



August 2010

TO: Provost Paul M. DeLuca, Jr., University Committee, Divisional Committees, Leadership Council and Academic Associate Deans, Chairs and Directors, and University Faculty-Staff Community in general

FROM: Steve J. Stern and Tenure Conversation Group: Professors Jake Blanchard, Barbara Bowers, Patti Brennan, Murray Clayton, Jane Collins, Jim Escalante, Beth Meyerand, Laurel Rice, Stern, and Susan Zaeske

RE: Tenure Conversation Group Report

The faculty tenure process is a university asset in which everyone has a stake, and in which all participate, directly or indirectly. That is why we simultaneously direct this cover memo to Provost DeLuca as our Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs, and to the many other relevant actors and stakeholders in the tenure process.

Please find attached “Tenure Conversation for a New Century: Rigor, Flexibility, and Excellence at a Great Public University.” As you know, the task of the Tenure Conversation Group (TCG) was to engage in thoughtful, low-key discussion of ways in which our tenure-track culture works well, and ways in which we may improve. The long-term goal is to spark a culture of campus conversation and best practices regarding tenure.

The report addresses tenure, but we recognize and welcome that it may also catalyze conversations about professional development during the entire faculty career cycle including post-tenure career development.

The attached report on tenure issues includes: (a) context on values, campus data, and historical change; (b) observations on what works well, what does not, and what emerging issues may present challenges in the future; and (c) a concluding section on “ideas for consideration” by the various players in the mentoring and tenure process.

We eschew the convention of presenting prescriptive recommendations, and instead offer “ideas to consider.” We interpret this approach as an invitation to the various relevant actors to get involved in a continuing conversation. We hope that all players will seek to supplement individual case-based understanding, with systemic reflection about best-practices

and change over time. We do not think the tenure process broken or in need of major overhaul. We do see room for improvement, and recognition of human and organizational fallibility.

Rather than provide a standard executive summary, we provide here a brief list of the ideas for consideration by the various players, including the faculty and leaders on the cc list. The ideas are succinctly listed below and explained on pages 17-23 of the report.

1. Leadership Orientation and Sharing of Experience.

We suggest that the Provost Office consider incorporating, within the annual August leadership orientation for department chairs and academic program directors, a “big picture” and process orientation on tenure. The orientation would draw on collaboration from divisional committee chairs and provide a space of encounter and sharing among leadership groups.

2. Mentoring of Key Social Actors.

We suggest that relevant offices consider upgrades in the mentoring of key social actors relevant to the tenure process. This work, primarily through workshops and leadership encounters, would take place on four levels: (a) probationary faculty; (b) department chairs, faculty, and administrative staff responsible for tenure dossier preparation; (c) academic associate deans (or similar personnel) who monitor the process at the school/college level; and (d) divisional committees.

We underscore, in this regard, that divisional committees’ independence needs to be respected. The ideas we suggest for consideration would recognize that the divisional committees remain independently responsible for their own internal orientation and mentoring process, and that they would decide independently on the usefulness of spaces for encounter or sharing across the four divisional committees or their chairs.

3. Second-Eyes Practice.

We suggest consideration of more active “second-eyes” practice – by department chairs in collaboration with academic associate deans – to yield effectively written and explained dossiers before transmittal to the Divisional Committee.

The second-eyes practice refers to the use of an effective and experienced outsider to a field to review a draft tenure dossier (or parts of a draft dossier), to point out areas in need of better explanation for an audience of smart outsiders, or in need of more complete information to comply with DC guidelines. The report suggests some circumstances in which second-eyes practice may be appropriate, regardless of the high scholarly quality of the tenure home department.

4. Divisional Committee Tools: Fact-Finders, Scholarly Advisors, Digitalization.

We suggest that Divisional Committees consider whether some good-practices tools already in use by one Divisional Committee may prove useful, perhaps in adapted format, for another. Two specific ideas to which we refer are: (a) fact-finders or other ambassadorial practice, and (b) scholarly advisors to assist the Divisional Committees in particular kinds of cases. A third idea is to develop and share ideas for good-practice tools for emerging issues, such as digitalization of scholarly research, and presentation of tenure dossiers in paper versus electronic versus mixed media.

At bottom, the idea is to consider sharing useful ideas across the divisional committees. We again underscore that the divisional committees decide independently on the practices they find useful.

5. Enhance Health Sciences Assessment.

We suggest that various players consider specific tools designed to engage fairly and rigorously the unique hybrid realities of academic health sciences, while working within the institutional arrangements and enduring values of our tenure system.

Among the specific ideas for consideration are the following:

(a) Closure of the gap, in the Biological Sciences Divisional Committee guidelines, between the careful explication of standards and criteria related to scholarly/teaching excellence in performance of extension duties, and the relative inattention to and lack of definition of scholarly clinical practice in health science fields. This issue may also be relevant to other Divisional Committees

(b) Utilization of FPP flexibilities (7.04.D and 7.04.H.3) and Faculty Legislation flexibilities (II-327) to address hybrid work and research, in dialogue with the University Committee and Academic Personnel Office. Such utilization might include not only transfer procedures from CHS track to tenure track, but also hybrid appointments (partly CHS, partly tenure track) with a pro rated tenure clock per FPP.

6. Surveys and Data Collection.

We suggest consideration of stronger effort to engage (as well as collect) campus data on perceptions about mentoring and tenure by faculty, especially probationary and recently promoted associated professors. This effort would contribute to the data driven discussion about experiences of mentoring and progress toward tenure, and the implications of such experiences for climate, job satisfaction, and retention.

We have learned much during our nearly two years of work on the Tenure Conversation Group. We wish to thank Provost DeLuca, former Interim Provost Julie Underwood, and all the

leaders, interlocutors, and colleagues who generously gave their time and expertise to support this work.

Although we have eschewed formal recommendations, we conclude with one. Let us embrace the value of a campus conversation about tenure, precisely *because* the topic is sensitive yet strategic, and precisely *because* human and organizational fallibility happens, even amidst healthy organizations and processes.

We believe that such a conversation, if conducted in non-accusatory and frank fashion, can sustain and improve the culture of rigor, flexibility, and excellence essential for a great public university in the twenty-first century world.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve our university.