

## FACULTY PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

### ***GUIDELINES AND BEST PRACTICES***

DRAFT: Revised September 29, 2009

The *Guidelines and Best Practices* are meant to ensure a high level of continuity and uniformity in the deliberations and actions of the faculty personnel committee. These guidelines interpret and complement the *Faculty Handbook*, but do not supersede it; the *Faculty Handbook* remains the sole authoritative source of information regarding promotion and tenure. Based on these guidelines future committees will:

- follow the same practical procedures in faculty reviews.
- interpret the pertinent sections of the *Faculty Handbook* in a consistent way.
- be aware of various important issues not discussed in the *Faculty Handbook*.

These guidelines constitute a “living document,” posted in the category of *Advices and Queries*. We envision this document to be fine-tuned by subsequent personnel committees, in consultation with faculty council, and edited when necessary to reflect any changes to our faculty handbook that would affect the review process or the responsibilities of the Personnel Committee.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

ROLE OF THE ACADEMIC DEAN
ROLE OF THE COMMITTEE CHAIR
ROLE OF THE COMMITTEE SECRETARY
ORIENTATION OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS
GATHERING REVIEW MATERIALS
PREPARING THE INITIAL REPORT
COMMITTEE PROCESS
PREPARING THE FINAL REPORT
RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF METHOD AND DATA
ISSUES REGARDING INTERVIEWS OF STUDENTS AND FACULTY COLLEAGUES
ISSUES REGARDING THE USE OF STUDENT TEACHING EVALUATIONS
FORMS FOR USE IN FACULTY REVIEWS
SPECIAL TENURE AND PROMOTION ARRANGEMENTS
IMPORTANT LITERATURE RELATED TO TENURE AND PROMOTION

## ROLE OF THE ACADEMIC DEAN

The role of the academic dean in collaboration with the committee chair is to ensure that the review process and deliberations are timely, fair, and conform to the faculty handbook. The dean also maintains an up-to-date schedule of reviews and notifies candidates when they are eligible.

Specific tasks are:

- Insure that each year's personnel committee is thoroughly oriented to their task, using "Guidelines and Best Practices".
- In the fall semester *prior* to the academic year of review, remind each reviewee's department chair and mentor, in written form, that the faculty member will be reviewed next year and ask them to fulfill their responsibilities as outlined in *Advices and Queries*.
- During the spring semester *prior* to the academic year of review, notify faculty members that they will soon be reviewed for tenure or promotion. In the case of promotion to full professor and, in certain circumstances (as outlined in the handbook) to the rank of associate, the individual may decide whether or not he or she would like to be considered in the relevant academic year.
- At the beginning of the fall semester, distribute the list of reviewees and reviewers to all faculty members through inside mail with a deadline for submitting comments for those to be reviewed during that semester. Two weeks later, a follow-up e-mail should be sent to all faculty with the submission deadline and a link to the form for faculty comments (peer evaluation form). In the spring semester, send out the list of remaining reviewees via inside mail and a follow-up e-mail to all faculty.
- Carefully consider with the committee any circumstances that may require recusal or represent a conflict of interest as outlined in the faculty handbook.
- Arrange for the college counsel to brief the committee at the beginning of the academic year about relevant legal considerations, including (but not limited to) confidentiality,

and proper disposal of sensitive documents. This can be done as part of the orientation of committee members described below.

- Maintain up-to-date copies of all letters of hire, appointment, and other agreements in each faculty member's personnel file.
- Maintain currency in the relevant academic literature related to the process of tenure and promotion especially as it relates to gender, ethnicity, age, and discipline.
- Understand the AAUP guidelines regarding tenure and promotion.

The academic dean is an ex-officio member of the faculty personnel committee with voice, but without vote. During meetings of the personnel committee the academic dean often serves as a valuable source of information, providing advice, historical background, and context. The personnel committee's decisions are passed on to the dean in the form of recommendations.

### **ROLE OF THE COMMITTEE CHAIR**

The committee chair and vice-chair are elected by the members of the personnel committee. Chair and vice-chair must hold the rank of full professor. The responsibilities of the chair include the following items:

- Preparation of the review schedule and the assignment of reviewers, in consultation with the academic dean and all members of the personnel committee.
- The chair personally contacts all reviewees at the beginning of each semester and informs them of the date of their review.
- Planning of an orientation session, together with the academic dean and the college's legal counsel (more information on this below).

- Checking that up-to-date versions of forms and templates are posted in the appropriate places on the College's website.

Invite all first-year faculty to a meeting at the end of the year to explain the review and tenure process from the committee's experiences.

