

MEMORANDUM

Date: September 30, 2011
To: Tenure-Track Faculty
From: Committee on Faculty Appointments (CFA), 2011-12
Re: Reappointment and Tenure Review Process
Cc: Tenured Faculty

Each year, following a recommendation originally made by the AC-CFA, the CFA sends a letter to junior faculty explaining how the committee does its work and the standards that inform that work. Our hope is that an annual letter written by the current members of the committee will clarify issues that are sometimes misunderstood and will improve communication within the College community regarding the review process. It is not our intent here to provide a comprehensive account of the appointments process or to paraphrase or repeat what is amply described in College legislation (*Articles of Government*, Book 1). Copies of previous letters and further information about the CFA can be found on the CFA's website:

<http://web.wellesley.edu/web/Dept/Provost/Committees/cfa.psml>.

General Operations of the CFA

In reappointment and tenure reviews, the role of the CFA is to respond to the recommendations of Reappointments and Promotions (R&P) committees. The CFA's decisions take the form of either accepting or rejecting a recommendation made by an R&P or (in the case of split decisions) by one part of an R&P.

If the CFA feels that it does not have sufficient information to respond to a recommendation, the Committee may ask questions (either written or oral) of an R&P. This is done frequently and routinely. Written requests for information or clarification should not be interpreted by candidates as foreshadowing a negative decision. In many cases, written questions simply indicate that an R&P did not provide adequate information or that the CFA wishes to receive further guidance on the interpretation of the available information. The same may be said of requests for copies of annual conversation reports and/or class visit reports – requests that the CFA is authorized to make.

Faculty members on the CFA holding an appointment in the same department or program as a candidate (or who are outside members of a candidate's R&P) recuse themselves from consideration of that case. Instead, they participate as members of the R&P. The Provost/Dean of the College and Dean of Faculty Affairs are the only exceptions to this rule, because they serve on the committee in their administrative capacities. The recusal rule is strictly enforced; no CFA member participates in any way in the committee's conversations about a candidate in her/his department or program.

The College's appointments process has long been characterized by its relative transparency. The candidate receives a copy of the R&P's recommendation as well as of

any correspondence between the CFA and the R&P (with appropriate redactions). At any stage of the process, the candidate is free to communicate in writing to the CFA. The CFA does not share such communications with R&Ps, so if a candidate wishes her/his R&P to see a copy, she or he should provide one directly. The transparency of our process is intended for the benefit of the candidate and not others; members of R&Ps and the CFA are expected to adhere scrupulously to the principle of confidentiality.

The CFA gives thorough and careful consideration to each case before reaching a decision. It has been the practice of the committee never to make a decision about a reappointment or tenure decision at the first meeting at which it is discussed. Every case is considered on at least two occasions, and frequently more than that. As a result, an extended period of time may elapse between the time at which a case is first considered (and written questions submitted to an R&P) and the time at which a decision is made.

Each case that comes before the CFA is considered on its own merits. The CFA does not compare candidates to one another. The College does not have reappointment or tenure quotas or caps. The College has long held rigorous expectations for faculty performance in each of the three main areas of activity (scholarship, teaching, and service) considered at reappointment and tenure. In view of these high standards, negative appointments decisions are likely to occur from time to time. Naturally, the past cannot necessarily be taken as a guide to future decisions, but the record of the last ten years does not show any trend towards an increased number of negative decisions.

Standards for Teaching

From the AC-CFA's conversations with us, we know that the CFA's interpretation of Student Evaluation Questionnaires (SEQs) is an area of particular concern. While SEQs are an important part of a candidate's dossier, they are examined critically and read carefully by the CFA in the context of the overall teaching portfolio, which includes the candidate's personal statement, the R&P's recommendation, enrollments, syllabi and other pedagogical materials, and unsolicited letters. Rather than focusing on specific individual comments, CFA members identify persistent or prevailing themes (positive and negative) in the student comments and significant trends in the quantitative and qualitative data. We do not make the assumption that excellent teaching is necessarily synonymous with high scores and laudatory student comments. The committee recognizes that some attributes of excellent teaching (high standards, demanding or challenging coursework) or some legitimate pedagogical methods (for example, cold-calling) might be characterized negatively in some student comments. The CFA places primary emphasis on the quality of student learning.

