

Teaching Professionals and Tenure

A call for discussion from the Collegiate Senators

For many years, the College has had semi-permanent non-tenure stream faculty. In recent years, the College has worked to make these positions more appropriate for the faculty involved. Within the last decade or so, individuals in these positions changed from having no contracts to contracts of three years. Additionally, titles such as “Senior Lecturer” were introduced. The Dean of the Business School looked to formalize these positions and provide additional security and routes for progression for such individuals. The Business School brought a proposal to the Dean’s Council. The proposal was discussed, modified to address needs of all schools and approved by the Dean’s Council. The titles of the lecturers were mostly changed to either Teaching Professors or Professors of the Practice and the ranks were changed to Assistant, Associate or Full Professor. Also, the lengths of potential contracts for these individuals were increased so that some receive contracts of up to five years; the promotion process was formalized to be more similar to the Tenure and Promotion process that was already occurring on campus. The Teaching Professional positions, however, violate recommendations of AAUP for a maximum of seven years of non-tenured service. Violations of AAUP guidelines should be the cause of substantive discussions since the guidelines were created with the long-term protection of tenure in mind.

To be clear, the Collegiate Senators are not accusing the current administration of attacking tenure through these new Teaching Professional positions. We believe that our current administration is acting with good will regarding these issues. We do, however, believe that the faculty should think strategically about what is the best course of action for the long-term protection of tenure at Wake Forest College.

Do Teaching Professionals Represent a Threat to Tenure?

The issue of concern is whether the Teaching Professionals position represents a threat to tenure, and if so, what can be done to minimize this threat. This is important, because “institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either the individual teacher or the institution as a whole. The common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition” (AAUP). Tenure is always in a precarious situation, always requires defense, and this has never been more true than now.

A report by the AAUP outlines the issues: <http://www.aaup.org/report/professors-practice>. This category of appointment, “might grow substantially, as has been true of other full-time appointments off the tenure track since the late 1960s...the category illustrates an anomaly in how colleges and universities treat faculty members who are not eligible for tenure. On the one hand, institutions have sometimes taken steps to improve the professional status of non-tenure-track faculty. ... On the other hand, the more closely the responsibilities, benefits, and privileges of full-time non-tenure-track faculty come to resemble those of faculty who have tenure, the more anomalous is the

failure to accord to these faculty members the safeguards for academic freedom that accrue with tenure.”

“The AAUP has long held that all full-time teachers, irrespective of their titles, should either be tenured or probationary for tenure, except for those appointed under special circumstances (for example, short-term replacements for faculty members who are on leave). Following from this basic position, the AAUP has been sharply critical of full-time non-tenure-track appointments, pointing to the adverse effects of these appointments for individual faculty members, for students, for academic freedom, and for the academic profession as a whole. ...The argument that non-tenure-track appointments endanger academic freedom is yet more compelling, however, when aimed at professors of practice.”

“Freedom in teaching, no less than freedom in research, suffers if faculty, subject to periodic review and serving in positions renewable indefinitely at the pleasure of the administration, fear losing their positions because their opinions are deemed too controversial. ...We recognize that those who support professor-of-practice appointments, while they respect principles of academic freedom and tenure, would prefer to carve out an exception to these principles with regard to full-time teachers who are not expected to expand knowledge through research and publication. But severing the connection between teaching and tenure impairs the freedom to teach.”

The Dean’s Faculty Staffing Model

Dean Jacque Fetrow has developed a faculty staffing model that seeks to protect tenure in the College. The impetus of the construction of the model was the last increase in the number of students in which no money was initially set aside for new faculty. Her model calls for 70% of all faculty teaching during a semester to be tenure stream, 15% to be teaching professions and the remaining 15% to be a combination of temporary faculty including Teacher-Scholar Postdocs and Visiting Assistant Professors. By reaching the goals of her model and maintaining those percentages, perhaps some of the problems associated with non-tenure stream teaching professionals can be averted. *The faculty should have a full discussion of the benefits and detriments of her staffing model.*

Faculty Governance

Now that the Teaching Professionals have been formalized, there is an expectation that they will be sitting on important institutional committees such as CAP, CAA, Committee on Student Life, etc. There have been occasions in the past in which the Dean’s representatives on these important institutional committees come into these meetings with an expectation that everyone will vote in a certain manner. Pushing back against these expectations can be sometimes difficult. It would even more difficult for someone who does not have the protection of tenure; particularly, if this person’s contract was going to be renewed in the not too distant future.

Concerns for the Future

We see three real or potential problems with the current model.

1. Individuals in the Teaching Professionals position will be expected to do academic work without the protections of academic freedom. The work of the University will suffer as a result.
2. Increases in the number of individuals in these positions will threaten academic freedom. Note that the percentage goals in Dean Fetrow's Faculty Staffing model have not been met in any year.
3. The College Faculty should not assume that the President of Wake Forest University will always come from a liberal arts college background and its corresponding culture on the meaning of tenure. In the future, the President of WFU might come from a medical school or business school background. Such a president may not understand the importance of tenure for College Faculty. Additionally, such a person may not understand why some faculty have tenure and others have three to five year contracts.

Questions for the faculty

The following questions arise:

1. Should the guidelines for teaching professionals be revised so that they follow AAUP guidelines? This would mean that instead of a series of three to five year contracts, they would be tenured as teaching professionals.
2. In contrast, is the current situation acceptable to the faculty and the Senate?
3. Is there a compromise position? For example, some agreed upon restrictions?
4. How do we proceed? E.g., make a recommendation to the college faculty as a whole.
5. Should the faculty vote to support Dean Fetrow's faculty staffing model and encourage the administration to find funds to fully implement it?
6. Should the Teaching Professionals be allowed to serve on major committees of the faculty? If so, what additional protections can we provide them?
7. How can the Faculty Senate be restructured to protect Teaching Professionals? Currently, they do not have representation on the Senate and cannot serve on the Senate.

8. What other concerns and problems are there that should be addressed as we discuss these issues?