- Checking that up-to-date versions of forms and templates are posted in the appropriate places on the College's website.
- Preparation and timely distribution of personnel committee meeting agendas.
- The chair leads committee meetings according to established parliamentary rules. It has been our custom to carefully consider each member's opinion and to take the time needed to achieve consensus, though this may not always be possible.
- The chair is available for consultation as questions arise in the preparation of a review.
- The chair may propose that a review should be continued: If, in the course of the discussion of the initial report, unforeseen important questions arise that cannot be answered satisfactorily from the available information, then the committee may ask the reviewer to gather pertinent additional information and to consult with the reviewee, before concluding the review at a later meeting. In such situations, the chair will inform the reviewee that the conclusion of the review has been postponed.
- The chair will contact reviewees in person or by telephone within twenty four hours of the committee reaching its decision, and communicate the committees' positive or negative recommendation.

#### **INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE COMMITTEE SECRETARY**

The minutes of personnel committee meetings are brief, listing only the members present and absent, who was reviewed for what, but no comments are included on the substance of the

committee deliberations. Minutes concerning other committee business (other than a faculty review), however, should be included and need not be overly brief. The minutes conclude by recording the personnel committee's final recommendation for the review. (A sample copy of committee meeting minutes is attached.) The minutes are kept on file in the academic dean's office.

### **ORIENTATION OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

The committee orientation is intended to improve consistency across all reviews. In preparation for your work on the personnel committee it is important that the members:

- Review copies of the pertinent sections of the current faculty handbook.
- Read and discuss the *Guidelines and Best Practices* documents, which can be found in the *Advices and Queries* section of the academic dean's website.
- Receive a packet of evaluation forms and sample memos for use in faculty reviews, plus a time-line and check-list, a report template, and a sample review report.
- Review the basic description of and charge to the faculty personnel committee in the faculty handbook. Read and discuss sections 1.4.3.6.1 and 2.1.3.1.
- Review the criteria for tenure and promotion, and the corresponding procedures, as delineated in the faculty handbook. Read and discuss sections 2.2.1, 2.2.2, and 2.2.3.
- Consider the recusal and conflict of interest policies described in the handbook. For this purpose, read and discuss sections 1.4.3.7 and 2.1.3.5.
- Learn about confidentiality requirements. Learn about what records to keep (for how long) and about what records to destroy (electronic and printed). Learn about issues involving electronic mail and voice mail. Learn about timelines and procedures for destruction of sensitive documents at the conclusion of a review.
- Learn about what types of questions to ask the reviewee (and all the other sources of information), and what types of questions to avoid.

- Review some of the important literature related to promotion and tenure. Summaries of and excerpts from important articles should be made available at this time from the Chair.

### **GATHERING REVIEW MATERIALS**

Once you, the reviewer, have been assigned a faculty candidate, contact the candidate personally and set a date for a first meeting. Three to four prior to this first meeting, remind the candidate to read all relevant sections of the faculty handbook, and inform the candidate that he or she will soon receive a letter (template provided) reminding him or her to provide the portfolio detailed in section 2.2.1.4 (a) of the faculty handbook. The letter can be sent as an email attachment.

Read the candidate's personnel file in the Provost's office. Of particular importance are the letter of appointment and previous review documents, especially the summary statements. The contents of the file may not be removed from the office and may not be photocopied, but handwritten notes may be taken.

Note that over the years, a number of documents have been produced by the academic dean together with certain departments, to deal with special situations (e.g. the teacher-coach model in kinesiology and athletics, a job-sharing arrangement in mathematics, a teacher-therapist position in psychology, teacher/gallery director in the art department). It is imperative that all such documents are relayed to the reviewer at the initiation of the review. These documents should state the date on which they became effective, and the persons involved in their negotiation. And, of course, copies of these documents should be made available to the personnel committee (chair and reviewer), the department chair, and the faculty involved.

At the first meeting with the candidate, clarify your role as reviewer. You are primarily a gatherer of information, being as objective as possible; the committee is the interpreter of that information. You can make no guarantees about outcome, since it is the committee as a whole, not you as an individual, that will make a recommendation about the candidate. Also, it is not your role to help the candidate to edit his or her materials, particularly the self-assessment and

faith-learning essays. Reiterate handbook policy that the burden of proof lies with the faculty member under review (2.2.1.4). It is your job, as the reviewer, to fully and faithfully put on display for the committee all of the input you receive about the candidate's performance. While you hope to be helpful to the candidate, you are not the candidate's mentor or advocate.