Following the recommendation of a prior AC-CFA, in 2010-11, the College implemented a five-point rating scale for SEQs. The previous, four-point scale, offered two positive options, one neutral, and one negative; an additional negative option was added to improve the symmetry of the scale. We have analyzed the results of this change and have not found that the five-point scale has changed the overall balance of the SEQs or led to more negative ratings on the whole. We will continue, however, to watch the results to be sure that junior faculty are not disadvantaged by the move to the five-point scale. We did

notice more student errors in filling out the new scale (most frequently a student giving a negative rating to a course that she clearly meant to rate positively, an error we had noticed previously but one that does seem to be becoming more common). Beginning in 2011-12, the numbers will not appear on the scale as it goes out to students, in order to focus their attention on the descriptive headings, with the expectation that this change may reduce the problem of reversing a 5 for a 1. Again, we will continue to monitor the pattern of errors on the SEQs, and we do want to reassure junior faculty that all the qualitative comments on all SEQs are carefully read by the CFA and such errors are taken into account and adjusted for when we evaluate each SEQ record.

The CFA recognizes the importance of independent study supervision as a form of teaching. Since there are no SEQs for independent studies, the Provost's office gets in touch with all students participating in 250s, 350s, and 370s at the conclusion of each semester, reminding them of the opportunity to write letters reflecting on their learning experience.

Junior faculty members often ask how to balance their own research needs with collaborative work with students. The College highly values the extension of research opportunities to students, but also emphasizes that faculty members should feel comfortable involving students in their research projects to the extent that seems appropriate to the specific discipline or project. We also note that an extensive record of collaboration with students would not exempt a faculty member from meeting the College's high standards for research.

It is the responsibility of the Provost's office to publish a list of faculty under review each year. While letters from colleagues and students are welcomed, the CFA does not judge a case based on the number of unsolicited letters received, nor do we encourage faculty to solicit them.

Standards for Research

As noted above, the College maintains high standards of scholarly research. The CFA does not equate these high standards with a particular number of publications or a set measure of productivity. In every case that it considers, the committee is concerned primarily with the quality, originality, and significance of the contribution that a faculty member is making, has made, and will make to the scholarly or artistic field in which he or she is working. In order to evaluate scholarly work, the CFA considers all relevant evidence, including the candidate's research statement, assessment of R&P colleagues, the professional judgment of external evaluators (in tenure cases), the quality of publication venues, the standards and definitions of excellence appropriate to a particular field, as well as any relevant indicators of professional standing and distinction. The committee finds that significant contributions to a scholarly field generally involve a record of substantial publication. But the committee does not reduce its overall evaluation of a research portfolio to the counting of publications.

Standards for Service

Service to the College forms an important part of every case for reappointment or tenure. The CFA understands that opportunities for service vary across the College, so we do not expect all service records to look the same. Participation on committees of Academic Council is one valuable form of service, especially if the committee member has been an active contributor to the work of a committee. A recent survey conducted by the Agenda Committee (in 2010-11) suggested that many faculty members, including former members of the CFA, do not believe that department service is given as much weight as service on committees of Academic Council. We would like to reassure junior faculty that we do consider department service as an important and valuable part of the case for a candidate's service. As with both teaching and scholarship, the CFA seeks to evaluate the overall quality of a candidate's service contribution. For that reason, it is important that both candidates and R&P committees address details of the service contribution in their statements to the CFA, especially as service at the department level may be harder for the CFA to recognize and evaluate. Other forms of professional service and student advising may be considered as part of a service record, though these activities also bear upon a candidate's scholarly activity and teaching.

Members of the 2011-12 Committee on Faculty Appointments:

H. Kim Bottomly, President

Andrew Shennan, Provost and Dean of the College (Chair)

Kathryn Lynch, Dean of Faculty Affairs (non-voting)

Patricia Berman, Art

Dan Brabander, Geosciences

Emily Buchholtz, Biological Sciences

Vernon Shetley, English

Group B representative, TBD

Clerk of the CFA: Ruth Frommer, Office of the Provost and Dean of the College