

AC 1998-447: Post Tenure Review Implementation at Arizona State University

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ABSTRACT

Arizona State University is one of the first universities to implement a post-tenure-review process for all tenured faculty members in accordance with Arizona Board of Regents (ABOR) guidelines. The purpose of the post-tenure-review process is to provide accountability through emphasis on sustained high quality performance and opportunities for faculty development, and to provide additional accountability to the university community, to the public, and to the ABOR. This article describes the policies and procedures that are approved and presently being implemented at Arizona State University.

Introduction

Arizona State University is one of the three universities under the ABOR that are required to implement a post-tenure-review process for all tenured faculty members in accordance with guidelines. The purpose of the post-tenure-review process is to provide accountability through emphasis on sustained high quality performance and opportunities for faculty development, and to provide additional accountability to the university community, to the public, and to the ABOR. This article describes the policies and procedures that are being implemented at Arizona State University.

The Situation

Legislators and university governing board members have begun to seek ways to provide greater access to higher education with improved efficiency and cost to the tax-paying public. Conventional wisdom has it that faculty members at research universities are significantly underutilized in teaching and focus much too heavily on research. Moreover, teaching is commonly defined as time spent in the classroom involved in the traditional lecture format. The solution generally prescribed to fix this perceived problem, by legislatures and governing boards is to redirect faculty effort.

Research universities have made a major commitment to the execution of fundamental research. Faculty release-time is used as a major incentive to gain the faculty's commitment to the research effort. Without the ability to release faculty from a part of their teaching load, the research agenda is significantly encumbered, if not eliminated. As the issues are debated around the country, it becomes more evident that public decision-makers are poorly informed about the actual nature of faculty responsibilities and workload.

Arizona is not the only venue for this struggle. Alternatives to tenure have been the focus of a protracted struggle at the University of Minnesota among others. The pro and con arguments

have triggered anger on both sides. Some faculty members have even used the issue to enhance their research credentials by providing fresh research data and proposed solutions for both sides. In general, the debate is leading to the development of broad-based knowledge of the elements of academic life and the faculty's role in it.

Through the years, the level of understanding of faculty life appears to have decreased with increased faculty research involvement. Hence, universities, especially research universities, become very concerned when legislators and governing board members seek to minutely control the mix of faculty responsibilities and activities. Yet, because of the lack of reasonable understanding of the university's research agenda, universities have great difficulty in providing a clear layperson's explanation or defense of faculty workloads with respect to the research paradigm.

In early 1996, the university faculty load debate became heated in Arizona. First, there were rumblings in the legislative session. There were statements of concern over the number of ranked faculty teaching lower division courses. Isolated examples of faculty misconduct were elevated to the level of standard behavior. Many statements were made that would appear to portend a legislative takeover of day to day management of the university system. The chorus was joined by members of the ABOR. As usual, the talk focused first on the removal of faculty tenure. The follow-up studies that were done focused on teaching load, with attention to the statistics on tenured and tenure-track faculty participation in "teaching." In this context, "teaching" was defined as information delivery while standing before a class. Special emphasis was placed on assessing the degree to which freshman classes were taught by resident faculty.

Toward A Reasoned Solution

The Arizona Faculty Council, the joint faculty governance organization for the three Arizona Universities, entered the discussions. Their influence caused the board to seek outside expertise and advise before making critical decisions in this area. The Faculty Senates of each of the three universities worked with their campus faculties through the Spring and Summer Sessions of 1996, seeking consensus on a proposed solution.

At the November 1996 ABOR meeting, the Arizona Faculty Council presented a proposal that recommended the common elements to be included in a post-tenure-review process. The resulting document is now referred to as the Common Elements Document. It set forth seven "Common Elements" that form the basis for a post-tenure-review process to be developed at the three universities. The Arizona Faculty Council's rationale as documented by the Common Elements, can be stated in terms of goals and processes.

One of the goals of post-tenure-review is to create an institutional climate that motivates faculty to continuously improve and maintain high levels of performance. The other goal is to provide a timely mechanism by which to deal with those faculty whose performance continues to fall below institutional expectations. Therefore, the success of this policy will be evidenced by ongoing improvements in faculty performance, both individual and collectively. Success requires consistent policy implementation, rigorous data collection and documentation of results, and careful assessment.

