

WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE

Faculty Meeting Minutes

November 5, 2020

Summary:

1. Call to Order
 - Approval of Agenda
 - Approval of the Consent Agenda and Minutes from October 1, 2020
2. Committee Business: COG
3. SoF Report
4. President's Report
5. Provost's Report
6. Closing Announcements
7. Adjournment

Detail:

1. Call to Order

The third Faculty meeting of the 2020-2021 academic year was called to order at 3:15pm via ZOOM by **SO F Dominko** (BBT). Prof. Dominko explained that she will hold her report until the end of the meeting and that both President Leshin and Provost Soboyejo had agreed to do the same. She explained that the Committee on Governance (COG) will be presenting three motions for discussion only. The amended agenda and consent agenda (including the minutes from October 1, 2020) were approved.

2. Committee Business

COG

Prof Boudreau (HUA, Chair, COG) and **Prof. Richman** (AE, Sec., COG) on behalf of COG gave a presentation providing an overview of three motions related to establishing a tenure track for teaching faculty. (See Attachment #1: Motions Relating to Establishing a Tenure Track for Teaching Professors, on file with these minutes.) The intention today is to get additional input on the motions and bring them back for approval at the December faculty meeting. Prof. Boudreau explained that the motions in their current form are a result of a close collaboration between COG, all faculty constituencies (TTTs, TRTs, Deans, Department Heads) and the upper administration – most closely with Provost Soboyejo, who has acted as a liaison with the President and the Board.

Prof. Richman (AE) described the institutional challenge that the motions begin to address as an institutional misalignment between the high value and commitment of our TRT faculty, on the one hand, and WPI's weak institutional commitment to them, on the other. As a matter of fairness, morale, and clarity of vision, there is a now a vital need for greater equity and inclusion of our TRT faculty. More broadly in higher education, faculty structures have become systemically more inequitable as they've become increasingly dependent on non-tenure track faculty without providing them the status of other university professors.

Prof. Boudreau explained that academic freedom across the University has eroded because we have more people taking on more and more teaching responsibilities without the protections needed not only for risk taking but for simply addressing matters of science and technology that increasingly have political and public policy implications. Academic freedom, in turn, is connected to the larger issue of job security, which can be enhanced but not guaranteed by improved long-term contracts. And job security is connected to full participation in faculty governance, which must balance the rights and privileges of all our valued faculty against concerns that the protection of tenure and academic freedom are essential for the strongest form of faculty governance. These three issues (academic freedom, job security, and full participation in governance) can only be addressed as related parts, and the three motions related to a teaching path to tenure address the first issue of academic freedom. The second one will be to work with the administration and with the TRT faculty on secure contracts. And the third will be to work with faculty governance to ensure full participation for all those faculty members who are tenured, on the tenure track, and on secure contracts.

Prof. Richman explained that in 2019-20 there were 128 full-time teaching faculty and 264 TTTs, so the current TTTs are 67.3 percent of the full time faculty engaged in teaching, while the non-tenure track faculty deliver just over half our academic credits. **Prof. Boudreau** summarized the range of teaching activities beyond the classroom (designing new curricula, directing project centers, academic advising, etc.) and the range of service activities that our non-tenure track faculty have taken on as part of their normal loads.

Prof. Richman explained that the first motion establishes a tenure track for teaching faculty, which will enhance our institutional visibility and reputation (as an institution that has solved a problem that has confounded all of higher ed and by creating an environment for teaching faculty to engage in work that in its own right will bring recognition to WPI), will improve our retention and recruitment of the best teaching faculty, and will unify the faculty with respect to shared tenure policies and full participation in faculty governance.

