

# MEMORANDUM

**Date:** October 1, 2014  
**To:** Tenure-Track Faculty  
**Cc:** Tenured Faculty  
**From:** Committee on Faculty Appointments (CFA), 2014-15  
**Re:** Reappointment and Tenure Review Process

Following a recommendation originally made by the AC-CFA, the CFA writes an annual letter to junior faculty explaining how the committee works and the standards that inform that work.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://www.wellesley.edu/provost/committees/cfa>.

## 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.

The CFA often needs further guidance to interpret material provided by the 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. Requests for information or clarification are not uncommon and should not be interpreted by candidates as foreshadowing a negative decision. In addition, the CFA may request copies of annual conversation reports and/or class visit reports.

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) are recused 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 of 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, a transparency that is intended to benefit the candidate. 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). It is not the practice of the CFA to meet in person with the candidate, but 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. To further protect the candidate's privacy, members of R&Ps and the CFA are instructed to adhere scrupulously to the principle of confidentiality, and no formal announcement of the outcome of a reappointment or tenure decision is made to the College community.

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 case 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 base its decisions to tenure or reappoint on a comparison of the candidates. The College does not have reappointment or tenure quotas or caps. The College does, however, have 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.

It is the responsibility of the Provost's office to publish a list of faculty under review each year. This list provides an opportunity for members of the College community, past and present, to write to the CFA about a candidate coming up for review, though letters are accepted at any time. Letters from colleagues and students are welcome. The CFA does not judge a case based on the number of letters received, nor is it appropriate for faculty to actively solicit them.

#### Standards for Teaching

From the AC-CFA's ongoing 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 (which addresses class visits), enrollments, syllabi and other pedagogical materials, and unsolicited letters. Rather than focusing on specific individual comments, CFA members identify themes (positive and negative) in the student comments and discernible 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.

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. Nonetheless, we recognize that students sometimes make errors in completing the form. These errors are generally obvious from the qualitative narrative comments, all of which are carefully read by the CFA; such errors are then adjusted for when we evaluate each SEQ record.

Junior faculty members often ask how to balance their own research needs with collaborative work with students. The CFA acknowledges the pedagogical value of extending research opportunities to students, as appropriate to the specific discipline or project. We also believe that an extensive record of collaboration with students would not exempt a faculty member from meeting the College's high standards for research.

The CFA also recognizes the importance of independent study supervision as a form of teaching. Since there are no SEQs for independent studies, the Provost's office contacts all students participating in independent study or thesis work at the conclusion of each semester, encouraging them to write letters reflecting on their learning experience. Effectiveness in supervising individual students' work is not judged based on the number of such letters received.

#### Standards for Research

As noted above, the College maintains high standards of scholarly research. 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 works. In order to evaluate scholarly work, the CFA considers the professional expectations of each field. In doing so, it evaluates all relevant evidence, including the judgment of external evaluators (in tenure cases), the candidate's research statement, assessment by R&P colleagues, 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, such as external funding. 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

We expect a strong record of College and department service in every case for reappointment or tenure, although such a record will not compensate for lack of excellence in the categories of research and teaching. The CFA understands that opportunities for service vary across the College, so not all service records will look the same. Participation on committees of Academic Council and departmental committees and other forms of College service are all valued, especially if the committee member has assumed significant responsibilities in the work of a committee. It is important that both candidates and R&P committees identify aspects of excellence in the service record in their statements to the CFA, especially as service at the department level may be harder for the CFA to recognize and evaluate.

**Members of the 2014-15 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)

John Cameron, Biological Sciences

Lee Cuba, Sociology

Roxanne Euben, Political Science

Kim McLeod, Astronomy

Carlos Ramos, Spanish

Ruth Frommer, Assistant Dean of the College for Faculty Appointments