

Post-tenure Reviews for Professors: An Alternative Proposal

[In response to feedback we have gathered from full Professors who have recently undergone post-tenure review, and] because Faculty Welfare would like to make the review process useful and productive for faculty at all stages of their careers, we would like to propose an alternative method of review for full Professors. Participation in such an alternative would be entirely voluntary; the regular post-tenure review format would remain in place for those who prefer it.

Here are the premises that guide our thinking about post-tenure review:

- Post-tenure review serves two functions: it gives the college a mechanism to evaluate faculty to determine merit pay, and (ideally) it encourages a process of reflection and growth in the faculty member under review. The first is a summative evaluation, carried out by the Faculty Welfare Committee and the Dean; the second is a formative assessment, supported by the review process but carried out primarily by the faculty member him or herself.
- The format and process of review most productive for any given faculty may change over the course of that faculty member's career—particularly the balance of formative and summative components.
- It is in the best interests of the college to make sure that the review process is useful and productive for the faculty member—that it is more, in short, than jumping through someone else's hoops.
- It is in the best interests of the college that a review process encourages faculty to honestly examine themselves and creatively reconsider their priorities, goals, and current practices. At its best, such a process should energize the faculty member by highlighting new opportunities, encouraging risk-taking and areas of potential growth and fostering creative new solutions to the ongoing challenges we all face as teachers, scholars, and committed members of the college community.
- Growth and change is almost always preferable to stasis.

Working from these premises, we propose an alternative post-tenure review procedure which places somewhat less emphasis on demonstrating what one has accomplished, and more on identifying—and deliberately *pursuing*—an opportunity for growth proposed by the faculty member him- or herself.

In short, the faculty member could propose a Faculty Development Project (FDP) aimed either at improving, re-conceiving, or re-inventing some practice they already engage in, or exploring and implementing some new area for development as a teacher, scholar, or servant of the college.

What might such a project look like? Here are some possibilities:

Improving current practices by addressing an area of concern

All of us face challenges of one kind or another, especially in the classroom. Times change, and so do students. Sometimes practices that have worked well in the past become less effective with the current population of students. Or sometimes we simply become aware of an area of our practice that we'd like to strengthen or revitalize. In such cases, a faculty member could propose an FDP designed to improve a particular aspect of their teaching. For example, a faculty member who struggles to give timely or effective feedback on student papers could propose a project that might include

- researching the latest findings on what kinds and formats of feedback students can best process and use
- attending a regional or national faculty development workshop on this issue
- identifying and meeting with a colleague or mentor who has particular expertise in this area
- using all of these to come up with a plan of action to improve your feedback

Experimenting with new goals, objectives or methods

Interesting new developments emerge in disciplines over time: different pedagogies appear with different goals and emphases. The time demands placed on full professors, who often add important administrative duties as their careers progress, can make it harder for professors to systematically pursue these developments. Habit and even past successes can make it less likely that a professor will want to take a risk on something new. In such cases, professor could propose a FDPs designed to help them learn about and implement something new in their classrooms. For example, a historian might want to experiment with role-playing games like "Reacting to the Past"; a scientist may want to increase his students' creative thinking skills through low-stakes improvisational exercises in class; an English professor might want to try to adapt the model of problem-based learning, so successful in the sciences, for use in the literary classroom.

Re-engaging a teaching challenge common to one's discipline

Teaching in any discipline carries its own particular challenges: Religion professors regularly face students who feel threatened by the idea of interrogating their own faith; History professors struggle to convince their students that history is more than a collection of facts to be memorized; English professors must find effective ways to challenge their students' assumption all interpretations are created equal, or that anything goes in literary analysis. In such cases, a faculty member could propose an FDP offering a fresh way to address such a longstanding disciplinary conundrum.

Re-engaging an existing area of professional inquiry, or pursuing a new one

Across the span of a career, the degree of attention devoted to teaching, scholarship, and service will inevitably shift more than once. Perhaps the demands of being a department or division chair have required some faculty members to put part of their scholarly work on hold for several years; when they return to it, they may feel less familiar with the latest developments in their field. New areas of inquiry

may have emerged. Challenges to or re-interpretations of established research might now suggest different perspectives, methods or theoretical models to apply. Or perhaps in mid-career a faculty member's own evolving interests will spark a desire to engage an area of research fairly new to him or her. In either case, the faculty member will need a deliberate plan to ramp up their . . . ?

