

Three Constitutional Proposals on Faculty Roles and Faculty Governance

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Constitutional Proposal 1: Faculty Personnel Decisions

Issue

Much division of opinion exists on campus about the desirability of our current Departmental Personnel Committee (DPC) system. This division of opinion has been documented in a campus survey, recent Task Force documents, and a 2009 constitutional vote that split 50-50. Some units prefer the current system and oppose all or nearly all change. Other units are interested in a “Craft Model,” which would abolish DPCs. Other units prefer various systems on the continuum between the status quo and a Craft Model.

Changes to the Faculty Constitution in the Handbook require the support of two-thirds of those voting to pass. Much evidence suggests that no specific, single proposal for a faculty personnel system has the support of two-thirds of the voting faculty members, including the current DPC system, which could not be constitutionally enacted today if it were not in place already. How, then, to open up possibilities for change without prescribing any particular campus-wide system?

Proposed Solution

Allow colleges, schools, and the library the freedom to choose for themselves the basic procedures and mechanisms for performing the functions of appointment, re-appointment, promotion, and tenure. As universities grow larger, a tendency is to have ever greater differentiation among units in how they handle important matters, including faculty personnel decisions. The evidence seems clear that Appalachian has reached the point in its history when one size certainly does not fit all. Permitting every department or program to determine its own procedures would be chaotic and highly aberrant. Letting major units develop their own systems, in contrast, would enhance faculty governance.

The basic idea is that the College of Arts & Sciences, the College of Fine & Applied Arts, the College of Health Sciences and Allied Professions, the Hayes School of Music, the Reich College of Education, University College, the University Library, and the Walker College of Business would be given the latitude to reshape—or not—their faculty personnel systems.

Constitutional Change Needed to Permit the Proposed Solution

The rather large superstructure of DPC regulations rests on one provision of the Faculty Constitution in Article II, Section 3:

“Those eligible to serve on and participate in election of members to departmental personnel committees are full time faculty in the ranks of lecturer, instructor, assistant professor, associate professor, and professor.”

The other regulations surrounding DPCs are constructed in “regular” Handbook language, which can be changed through the usual governance processes and submitted for approval to the Board of Trustees. The Handbook sections dealing with DPCs are, in this respect, no more sacred than any other sections.

To open options for change, a new Article II, Section 3 could read:

“Units at the college, school, or library level shall develop structures and procedures governing the roles and responsibilities of faculty members in personnel matters such as appointment, re-appointment, promotion, and tenure.”

This constitutional provision would mandate that units have policies, but it would not mandate what those policies have to be. A revised Faculty Handbook would continue to govern shared fundamentals (for example, rules of confidentiality), but much of the rule-making on personnel matters would henceforth be done at the college/school/library level. The process of change undoubtedly would take time and work, just as creating the DPC system took time and work in the past, and it is impossible to state in advance what all of the outcomes would be. Giving people the power to make choices involves some uncertainty.

Constitutional Proposal 2: General Faculty Voting Rights

Issue

Appalachian’s current definition of voting faculty reads as follows in Article II, Section 2:

“All members of the faculty, excluding emeriti faculty, adjunct faculty, and part-time faculty teaching less than six (6) hours per semester, have the right to hold faculty offices and to vote in faculty meetings and faculty elections and in departmental and college committees on which they serve except as noted in Article II, Section 3.”

The definition has proven to be both overly broad and overly specific in various ways, and it particularly has been subject to abuse through manipulation of the modifier “adjunct” in faculty titles. The result has been that the majority of people who apparently have voting rights based on Article II, Section 2 have been disenfranchised. A major motive for this disenfranchisement has been to prevent these faculty members from voting for or being members of DPCs. Article II, Sections 2 & 3 thus have operated together to diminish seriously the apparent rights of large numbers of faculty members. In some instances, the faculty members largely responsible for programs have been excluded from voting on matters vital to those programs.

Proposed Solution

A better practice would be to have a standard, straightforward definition of a voting faculty member that does not permit the entanglement of general voting rights with voting on personnel matters. Such a definition would broaden de facto voting eligibility on general matters at both the university and unit level, and this enfranchisement potentially will have large positive effects on morale and be a better model of participatory governance. In addition, it may well discourage turnover among non-tenure-track faculty and promote better compensation and recognition for them. The proposed solution is based on a model used at UNC-Chapel Hill.