Prof Boudreau described the elements of the proposed tenure criteria. *Teaching practice* must be of high quality and have significant impact, and the criteria describe the specific skills (i.e. enthusiasm, flexibility, inclusivity, etc.) that constitute high quality teaching and the impact (based on the goals imbedded in our teaching mission statement) that teaching should have on our students. *Continuing professional growth and currency* requires that candidates be committed in a manner that has significant impact on their teaching and other learning networks and/or their on scholarly communities. In this category, the criteria provide a list of possible forms of growth and currency, including teaching innovations and experimentation that that have demonstrable positive impacts within and outside of WPI. The third motion provides detailed guidance to candidates and tenure committees on how best to document and assess progress toward meeting these tenure criteria.

Prof. Richman described the three mechanisms by which we will ensure rigor and high standards in evaluating the tenure cases of our teaching faculty: the content and substance of the tenure criteria; the reliability of our existing tenure process; and healthy collaborations (between the Provost, the Deans, Department Heads, department tenure committees, faculty governance including CTAF, and the TRT faculty themselves) that are built into the implementation process. The implementation process is broken down into decisions about the number of tenure lines to be opened each year, who will be placed on the available lines, and the length of the individual probationary periods.

Prof. Boudreau described the second motion, which would revise Part One, Appendix D of the faculty handbook. To address concerns that there may be a shift to hiring primarily teaching mission faculty, the revised appendix (“The Roles and Balance of the Faculty in Carrying Out WPI’s Mission”) includes an institutional goal in which 70 percent of the full-time faculty with teaching responsibilities would be the traditional tenure-track faculty and 30 percent would be the full-time teaching mission faculty. Among the full-time teaching-mission faculty, 50 percent would be tenured or on the tenure-track and the remaining 50 percent would continue as non-tenure track faculty with more secure contracts. An annual report on the faculty population would be given to the faculty to avoid imbalances that have come about in the past, while the appendix includes a flexible statement that the goals can be revisited by the University when needed.

Prof. Richman described three possibilities for establishing appropriate titles for the tenure and tenure track teaching faculty. The first is to align the new titles with tenure status, so that the new TTT teaching faculty would share titles with our current dual-mission TTT faculty. The second is to align the titles (as closely as possible) with function, so that the new TTT teaching faculty would share titles with our current teaching-mission NTT faculty. The third is to establish a third set of titles for the new TTT teaching faculty. Prof. Richman explained that this was still very much an open question and requested feedback on this.

Prof. Dominko opened the floor for questions. **Prof. Smith** (CS) asked if the University would be seriously constrained financially by the new proposal. **Prof. Boudreau** explained that the proposal has been developed with this question in mind and that our COG representatives have been working closely with Provost Soboyejo and Assoc. V.P. Sullivan to assure that the proposal is budgetarily sound. **President Leshin** understood that the proposal to be more constraining for the institution. Her goal is to get to a point where she can confidently tell the board that “we can do this” while not over constraining the institution. In the meantime, President Leshin was very pleased that we are working together.

Prof. Dominko understood Appendix D to be a way to ensure that our common goals are agreed upon and that our progress toward them could be measured tangibly. **Prof. Richman** agreed that the proposal should not over constrain the University, but pointed out that by using language that was too vague in the current version of Appendix D, our annual discussions focused less on the direction of the University, and more on semantic arguments about what was meant by a “significant majority” of credits delivered. Based on that experience, the better approach is to be somewhat specific in the Appendix, but to make it known that there is flexibility because the

numbers in the proposed Appendix D are not exact and that with open discussion and for good reasons, our goals can be revisited.

Prof. Roberts (CHE) thought that the TRT faculty deserve equity and inclusion for their contributions. She agreed that scholarship does not have to be discipline-specific discovery, but was concerned that it has to have some major external impact. She views professional growth and currency as the same as professional development. Despite the concern about the wording, she is in favor of the creating these TTT teaching intensive positions. Prof. Roberts also was concerned that there would be a lack of external clarity if the TTT teaching faculty were to have the same titles as the dual-mission TTT faculty. **Prof. Boudreau** indicated that the motions have been modified several times with respect to the question of titles and that the goal is to weigh both the benefits of each possibility and feedback from the community before finalizing the proposal for a vote.

