

The Committee on Faculty Affairs
Preliminary Recommendation for Updating and Realigning TCNJ's
Reappointment, Tenure, and Promotions Documents

December 13, 2006

Dear Colleagues:

I. Introduction

Last year, the Committee on Faculty Affairs ("CFA") re-issued a recommendation for updating and realigning TCNJ's reappointment, tenure, and promotions documents which were first combined by CFA into one comprehensive document [hereinafter "the Document"] during the 2004-2005 academic year. At the end of his tenure as Provost, Dr. Stephen Briggs rejected the Document and returned it to the CFA for further consideration on select items contained therein. At the start of the 2006-2007 academic year, Interim Provost Beth Paul met with Dr. Hank Fradella, the chair of CFA, to provide her insights into former Provost Briggs' rejection of the Document. She explained both the concerns that she shared with Dr. Briggs and those on which she differed from him. Interim Provost Paul then charged the CFA with undertaking one additional, expedited review of the Document in light of the feedback that she and Dr. Briggs had shared. Dr. Fradella brought those concerns back to the CFA and the Committee worked through the fall 2006 semester to resolve the few outstanding issues. Having completed that review, CFA now issues its "Preliminary Recommendation" to the campus community to adopt the re-revised draft of the Document. To assist the community in understanding the latest revisions to the Document, we prepared this cover letter summarizing the changes we made during the fall 2006 semester.

II. Summary of Minor Changes

- A. The Document has been updated to include language mirroring that used in The College's Mission Statement and Core Beliefs, as well as numerous recommendations of the *Teacher-Scholar* Task Force. While these changes affected language throughout the Document, they are most evident on pages 1-11 and pages 26-28 of the revised Document – especially in the bulleted lists that appear on page 3 and on pages 4-5.
- B. Some changes have been made to the promotions process time-line to allow both departmental Promotion and Tenure Committees (PTCs) and Deans more time to review candidate's applications for promotion. We have also clarified the time-frame for processing appeals from decisions of the College Promotions Committee (CPC). These changes can be found on pages 11-18 of the Document, and a summary chart of all relevant dates in the process can be found on page 19.
- C. Some ambiguities regarding the creation of departmental PTCs, especially as they applied to faculty holding joint-appointments, were clarified. These changes can be found on pages 20-21 as they apply to the promotions processes, and on pages 36-37 as they apply to the reappointment and tenure processes.
- D. Minor changes to the operating procedures for conducting PTC votes and signing PTC reports/recommendations were also made. These changes appear on pages 12 and 31-34.
- F. Minor changes have been made to the composition of the CPC to help ensure a fully-staffed committee (see pages 22-23).

III. Summary of Major Changes

- A. *Peer Evaluation of Teaching*: CFA recognizes that the way in which it had previously recommended that peer evaluations occur was problematic for a number of reasons. However, CFA reaffirms its commitment to the belief that peer evaluations of teaching should continue to be an integral part of the processes for evaluating candidates for reappointment, tenure, and promotion. We therefore included language requiring the submission of peer evaluations of teaching. However, the content, structure, and form of peer evaluations of teaching are currently being studied jointly by the Faculty Senate's Standing Committee on Teaching Excellence and a subcommittee of the CFA. The report of this joint-committee is scheduled to be issued in 2007. Once it is issued, it is CFA's intention to integrate the joint-committee's findings as an appendix to the new reappointment, tenure, and promotion Document (to become Appendix III). However, before doing so, that appendix will go through the normal governance process before being formally adopted as a part of the Document. Thus, members of the TCNJ community will be provided with a separate preliminary recommendation from CFA regarding peer evaluation of teaching, and testimony on the recommendation will then be gathered before any final recommendation is made to integrate the new peer evaluation of teaching processes into the reappointment, tenure, and promotion Document.
- B. *Grade Distributions*: During the last two academic years, CFA learned that faculty members' grade distributions were being used during review of promotion applications even though such information was not mentioned in the 1997 Promotion Document. In some cases, grading histories were provided to the CPC without the knowledge of the candidate, and, therefore, the candidate did not have any opportunity to explain his/her grading practices. CFA weighed, therefore, whether it would be worthwhile to encourage applicants to comment on their grade distributions so that no candidates would be in the position of being judged on a criterion about which they had never commented. However, after hearing testimony from the TCNJ community, especially from the Faculty Senate and from the AFT, and after discussing this issue with Interim Provost Paul, CFA concluded that there are insufficient standards governing how grade distribution should be used as part of the promotion evaluation process. This turns, in part, on the fact that there are no agreed upon standards nor methods for interpreting grading as an indicator of teaching effectiveness. Until such time as The College undertakes such a study of grading (and we recommend that such a study take place in the near future), the CFA has decided to bar the use of grade distributions during CPC deliberations.
- C. *External Reviews of Scholarly/Creative/Professional Activity*: The policy on external reviews for promotion set forth in 1997 stated that such external reviews are optional at both the Associate Professor and Professor levels. Last year, the CFA considered whether to recommend a change in this policy after reviewing information on external review from other colleges and testimony from TCNJ faculty. In its review, the CFA identified three main problems with the current policy concerning external reviews.