Constitutional Change Needed to Permit the Proposed Solution

A new Article II, Section 2 could read:

“All members of the faculty with at least a three-quarter-time appointment (.75 FTE) have the right to hold faculty offices and to vote in faculty meetings and faculty elections and in departmental and college committees on which they serve, subject to the following conditions:

- 1) A tenure-track or tenured faculty member holding at least a three-quarter-time appointment (.75 FTE) becomes an eligible voter at the start of the appointment.
- 2) A non-tenure-track faculty member must have served in at least a three-quarter-time appointment (.75 FTE) for at least three academic years out of the preceding five academic years to become an eligible voter, and he or she must continue to meet this standard to remain a voter.
- 3) In exceptional circumstances, a non-tenure-track faculty member with at least a three-quarter-time appointment (.75 FTE) and extensive experience elsewhere or notable credentials may become an eligible voter at the start of the appointment. Such voting eligibility requires a positive recommendation from the faculty of the unit involved and the concurrence of the Chair/Director, Dean/University Librarian, and Provost.”
- 4) Unit policies developed pursuant to Article II, Section 3 will govern voting and committee rights related to personnel matters.

Constitutional Proposal 3: Faculty Ranks, Titles, and Career Ladders

Issue

Approximately forty percent of Appalachian’s faculty members are non-tenure-track (contingent), a percentage far lower than the national figure, which now exceeds seventy percent. Appalachian definitely should resist trends toward the employment of ever larger numbers of contingent faculty. At the same time, the university must recognize that contingent faculty members will continue to be vital to Appalachian’s mission in “traditional” instructional roles as well as in evolving roles in research and clinical work. Contingent faculty members are here to stay and deserve better.

The university has made progress in recent years in providing greater number of “benefitted” positions for contingent faculty. However, Appalachian, like most other universities, has no meaningful career ladder for contingent faculty: Getting on the tenure-track is not a realistic option for most, and many may not even desire such appointments. Under current arrangements, a contingent faculty member can join the university as a lecturer or instructor, teach with distinction for thirty years, and retire with exactly the same title with which he or she began. What can be done to encourage stability, productivity, and job satisfaction amongst contingent faculty?

Proposed Solution

The university will create career ladders for contingent faculty. Criteria for advancement based on achievement and time in service will be similar in form to those for tenure-track faculty, but specific criteria will differ due to the differing nature of appointments and duties. In addition to general university criteria, units will develop their own more specific criteria—again, similar to what is done now with tenure and promotion.

For non-tenure-track faculty members with appointments of .75 FTE or more and with terminal degrees appropriate to the discipline, at least the following titles and ranks are proposed:

Assistant Research Professor, Associate Research Professor, Research Professor
Assistant Clinical Professor, Associate Clinical Professor, Clinical Professor
Assistant Instructional Professor, Associate Instructional Professor, Instructional Professor

For non-tenure-track faculty members with appointments below .75 FTE or for faculty members who have not completed the appropriate terminal degrees in the discipline, at least the following titles and ranks are proposed:

Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Senior Lecturer II

The university will virtually eliminate the use of the term “adjunct,” except in rare cases in which the term may appropriately be applied to a faculty member whose service is of a markedly temporary or intermittent nature.

It is impossible to determine in advance all of the qualifications, criteria, and procedures that will be associated with creating and managing this new career ladder. The usual shared governance processes can write these matters into the Faculty Handbook and/or unit documents.

Constitutional Change Needed to Permit the Proposed Solution

The current composition of the faculty is controlled by Article I of the Constitution:

“The faculty shall consist of those persons employed by Appalachian State University who hold the rank of instructor, assistant professor, associate professor, professor, and lecturer; and also those persons appointed as emeriti faculty and adjunct faculty.”

A revised Article 1 could read:

“The faculty shall consist of those persons employed by Appalachian State University who hold the rank of instructor, assistant professor, associate professor, professor, and lecturer; and also those persons appointed as emeriti faculty. Modifiers including but not limited to “adjunct,” “clinical,” “research,” “instructional,” and “senior” may be added to the ranks above to define further the roles and titles of faculty.”