goal setting and/or the review of goals which were established in a previous review. They may also be a mechanism by which resources are allocated to faculty in order for them to achieve these goals.

Licata and Morreale[1] in their paper on post-tenure review identify five different approaches to post-tenure review. While these may appear to be separate and distinct, in practice they may be combined in a number of different ways to achieve a variety of purposes. These are annual reviews, periodic/consequential reviews, triggered/consequential reviews, formative departmental reviews and formative individual reviews. Let's briefly examine each of these.

Annual reviews are typically summative in nature and are done, as the name implies, on an annual basis. They are often done for the purposes of determining any pay raises for the coming year. Because they occur so frequently relative to the length of time required to fully evaluate faculty

development projects, they are of questionable value for any kind of formative evaluation. In addition, the evidence elements needed for a thorough evaluation are usually missing and as a result, these evaluations tend to be fairly perfunctory. They do have the advantage however of alerting both the faculty member and the administration to any potential problems annually rather than waiting for a formal review several years into the future.

The periodic/consequential review is one in which all tenured faculty are reviewed on a periodic basis, typically every three to five years. As the name implies, poor performance can result in specific consequences with formal sanctions occurring if performance does not improve after a certain period of time. However, with this review process there can also be some formative elements such as the development of a professional growth and development plan. Because sanctions are permitted, there is usually an appeals process available. Sometimes the periodic review is combined with annual reviews and is frequently done by a peer review committee and/or administration.

The triggered/consequential review is done only of selected faculty members and is usually done as the result of unsatisfactory performance as indicated by some other review, frequently an annual review. Because it is consequential, the potential sanctions are usually made clear and again, an appeals process is available. The features are almost the same as for the periodic/consequential review but frequently this type of review is seen as more palatable to faculty as only the substandard performers get reviewed. On the other hand, it might be argued that it does not provide an opportunity for the other faculty to be involved in any kind of formal development process nor does it support the notion of continuous improvement.

The formative departmental reviews puts an emphasis on establishing and periodically revising a professional development plan which attempts to match the needs of the department with the career interests of the individual. This review, since it is departmental, is done by the faculty member's immediate supervisor, usually his department chair. The review requires that the department or program have clearly defined goals which then allows the reviewer a basis upon which to judge how well the faculty member's development plan matches these goals.

Finally, the formative individual plan involves a periodic review of all tenured faculty and is a review intended to develop the individual and is not intended to assess competence. It usually involves peer review and the formulation and review of an individual development plan. In addition, institutional support is made available to assist in the faculty member's development.

It can be seen that post-tenure review may contain elements from each of these. Any final plan will be particular to a given institution and be dependent upon factors and conditions present in that institution. These would include such things as institutional size, the size of the individual departments, requirements from external agencies, bargaining agreements and others.

Guidelines and Caveats
In putting together or revising a post-tenure review process, several things need to be kept in mind. First, the plan needs to be developed with both faculty and administrative input. Any plan just developed by the administration will typically be viewed negatively by the faculty and any plan just developed by the faculty could be seen by the public as a fox guarding the hen house situation.

In addition, a collaborative effort preserves the long standing tradition of shared governance in higher education in this country.

The plan should have a clearly articulated purpose and specifically defined consequences. In the authors view, it needs to have both a formative purpose and a summative purpose. The formative aspect should include an ability to trigger appropriate mechanisms to provide resources[2] for faculty development and to help those who are not performing as they should. The summative aspect should have the capability to trigger the mechanism used to remove those who continue to be non-performers. Thus there also needs to be included in the process the preservation of faculty due process rights.

Any plan should provide useful information to both the faculty member and the institution. Thus multiple methods of data gathering should be used including student evaluations, peer review and self-reports. While some might argue that such comprehensive data gathering would consume too much time and take too much effort, a counter argument could easily be made that the faculty are the front line of the educational enterprise and this process is one designed to help them improve. In addition, we are talking about a review which only occurs every three to five years.

Finally, the plan should give latitude to the individual units regarding criteria and standards and allow for a degree of flexibility to match the needs of the unit and of the faculty member. Again there needs to be some measure of institutional support available to help faculty develop which could include money for travel, workshops, sabbaticals, specialized equipment and so on. Faculty development is a two way street and there needs to be a willingness on both the part of the faculty member and the institution to work together towards a common goal.

Current Practices

Recently an informal survey of post-tenure review practices was conducted by the author using the ETD list serve. There were a total of 68 responses received and since the survey was rather unscientific, no attempt was made to remove responses from the same institution. Also not everyone answered every question so the responses won't add together to get the totals shown. Of those who responded, there were 33 who said they offered AAS degrees in Engineering Technology, 52 who offered BS degrees in Engineering Technology and 26 who offered BS degrees in Engineering. Of these, 47 are currently doing some form of post-tenure review and 17 are not although 5 plan to institute some form of post-tenure review within the next three years. It is clear from this sample that post-tenure review is here whether we want it or not.

Other data from the survey indicate that the majority of most institutions do either annual reviews or do them every five years. Other institutions have triggered reviews based upon such things as application for promotion or a previous negative review. 17 schools reported they use the review for salary setting, 22 use it for goal setting, 35 for faculty development and 19 as a possible review for dismissal. It was reported that the department chair or head conducts the review in 24 schools, a dean or division director does it in 11 schools and 22 schools report that the review is done by a faculty committee or some other combination of reviewers. In 37 institutions the review results go into the faculty member's permanent file and in 3 institutions they do not.

14 institutions reported that they felt the reviews had been effective in achieving the goals listed above while 17 reported that they did not feel the reviews were effective. The comments, which are too numerous to list here, seemed to fall into three main categories. One group were those who felt the reviews were effective, particularly in helping faculty with their professional development. The second group reported that they had recently instituted post-tenure review and therefore did not feel they had enough experience to determine whether or not it was effective. A third group felt the reviews were mostly busywork and were being done to meet some external mandate and therefore not actually providing a benefit to either the faculty or the institution.

Conclusion

This author feels very strongly in the benefits of post-tenure review. He has seen it work to both help faculty in goal setting and with their personal development as well as to trigger the mechanism to remove a non-performer. However, to be effective any form of post-tenure review needs to be done in a manner which will ensure that both the faculty member and institution benefit. This requires that the process meet several criteria. The first is that there be adequate input from both the faculty and the administration on how the review is to be conducted and how the results are to be used. Important in the review process is that it not be too time consuming on the part of the participants while still using multiple sources of data. The process has to be an open one with safeguards for both the faculty member and the institution. In addition, the process needs to be flexible such that it meets the needs of the individual organizational units. Finally, there has to be both the actual provision of support for faculty development and the possibility of dismissal for those who do not perform after an adequate probationary period. With these criteria, post-tenure review can be an effective mechanism for faculty vitality and development.

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