First, there were mixed opinions about the utility of external reviews. Some people see external review as a useful additional tool for explaining the case for promotion, especially when the scholarship is not familiar to the CPC. Others think that since the reviewers are chosen by the candidate, the reviews will be uniformly good and therefore would not add anything meaningful to the application. Second, although external review is optional, some faculty members feel that it is a de facto requirement in some schools, leading to an inequity in expectations across

campus. This is a serious problem since the standards and expectations for promotion must be applied equally to all faculty members. Third, many faculty members think that reviewers need clearer instruction to evaluate TCNJ faculty scholarship in the context of a primarily undergraduate institution with our teaching load. In light of the complexities surrounding this important issue, the CFA concluded that the current policy on optional use of external evaluations should be changed.

After considerable debate and deliberation, the CFA decided to recommend that external reviews should be required of all applicants for promotion (although the processes used for external review of promotions from Assistant Professor to Associate Professor may well turn out to be qualitatively different from those used for promotions from Associate Professor to Professor). There are several reasons supporting our conclusion. First and foremost, having external experts helps to explain someone's scholarship to CPC members who may not understand an applicant's methods or the importance of his/her contributions to the field. Second, external reviews can evaluate scholarly standards reflected in the work as appropriate to a specific discipline and comparable with faculties of peer institutions. And third, engaging external reviewers recognizes TCNJ's role in contributing to disciplinary growth and advancement.

Even though the CFA believes external reviews can and should play an important role in the promotions process, the Committee feels this is far too important an issue to be handled without the full participation of the TCNJ community in a careful, deliberative manner. So, CFA recommends the following:

- 1) An ad-hoc committee should be formed by the Faculty Senate and the CFA to investigate best practices with regard to the external review process (in the same way the two bodies are currently studying the process of peer-evaluation of teaching). That committee should be formed in the spring 2007 semester and prepare a report over the course of the 2007-2008 academic year recommending a new system for external reviews that includes a standardized system for selecting external reviewers, soliciting their participation, and guiding the format and content of their evaluations.
- 2) Once the ad-hoc committee issues its report, the CFA should evaluate it and integrate its findings as an appendix to the new reappointment, tenure, and promotion Document (to become Appendix IV). However, before doing so, that appendix will go through the normal governance process before being formally adopted as a part of the Document. Thus, members of the TCNJ community will be provided with a separate preliminary recommendation from CFA regarding adoption of a new external review process, and testimony on the recommendation will then be gathered before any final recommendation is made to integrate the new process into the reappointment, tenure, and promotion Document.
- 3) Until such time as a new, uniform system governing external reviews is formally adopted through the governance process, the CFA recommends that external reviews should remain optional and at the discretion of the candidate for promotion.
- 4) Once a new, uniform system governing external reviews is in effect, the Office of Academic Affairs must provide meaningful professional development to all faculty members (especially those who serve on the CPC) to ensure that external reviews are interpreted in a manner consistent with the ad-hoc committee's recommendations.

D. *Minimum Number of Years for Promotion Eligibility*: TCNJ currently sets the minimum threshold for promotion to the rank of Associate Professor at five years of professional service, and eight years of professional service for promotion to the rank of Professor. Both time periods are below those used at comparable institutions. However, given New Jersey's statutory tenure-clock, CFA believes the five-year period for the first promotion is an appropriate time-frame. However, the eight-year period for promotion to the rank of Professor should be increased to ten years. Even with such an increase, TCNJ would still have one of the lowest minimum threshold periods for promotion to Professor, as most comparable institutions require six to eight years of service *at the rank of Associate Professor* before a faculty member is eligible to apply for promotion to Professor. Another reason CFA supports the increase to ten years is because the average length of time for promotion to the rank of Professor at TCNJ is 13.5 years (for all promotions between 1996 and 2006). In light of this average, CFA feels that continuing to set the minimum number of years at only eight years is likely to create false expectations for early promotion; this, in turn, can lead to faculty disillusionment with the promotions process and decreased overall job satisfaction as well. However, we disagree strongly with the approach taken by most comparable institutions that promotion should require a minimum number of years *in rank*. Thus, we strongly support continuing to allow "other professional service" prior to coming to TCNJ to count towards the minimum thresholds for promotion so that faculty who are hired from business, law, government, industry, or other educational institutions may move along the promotion process without unnecessary delay.

Readers should note that CFA recommends waiting until the 2008-2009 academic year to implement the new ten-year period of time for promotion to the rank of Professor. This should allow those faculty members who have begun to prepare their materials for promotion next fall to move forward with those applications as planned.

IV. Conclusion

We invite members of the TCNJ community to review the Document and provide feedback on it to the CFA. There are several opportunities for doing so. The first opportunity will be on Wednesday, January 31st when CFA and the Faculty Senate will jointly host an open forum on the revisions to the Document from 12:00 noon to 1:00 p.m. (location to be announced). A second open forum will be held on Friday, February 2nd from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. (location to be announced). Email comments are also welcome; messages should be sent to Dr. Hank Fradella at HFraddell@tcnj.edu.

Respectfully submitted,

The Committee on Faculty Affairs, 2006-2007

Hank Fradella, Chair; Steve Viola, Vice-Chair; Sunita Ahlawat, Bill Behre, Terrence Bennett, Jean Graham, Ruth Hall, Adam Knobler, Deborah Knox, Marc Meola, Jeffrey Osborn, and Deborah Thompson