In this meeting, outline the process and timeline and ask any questions that arise from your initial reading of the candidate's materials. Be sure to specifically address the fundamental criterion. Set a date for a second meeting with the candidate; this will come after you have received and reviewed most of the input for the review but before you have written the report. Explain that you may be checking back with the candidate from time to time for additional information.

All of the candidate's department colleagues should provide written input and be interviewed individually. Interviews should be conducted in person, whenever possible. Department chairs in particular should provide a thorough assessment; it is appropriate to ask the chair or chairs how they have fulfilled their responsibilities for mentoring and orienting the candidate. Be sure to contact all references named by the candidate, and to acknowledge their responses with thanks. The Dean of Student Life, the Registrar, and the Director of Student Advising should also be contacted for every review. Faculty mentors are not obligated to provide input, but may do so if they so desire. It is very important that at least eight students be individually interviewed in person. Half of the students interviewed should be named by the candidate. In your selection of these students, aim for diversity in gender, ethnicity, class rank, and major. Assure all references that their input will be held in confidence and that they will not be identified by name in the review report.

The sources of evidence for faculty reviews are described in sections 2.2.1.3 and 2.2.1.4 of the Faculty Handbook. You may receive and solicit input from faculty, administrators, and students. Former faculty, administrators, or students may provide input if their time at Westmont has overlapped the period for which the candidate is under review. External references are only appropriate if named by the candidate, and these would normally be restricted to professional colleagues from the candidate's discipline. In the case of promotion to full professor, such

external references are required. If provided by the candidate, a character reference from a pastor or community member will be accepted.

In your second meeting with the candidate,, ask any additional questions that may have arisen in the review and apprise the candidate of any potential concerns that have emerged in the initial phases of the review. Resist the temptation to be overly encouraging or reassuring; stick to the facts and avoid sweeping expressions.

Allow the candidate to respond to these concerns in this meeting, and allow the candidate several days to provide further written or oral response if he or she so desires. (As time permits, this response may be included either in the body of the report or in an addendum.) Keep careful notes of what is discussed in this meeting, not only for your own use but also for possible use in responding to an appeal.

### **PREPARING THE INITIAL REPORT**

To ensure confidentiality, department secretaries may not be used in the work of compiling the report. Student workers may not be used. If help is needed, the administrative assistants in the Provost's office may be available.

Carefully follow the template for the review report in all respects. At the beginning of each major section (i.e. fundamental criterion, teaching, professional development, and institutional service), a brief summary is appropriate,. Though we recognize that even a summary involves some interpretation, every effort should be made to keep interpretation to a minimum. It is the job of the committee to interpret; it is the job of the reviewer to organize the review materials as a basis for interpretation.

The candidate's personal self-assessment essay should be written in such a way that it may be partitioned under the various headings in the body of the report. The candidate's faith/learning portfolio essay should be preserved intact in a must-read appendix. Comments from various

references about the integration of faith and learning may best belong under the category of teaching, though some might fit in other categories as well.

When including the comments of those who have provided input, do not delete an observation of one person just because it has already been provided by another. It is useful for the committee to see what kinds of comments recur. However, if the comments of one given individual are redundant, or involve hearsay, or focus on persons or situations that are irrelevant to the review, judicious editing is in order.

Numerical scores from student evaluations should be tabulated. Look for congruence or lack of congruence between the numerical scores and the written comments on the evaluations. When considering the written comments, it is useful to separate them by gender. Note trends in the written comments and provide representative quotations in order of their frequency. Make sure that the exact optional questions for parts *E* and *F* are noted, as these can vary.

Pertinent excerpts from previous review reports may be included at the end of each main section in the report to the committee.

### **COMMITTEE PROCESS**

The initial report will be hand-delivered by the reviewer, under confidential cover, to the members of the committee at least three working days before they meet to deliberate. (A department secretary may perform this task, but not a student worker.)

It is highly desirable that all committee members be present for each review; when the personnel committee is constituted for a normal semester's workload, no more than one member may be absent for there to be a quorum. The chair or vice-chair of the committee and the academic dean are present for all reviews. All committee members should be encouraged to express the thoughts and concerns on their minds. Absent members may send questions and comments via email to the chair prior to the discussion.

In the committee deliberations, the reviewer acts as a guide and resource as various sections of the report come under consideration. The reviewer will remind the committee of relevant aspects of the candidate's performance which may be overlooked in discussion, whether those aspects be positive or negative. In short, the reviewer's role is to ensure that adequate consideration is given to all parts of the review. If, as may occasionally happen, the committee desires further information, the conversation about the review will be paused, and the reviewer will revert to the role of information gatherer. This information gathering should, unless deemed inappropriate by the committee, include further conversation with the candidate. The reviewer will bring the desired information to the next meeting.