Prof. DiMassa (HUA) responded that in deciding if it was appropriate for dual-mission TTT faculty members to share their titles with new TTT teaching faculty, it was important to recognize that many of our current NTT teaching faculty, especially those in Humanities and Arts, are already engaged in research.

Prof. Rahbar (CEE) agreed with Prof. Roberts concerning titles, and thought that the criteria should be clear about different expectations for different tenure-track positions. He asked about the degree to which a faculty member in one category would be free to switch to another. **Prof. Boudreau** explained that such a switch could not be made without approval from the Department Head, the Dean, and the Provost.

Prof. Medich (PH) agreed with Prof. Boudreau's view that specific tenure slots are given to departments for specific strategic reasons, and to maintain the integrity of the research program, for example, the specific number of dual-mission TTT slots have to be considered as resources specified for each department..

Prof. Smith (CS) expressed her overwhelming support for the proposal. She thought that, regardless of differences in responsibilities and workload, everyone with equal rights and privileges should also have equal titles. In her view, this principle is already accepted among the current TTT faculty - who have the same titles but very different responsibilities depending on their fields and their departments. She would like to see the proposal as an institutional statement that we grant tenure for the range of work that we do. Prof. Smith also asked how the implementation process would work for faculty members whose primary affiliation has been to interdisciplinary program rather to a department. **Prof. Boudreau** explained that the department head, the appropriate program director, the Dean, and the DTC would make any decisions in this case. **Prof. Richman** pointed out that this is parallel to a problem we also have for current TTTs in interdisciplinary programs and for whom their DTC is not serving them well. For these situations, CTAF is close to proposing Program Tenure Committees, and that solution will be easy to transform onto this process as well.

Prof. Brisson (HUA) suggested that, just as someone currently in a TRT position could apply for an open TTT slot, someone holding a new TTT teaching position should be able to apply for an open dual-mission TTT slot. **Prof. Boudreau** agreed that has always been an option and will continue to be an option, and pointed out that the current proposal doesn't preclude that possibility at all.

Prof. Sanbonmatsu (HUA) expressed his gratitude to all those who have worked on this proposal. In his view, this is the model of what collaborative shared governance looks like. As a matter of equity, it will remedy a long-term structural problem at WPI. In December, the WPI Chapter of the AAUP issued a statement fully supporting the creation of tenure lines for teaching faculty because it is essential to academic freedom. Our chapter shared an earlier version of the proposal with the national office of the AAUP and the AAUP was very enthusiastic about it because it is consistent in with their governing principles.

Prof. Fehribach (MA) expressed his general support for the proposal. He is in favor of having different titles for the different TTT positions because they have distinct teaching and research expectations associated with them. In his view, we need to have distinct titles so that it's clear to external audiences what the differences are.

Prof. Farny (BBT) was in general support of the proposal. She is in favor of using the same titles for the two types of TTT positions. In her view, faculty members aren't defined by their everyday activities, but instead by their inclusion in the tenure process. In addition, Prof. Farny thought that the term "currency" should be more carefully defined in the tenure criteria and she emphasized that it should not refer to any single product or artifact. She understood the need for flexibility in interpreting the criteria, but she was concerned about possible negative consequences of too much ambiguity, especially as might they affect woman and candidates of color. **Prof. Richman** assured Prof. Farny that several elements of the written feedback that he and Prof. Boudreau had received from her and Prof. Demetry before today's meeting will be incorporated into the next draft of the criteria.

Prof. Demetry (ME) stated her unequivocal support for the proposal. In future years, with the tenure path well established, we will better appreciate and judge the work that our teaching mission tenure track colleagues are doing. In Prof. Demetry's view, the current proposal makes clear what the rigorous contributions of the teaching faculty are and can be. She is also in favor of using the same titles for the two types of TTT positions. Prof. Demetry asked if and when criteria will be created for promotion from Associate to Full Professor for tenured teaching faculty members. **Prof. Boudreau** explained that there is no specific plan in place for promotion criteria, but if and when it is needed, it is work that would be lead by COAP. **Prof. Richman** explained that the current proposal does not hinge on those criteria, and that such future work has been put off at least until the current proposal is approved. Such promotion cases would not arise for several years, which means that there will be time to address the promotion criteria before then.

