

FINAL REPORT OF THE
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR MENTORING TASK FORCE

The State of Dedman College's Efforts to Mentor Associate Professors
Toward Their Promotion to Full Professor
With Conclusions and Recommendations

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Dean Tsutsui created the Associate Professor Mentoring Task Force consisting of Jing Cao, Dennis Ippolito, Peter Moore, Ross Murfin, Thomas Osang, Elizabeth Russ, and Lynne Stokes.

CURRENT POLICY AND PROCEDURE:

The University Guidelines on Promotion to Full Professor are as stated in the University Policy Manual 6.12.A.3: “The rank of Professor is the highest rank to which a faculty member may aspire. It should not be assumed that promotion to this rank will automatically follow from any certain number of years of service. Nor should it be assumed that all faculty members will achieve this rank. It should be reserved for those persons whose teaching as judged by students and peers is of sustained high quality and whose scholarly achievements (and/or performance and creativity) are recognized by members of the professional field as substantial and continuing.”

Dedman College bylaws state that, “The rank of professor is the highest rank to which a faculty member may aspire. It should not be assumed that all faculty members will achieve this rank, which is reserved for persons whose scholarly achievements are sustained and recognized as important by leaders in the person’s field of study and whose teaching is of high quality. A professor should also be a person who has served the University effectively and who has contributed to the scholarly community as a whole.” It is important to note that service is not mentioned in the University Guidelines but is explicit in the Dedman College bylaws and does play a role in promotion to Full Professor.

In both cases the language describing promotion to Full Professor differs somewhat from the language used to describe achieving tenure (and promotion to Associate Professor) at SMU. For example, in the University Policy Manual 6.12.B.2 it states, “While each faculty member should be judged individually on the basis of his/her particular ability to contribute to the educational, intellectual and creative life of the University, generally tenure should be awarded only to those who are outstanding in either teaching or research (or equivalent activity) and whose performance in the other is of high quality.” Thus, there are three “paths” to receiving tenure: outstanding research and high-quality teaching; outstanding teaching and high-quality research; and outstanding in both categories. However, one could infer that the middle path (outstanding teaching, high quality research) is not available for promotion to Full Professor (see below). It is also clear that service plays a larger role in promotion to Full Professor than it does in promotion to Associate Professor despite not being mentioned in University Policy 6.12.A.3.

While these statements describe the criteria necessary to achieve the rank of Full Professor they say nothing about the procedure. In particular, clarity is lacking with regard to the initiation of the process. With no contractual time frame, as in the case of tenure decisions, uncertainty as to the requirements and a lack of mentoring, decisions regarding when to promote to Full Professor are often ad hoc. In some cases it is the candidates themselves who initiate the process by requesting to come up for promotion.

In other cases the chair initiates the process sometimes in consultation with the candidate. Some departments have a group of Full Professors who make the recommendation to move forward. Finally some cases have been initiated by the Dean. Evaluations can happen each year at the annual review or less frequently. In a few departments no one has been promoted to Full Professor in over a decade and one department has no Full Professors. The ad hoc nature of our current procedure leaves candidates and chairs confused.

FINDINGS:

As part of its process the Task Force decided to survey our benchmark and peer institutions concerning their policies on promotion to Full Professor and their efforts to mentor Associate Professors. The following email was sent to the Associate Deans at Tulane University, University of Southern California, Vanderbilt University, Baylor University, Notre Dame University, Emory University, Ohio State University, Texas Christian University, Stanford University, Duke University, University of Michigan, Columbia University, Brandeis University, and New York University:

Dedman College at SMU (the College of the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Sciences) is developing a faculty mentoring plan this fall. In particular we are targeting the mentoring of Associate Professors to help ensure their promotion to Full Professor. As part of our effort I am surveying fellow private Universities (modified for the University of Michigan and Ohio State University) for insights they may have and mentoring programs they have put in place. Would you be willing to have a brief (15 minute) phone conversation about what you do at (fill in University name)?

Responses were obtained from the first seven institutions listed above. Formal procedural practices put in place by these institutions include: an annual review of Associate Professors by Full Professors in the same department conveyed through the department chair; a more comprehensive five year review that includes a detailed plan for moving toward promotion; and a thorough review of Associate Professors who had remained so for eight years or more. In the case of one University, three criteria, excellent, very good, and good, are used to evaluate research, teaching, and service with promotion to Full Professor possible to those who rate good in research, excellent in teaching or service, and very good in the other. Another expects significant research, teaching, and service with flexibility in balancing between heavier and lighter commitments but in practice the focus is still on research.