### **FINAL REPORT**

In all reviews except that for promotion to full professor, the candidate is awarded a numerical score in each of the three main categories of evaluation: teaching, professional development, and institutional service. These scores are recorded in Section 5 of the review report. Issues relating to the fundamental criterion are discussed in the summary statement, but a numerical score appears clearly inappropriate.

The stated range of scores in the handbook is 1-7; the most common scores typically range from 3-5, with plusses and minuses sometimes added. However, the entire range of scores as defined in the handbook is available to each committee. The handbook makes clear that the criteria for promotion indicates that the bar for performance is somewhat raised for each subsequent review (2.2.2.2); a score of 4 on professional development for a tenure review would indicate a greater record of achievement than a score of 4 on professional development for a mid-tenure review.

In the case of a positive review, committee members will offer suggestions to the reviewer for the drafting of a summary statement. A draft of this statement is then brought to a subsequent meeting for editing by the entire committee. The statement should proceed in an organized manner through each of the main categories of review, offering meaningful affirmation and carefully crafted stipulations for improvement. If negative issues from an earlier review have been satisfactorily resolved in the most recent review, they need not be mentioned in the

summary statement of the current review. The summary statement, which forms Section 4 of the final review report, must of course include the Personnel Committee's decision and recommendation.

In the case of a positive review, the candidate will receive from the Provost the summary statement as composed by the committee; however, the remainder of the final review report received by the candidate may be slightly edited. To further ensure confidentiality, sources identified in the original report as "Faculty Member A" or "Administrator B" will simply be marked by bullet points. Also, highly injurious comments may be edited out at the discretion of the committee. This edited version of the report (including appendices) will be placed in the candidate's file and given to the candidate. Any external letters of reference will be treated as confidential unless otherwise noted by their writers, and thus generally not included in the file nor are they given to the candidate.

#### **RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF METHOD AND DATA**

Whether or not the committee's recommendation is positive or negative, the integrity of the decision rests largely upon the quality of the information that was used to make it. Likewise, the integrity of the process partially relies upon the quality of the means used to gather the data. *It is the reviewer's responsibility to maximize the reliability and validity of the information presented to the committee for its deliberation.*

Reliability refers to the degree to which a particular method of gathering information--whether from questionnaires, interviews, or a standardized evaluation instrument--produces consistent results. For example, if the questions used to interview a student produce the same responses from that student regardless of who asks them, then we can say that the questions are reliable. Validity is more critical; validity refers to the degree to which a method produces results that measures what it purports to measure. For example, student ratings of an instructor's mastery of an academic field may be consistent (i.e., reliable), but may reflect something other than mastery (and thus have low validity). The method can be reliable but the resulting data can lack validity which represents the trustworthiness and accuracy of the methods, data, or findings. One of the

critiques of the use of standardized student teaching evaluations is that they are not built upon a coherent theory of teaching effectiveness such that it is unclear what they, indeed, measure.

High validity and reliability also contribute to the reduction of bias. Bias refers to the degree to which a method of gathering information produces results that systematically leans in one direction. For example, interviews with only high-scoring students may produce results that are biased toward higher ratings of an instructor's teaching ability. While complete removal of bias is unachievable, we can take measures to minimize it to the best of our abilities.

#### **REGARDING INTERVIEWS OF STUDENTS AND FACULTY COLLEAGUES:**

The following techniques and principles tend to maximize the reliability and the validity of information gathered by interviewing:

1. Schedule interviews in a timely manner, keeping in mind that the complexity of both student and faculty schedules will require considerable flexibility on the reviewer's part in scheduling the required meetings.
2. Assure the individuals to be interviewed that their comments will be held in confidence by you and the committee.
3. Try not to schedule more than two interviews back to back so that the information does not become a blur in your mind. Type up your notes as soon after the meeting as possible.
4. Avoid asking double-barreled questions such as "What did you like and dislike about the class," or "Is the professor organized and clear?"
5. Address more sensitive topics later rather than early in the interview.
6. Pause a few seconds (count to ten slowly) to give the person an opportunity to formulate a response to your question.