Prof. Simeoni (FPE) supports the proposal because he believes we need to provide our teaching track faculty a path that is parallel to the track for the TTTs. Internally, offering a tenure path will

provide a level of protection for our teaching professors that they deserve. However, in his view, WPI also must be concerned with our external visibility and evaluations. There is an external expectation about the level of research done by TTT faculty. So to be clear to outsiders, our TTT teaching faculty and their titles should be distinguishable from TTT research faculty. This way, we get the benefits of tenure for all types of faculty without diminishing perceptions evaluators may have of our research activities.

Prof. Dominko read a comment that the principal purpose of tenure is to safeguard academic freedom. She suggested that we try to see the need for academic freedom in all our activities, including teaching and even service. **Prof. Boudreau** suggested that we not equate tenure with status, but rather we see it as a fundamental but invisible protection. Tenure has become a status symbol because of the very inequities that we are working to eliminate.

Prof. Dominko expressed her pride in seeing the faculty address this complicated issue, encouraged all in attendance to contact Prof. Richman and Prof. Boudreau with further comments, and thanked the two of them for their presentation and all their work leading up to it.

3. SoF Report

Prof. Dominko conveyed the Board's gratitude, congratulations, and appreciation to all the faculty for all we have done not just to make WPI even stronger position during a difficult time, but for the work we do that will make WPI better in the future.

4. President's Report

President Leshin appreciated today's thoughtful discussion on establishing a teaching path to tenure, and was grateful to Prof. Boudreau and Prof. Richman for their presentation and their thoughtful proposal. She also thanked Prof. Dominko, and Prof. Heilman and all the TRT faculty who have been involved in effort throughout.

President Leshin has watched our early discussions about equity lead to this more creative thinking about how we express the value we place on teaching. She is excited to collaborate on the details of the proposal and she is optimistic that we can secure the Board's strong support of it. As an accredited institution, in principle we are required to protect the academic freedom for all faculty members. But even more fundamentally, we need to align our mission, our values, and our actions. We are asking faculty to make commitments to the institution, so we want the institution to make equal commitments to the faculty.

President Leshin conveyed the Board's thanks for the work that the faculty is doing, she expressed the Board's appreciation for the faculty's creativity, collaboration, and innovation, and she conveyed both her and the Board's understanding of the stress level under which the faculty is working. President Leshin also described our students' feelings of loneliness and the lack of connectedness, and assured the faculty that we will keep working creatively together to address their needs.

5. Provost's Report

Provost Soboyejo cited today's presentation by Prof. Boudreau and Prof. Richman and the management of the discussion by Prof. Dominko as great examples - and was proud - of how our faculty governance system works so well to bring us together as a community to address our most critical issues. He sees how faculty governance and the administration can work together, in this case to provide institutional commitments to the teaching faculty.

Provost Soboyejo expressed his strongest support for the process that has brought us so far on the issue of tenure for our teaching faculty, and he thanked the TRT faculty for their great work, as well. He gave his assurance that the administration is working on the necessary budget, the long-term planning, the contract language, and benchmarking that will result in systemic changes that will strengthen WPI's academic enterprise. Provost Soboyejo emphasized that the whole effort, including the path to tenure for teaching faculty, is consistent with WPI's core values.

Provost Soboyejo urged everyone to be mindful of the wide range of feelings that are being experienced by our students and staff and faculty colleagues at this time, and to be as flexible as possible for as long as possible. He concluded by thanking everyone for all they do for WPI.

6. Closing Announcements

Prof. Servatius (MA) announced that we should get rid of Workday.

7. Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 4:51pm by **Prof. Dominko**.

Respectfully submitted,

Tanja Dominko

Secretary of the Faculty

Addenda on file with these minutes:

Attachment #1: Motions Relating to Establishing a Tenure Track for Teaching Professors