The Arizona Board of Regents, meeting in regular session in February 1997, adopted a new policy amending existing ABOR Policy Section B 6-201, Conditions of Faculty Service. Section H - Post-Tenure-Review, contains the newly created policy, which closely follows the “Common Elements”. The new policy has been assessed and implementation is underway at each of the three Arizona universities.

Each university was given the latitude to design and implement a post-tenure-review process for all tenured faculty members under its administrative control, in accordance with ABOR approved policy. The post-tenure-review process at each university shall include essential elements largely drawn from the “Common Elements” document.

Performance Review

The ABOR policy requires an *annual performance review* for all tenured faculty members. It is mandated that it shall be conducted at the unit level, by unit heads and/or peer committees. The evaluations must incorporate input from students, administrators, recent alumni and community representatives. Each faculty member’s performance shall be evaluated based upon written expectations agreed to in advance, between the faculty member and the unit head. The elements of the agreement must be adherent to the performance standards developed by the academic unit.

Each academic unit will execute *academic program reviews* that cover the contribution of faculty members to program execution. The unit level review processes will be subjected to periodic *Dean’s Level Audit* to assure fidelity to the prescribed process.

Addressing Unsatisfactory Performance

A faculty member who is determined to be performing at an unsatisfactory level shall be required to participate in a personal *performance improvement process*. Each faculty member found to be performing unsatisfactorily is required to develop and implement a plan designed to improve his or her performance. The plan, created at the unit level, with the unit head must include specific goals, timelines and benchmarks associated with the area(s) or weakness that will be used to measure and follow improvement progress. Failure to achieve the goals prescribed in the performance improvement plan in a timely manner shall result in a recommendation for dismissal. A faculty member who is recommended for dismissal because of the post-tenure review process has an opportunity to challenge the recommendation as prescribed by ABOR policy, under hearing procedures for faculty.

Elements of Implementation

Program and faculty member assessments have been a focus of the Arizona Board of Regents. Hence, some effort has gone into implementing the new post-tenure-review program in a manner, that would not eliminating or confounding the existing processes. These existing assessment processes include Annual Performance Evaluation and periodic Academic Program Review. Evaluation of every faculty member’s individual performance is conducted by the

academic unit head on an annual basis. The substance of the assessment program has been and will continue to be based on the academic triad of teaching, research and service.

This motivating factors for the assessment program have been focused on merit pay raises, promotion and tenure determination for all tenured and tenure-track faculty members. Program assessment is designed to answer questions about the appropriateness, currency, and contribution of the faculty and program of study. It has been conducted by the Dean with a panel of qualified persons including outside experts and recent alumni every five to seven years.

Impact of Post-Tenure-Review

The implementation of post-tenure-review sets the stage for several possible outcomes for tenured faculty members. Satisfactory performance in all areas of evaluation allows the faculty member to remain in the regular evaluation process. Then the impact is only on positioning each faculty member for the possibility of a merit-pay-raise. If unsatisfactory performance exists in only one of the three primary areas of faculty activity, a faculty development plan is triggered for that faculty member, at the unit level.

An overall performance assessment outcome of unsatisfactory generally results, from judgements of unsatisfactory performance in at least two of the three performance areas. A judgement of *overall unsatisfactory performance* is deemed unacceptable. This is based on the assigned emphasis associated with the goal-based agreement and the extent of the deficiency identified. However, because of the impact of the individual assignment agreement, workload proportions may be heavily skewed. This may place major emphasis on a single performance area. Therefore, a rating of overall unsatisfactory performance may be triggered when a faculty member has a performance rating of unsatisfactory in a single area that is associated with a high workload factor. The campus Chief Academic Officer shall ensure that every unit develops a clear definition of unsatisfactory performance that is appropriate to the mission of that particular unit and consistent with the mission of the university. This is being accomplished through written criteria at each academic level department, college and University.