In terms of mentoring, the most common response was very little is in place formally and any mentoring was thus done on an ad hoc basis. One university appoints senior faculty with extensive experience in the promotion process to meet annually with Associate Professors in their area (division by SMU terminology) to discuss each candidate's status and ideas for moving the process forward. One university holds a yearly forum for the Associate Professors much like our Road-To-Tenure forum run by the CTE for Assistant

Professors. Some universities provide leaves, course reductions, and funding to help faculty members complete research projects.

The Task Force also asked for responses from all Dedman tenure and tenure-track faculty. Most of these responses came from Associate Professors. One of the most common concerns was a lack of clarity within their department about what constituted an appropriate research record.

Dedman College has 68 Associate Professors with 46 men and 22 women. Among those here between 7 and 10 years, 7 are men and 4 are women. Of those here longer than 10 years there are 5 women and 17 men. The number of Full Professors is 76 with 67 men and 9 women. The last female appointment to Full Professor took place in 2002. Since then three women have been hired at the Full Professor level. Only one woman who has been in Dedman College less than twenty years has been promoted to Full Professor at SMU and that individual was here only one year before promotion to Full Professor.

It is apparent from talking with colleagues and from our own discussions, that the current criteria for promotion to Full Professor (Policy 6.12.A.3) involve a narrowing of the criteria for receiving tenure. In particular, Associate Professors cannot expect to be promoted to Full Professor based on a post-tenure record of outstanding teaching, high quality research and substantial service. We also believe that the current University policy for promotion to Full Professor requires a qualitative improvement in research and not simply a quantitative one but this is not always well-understood.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

In order to improve the likelihood that Associate Professors in Dedman College will attain the rank of Full Professor the Task Force recommends that the following efforts aimed at encouraging and mentoring Associate Professors be implemented:

1. Each department must generate guidelines on the criteria used for evaluating research, teaching, and service. The guidelines should clarify “substantial and continuing scholarly achievement” and the membership of the “professional field” who should recognize that achievement as “substantial and continuing.” Each department must also develop a mentoring plan for Associate Professors. Each Associate Professor should be reviewed annually in terms of progress on promotion to Full Professor.
2. Each Dedman divisional Advisory Committee on Promotion to Associate Professor shall provide newly tenured faculty members with an executive summary of suggestions for new directions, next steps or general improvements obtained during the tenure review process. These suggestions should be gleaned from letters by faculty and committee members, external reviewers, and students (with attributions removed). Currently much valuable information is simply discarded. While the executive summary should not be a description of the reasons for which tenure was awarded it should make clear, especially in the case

that tenure was awarded on the basis of outstanding teaching and high-quality research, what steps will need to be taken to achieve promotion to Full Professor.

3. The Dean should designate a Full Professor (Full Professor Mentor) from each division who will meet yearly with the Associate Professors in their division until the extensive review. These Full Professors will be given access to CVs and annual reviews. Meetings after the extensive review are voluntary. Among the three Full Professor Mentors at least one should be male and one female. While it is expected that Associate Professors will meet with the Full Professor Mentor in their division, Associate Professors should feel free to select a Mentor from one of the other divisions.
4. The College should foster the formation of groups of three to four Associate Professors. Participation will be voluntary and will be across disciplinary boundaries. The Full Professor Mentors will facilitate the formation of these groups. These groups will give Associate Professors an opportunity to talk with other Associate Professors in different disciplines and at different stages about their experiences and progress. In some cases it might lead to collaboration in research or teaching.
5. Summer support for one month of research in the first or second summer after tenure is achieved in the amount of 1/9 salary should be provided to new Associate Professors.
6. The College should hold an annual Road-to-Full-Professor presentation each fall hosted by the Senior Associate Dean.
7. Associate Professors should be given significant service assignments within the department, college, or university and this should begin early on after receiving tenure. At the same time service must be balanced by the need of faculty members to improve teaching and conduct research that will lead to promotion to Full Professor. We recommend that all non-departmental requests to Associate Professors for service should be done in consultation with the department Chair.