Faculty Development Project (FDP): Structure of the project experience

1. **The faculty member will submit a FDP proposal** to the department chair and the Faculty Welfare Committee in the Spring term of the academic year prior to the project year (two years prior to the review year). The FDP proposal should be *no more than five (5) pages in length* (excluding bibliography and/or appendices, if warranted) that include the following:

- ✓ A personal reflection statement, not to exceed two (2) pages, assessing the faculty member's current strengths and challenges in the primary areas of teaching, scholarship and service. The purpose of this reflection is to provide:
 - a *baseline for evaluation in the post-tenure review* and
 - to *identify an area for sustained inquiry aimed at formative development* within the broad categories of teaching or scholarship. This area could involve any of the following: improving an area of personal concern; engaging a particular challenge or conundrum; experimenting with new goals, objectives and/or methods; moving into a new area of professional inquiry. The identified project area should be sufficiently focused and concrete to provide the foundation for the faculty member's FDP.

- ✓ A project plan that includes the following elements:
 - clearly articulated *goals and objectives* for the project. These objectives should be defined narrowly enough to provide the project with direction and limits, and concretely enough that they may be assessed at the end of the project;
 - an *action plan* for engaging the goals and objectives for the project. The plan should delineate what the faculty member wants to do and how, what resources are necessary to carry out the plan, and the time frame for implementation during the project year (which may involve one, two, or three terms as needed);
 - an *assessment plan* for evaluating progress on the project goals. The nature of the assessment will depend on the project objectives and actions, but ideally should be grounded in some form of research literature or statement of best practices relevant to the disciplines involved (e.g., SoTL research, professional association statement, etc.), and/or some other form of tangible observation (e.g., evidence of student learning in the objective area, submission of a paper to a conference or publication, etc.).
 - optional: identification of *other persons involved* in support for the project, if desired (e.g., a peer mentor, a project partner, a teaching observation group, etc.).

2. **The FDP proposal will be discussed and approved** by the faculty member's department chair and division chair, following a discussion of the proposal with the faculty member. The Faculty Welfare Committee will then review and approve FDP proposals.

FDP projects will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- ✓ Identification of project goals and objectives should benefit the professional development of the faculty member in a concrete, substantial way;
- ✓ Project plan details should demonstrate that the action plan reasonably engages the project objectives and is practicable given resources available to the faculty member;
- ✓ The assessment plan should provide a clear metric for assessing progress or growth in the targeted area, and provide a basis for the evaluation of merit in teaching or scholarship by the Faculty Welfare Committee in the review year.

The FDP proposal may be revised and resubmitted as deemed necessary and useful by the department chair, division chair and faculty member during their discussions, as well as by the Faculty Welfare Committee. Requests and suggestions for revision are intended to assist the faculty member define and carry out the project in a manner most helpful to that faculty member.

3. In the project year (the academic year preceding the review year), **the faculty member will carry out the FDP action plan**. The plan may involve teaching- or scholarship- related activity during one, two, or three terms as specified in the faculty member's FDP proposal. The execution of the action plan should ideally include some mechanism for recording reflective observations and collecting assessment data for the project as specified in the proposal.
4. By the end of the summer of the project year, **the faculty member should complete assessment of the project** as specified in the faculty member's FDP proposal.
5. By the specified due date for the submission of Fall term post-tenure review materials, **the faculty member should submit the following to the Faculty Welfare Committee:**
 - ✓ the faculty member's *current CV*;
 - ✓ the faculty member's *summary IDEA/SRI data* for the preceding five years (or, if student evaluations are not collected by the faculty member, some *alternative form of data* for assessing baseline teaching effectiveness);
 - ✓ a *report on the faculty member's FDP* not to exceed ten (10) pages, including:
 - a summary explanation of the project objectives, action plan and assessment plan;
 - a discussion of the assessed results of the project, and a reflection on the faculty member's FDP experience;
 - a brief description of future goals for professional development.