7. Use the same wording to ask the same questions from interview to interview. Using the questions provided on the on-line forms for students and faculty to guide the interview process helps maintain consistency from interview to interview, increasing reliability and validity. The wording of questions asking for non-threatening information tends not to influence the response. *However, the wording of those intended to elicit sensitive or potentially threatening information does.*
8. Avoid leading questions such as “I hear that Professor X is wonderful in the classroom” or “Some students have said that Professor Y is boring” or “Other students or faculty members have said....” Leading questions introduce bias. Ask the student or colleague to speak about their experience.
9. As much as possible, ask open ended questions rather than those requiring only a “yes” or “no” answer: “How does the professor keep your attention?” rather than, “Does the professor keep your attention?”
10. Elicit the reasons behind the comments--positive, negative, or neutral--in a non-threatening or leading manner: “Tell me more about that” or “What has led you to draw that conclusion?” Even if a student or colleague states that the individual is “wonderful” ask them to tell you what that means to him or her.
11. Ask the individual to indicate the context and the time frame from which they are making their comments.
12. Save time at the end of an interview to read back to the individual what you have written down to ensure clarity, accuracy and completeness.

If criticisms arise in these interviews which the reviewee has not addressed directly either in the self-assessment or in your prior conversations with him or her, be sure to factually state them at your next meeting, without revealing their source and ask them to provide clarification or more information. Give the reviewee at least 48 hours to submit a response or to talk with you further. *Whether speaking with the individual under review, students, colleagues, or administrators, it is important to stick to the facts; don't make evaluative comments even, “I think you will be fine” or “I don't anticipate any problems.”*

### **REGARDING THE USE OF STUDENT TEACHING EVALUATIONS:**

The reviewer and the committee should treat the student evaluations as a point from which to ask questions rather than as a basis to make a judgment. The academic literature, thus far, does not provide a consistent voice about the validity or reliability of student teaching evaluations. (One scholar aptly points out that the different and sometimes contradictory findings reflect whether or not the researcher's purpose is to justify their use or to measure their validity.) However, a critical mass of research reports a host of factors which influence student evaluations, several of which are outside of the instructor's control or are unrelated to effective teaching. As a result, extremely high scores may be as much of a concern as extremely low ones. Since the current student evaluation forms do not factor gender, ethnicity, major, elective, or required course into the numerical calculations the reviewer must sort the information into relevant categories. Here are several questions to pursue, if needed, while reading the student teaching evaluations:

1. Examine the standard deviation of the scores. The larger the standard deviation the less agreement among the students about the particular item; the smaller indicates that more students agreed or disagreed similarly.
2. Examine ~~Sort~~ the written comments by sex. Do male and female students evaluate an instructor in the same or different ways? Are the descriptors similar or different? Are the points of praise or criticism similar or different?

The same may ~~should~~ also be done for whether or not the respondent is a major or minor and if the course is required or an elective. However, that information may not be available.

3. Pay attention to the relative frequency with which comments are made and general trends that emerge. .
4. Solicit from the faculty member being reviewed and from students interviewed concrete examples of how classroom practices that maximize student learning are incorporated into the course.

**FORMS FOR USE IN FACULTY REVIEWS**

1. Review Time-Line and Check-List
2. Sample Letter to the Reviewee
3. Sample Letter to Faculty Colleagues
4. Sample Letter to Students
5. Peer Evaluation Form
6. Student Evaluation Form
7. Sample Review Report
8. Sample Committee Meeting Minutes

### IMPORTANT LITERATURE RELATED TO TENURE AND PROMOTION

Upon election to the personnel committee, members should familiarize themselves with the relevant academic literature (or summaries thereof) regarding the review and promotion of faculty members. We recommend at the very least these seven articles. The first four articles below were brought to the committee's attention by Toya Cooper, Special Assistant to the President for Legal Affairs. Additional papers may be added in the future.

1. *Good Practice in Tenure Evaluations: Advice for Tenured Faculty, Department Chairs and Academic Administrators* (Joint project of the American Council on Education, The American Association of University Professors and United Educators Insurance).
2. *The Probationary Period: Evaluation and Decision*, AAUP Website.
3. *Road Signs to Tenure*, Chronicle of Higher Education.
4. *Examining the Relation between Race and Student Evaluations of Faculty Members: A Literature Review* by Dana A. Williams.
5. Paper on the Influence of Gender, Ethnicity, Age and Discipline on the Tenure and Promotion Process. Contributions to be selected by Laura Montgomery.
6. *The AAUP Policy Documents and Reports* (The Red Book).
7. Seven Principles for Good Practices in Undergraduate Education.

For the evaluation of faculty colleagues' work in the category of professional development – in diverse areas such as physics, theater arts, or athletics – it may be helpful to obtain guidelines from various professional associations.