An overall unsatisfactory rating leads to a Performance Improvement Plan that must be supervised at the college level. Upon a faculty member's failure to successfully complete the Performance Improvement Plan, the Dean is required to initiate the tenure withdrawal process.

Response of Engineering Technology Units

The range of response to this new mandate has been quite broad throughout the university community. Within the College of Technology and Applied Sciences, the response is still in its formative stage. However, several constructs have been established. The basic post-tenure-review procedural approach is to follow carefully the established ABOR policy. To express the character and values of Engineering Technology Education and technology education in general, we use a hierarchy that is more pragmatic. The assessment focus is still based on the traditional academic triad. However, because of the nature of the mission of Engineering Technology Education, our pragmatism focuses on teaching (organizing and transmitting knowledge) as the basic academic function for the faculty. We place research (knowledge dissemination,

generation, re-conceptualization, manipulation, and technical application), and service (profession efforts to serve the university, the profession and society) as second and third legs of the triad. Each faculty member is expected to demonstrate sustained productivity in teaching and at least one of the other area of the academic triad. It is desirable that each faculty member demonstrates sustained and note-worthy performance in each of the three areas.

Peer assessment processes are the foundation of professional assessment and make up a major part of initial tenure decision-making. Therefore, peer assessment should be a major influence on post-tenure-review as well. Hence, engineering technology units should employ strong peer assessment processes to buffer both the authority of and the burden on the unit head. Peer processes work best when they are applied within the peer group closest to the discipline. Therefore, engineering technology academic unit-level personnel committees are ideal places for rigorous peer review. Emphasis on peer review at the college level is conducted to provide for lower unit level accountability and to minimize personality and bias encroachment into the processes. It is also an opportunity to protect college-level values that transcend departmental boundaries.

Performance measures used for the post-tenure-review process are essentially the same as those used in initial tenure and promotion reviews. However, the measures that are emphasized will vary on an individual basis due to the performance agreements developed with each faculty member. The process allows for significant differences in workload emphasis, among faculty members within an academic unit. This difference is possible because of the desires, interests, and expertise that are emphasized in the individual faculty member's performance agreement developed with the unit head.

The measurement process is crucial to the execution of the intent and policy of ABOR. The factors involved in the assessment process are usually not concrete. They rely on accurate reporting, collection and some interpretation. Often, the factors defy the use of quantifying conversions. Hence, judgements made based on degree of goal achievement and the quality of performance reported by others play a significant role in outcome determination. To overcome some of the inherent uncertainty caused by these imperfect measures, performance levels are a desirable component of the faculty performance agreement.

Teaching is the only element of the academic triad that is the unique province of the faculty. Teaching is delivered in the context of the curriculum and the program of study that are guided by the faculty. Therefore, the faculty member is hired to teach as a matter of primary function. It is every faculty member's obligation to execute the teaching function with effectiveness. Some of the measures that may be used to assess teaching are:

- Course portfolios
- New course development
- Course material development
- Published papers and textbooks
- Student Evaluation
- Successful mentoring of students

The mission of academic units associated with engineering may have reduced emphasis on research. However, we value activities that focus efforts to participate in new knowledge generation, purposeful manipulation and re-conception of knowledge for technical application and dissemination. Any or all of these are high level candidates for technology faculty workload profiles. Measures of performance in this arena include:

- Peer-review publications
- Industry based Technical project reports
- Successful proposal for funded projects
- Development of special research laboratories
- Special recognition for a research accomplishment
- Student participation in recognized research activities

Based on the natural service opportunities associated with every faculty position, some level of service activity is expected. Faculty members are hired and tenured because of their professional expertise and accomplishment. Therefore, the basis for all faculty services must be their professional status. However, service to the public in the context of professional expertise or as a matter of university assignment can be a component of their service to the university. The following are some of the many reasonable measures of service performance.

- Administer university processes
- Contributions to student matriculation
- Mentoring student professional groups
- Measurable services professional
- Measurable use of expertise and/or influence to improve the community or society

The intent of these measures when applied in the context of the ABOR policy on post-tenure-review, that the goal of continuous accountability and continuous improvement of tenured faculty performance is attainable.

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