Tenure for Teaching Intensive Appointments at Portland State University: A Green Paper for the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

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“An organization of intellectual workers can have the greatest significance for society as a whole by influencing public opinion and education. Indeed, it is its proper task to defend academic freedom, without which a healthy development of democracy is impossible.”

Albert Einstein, “Message to Intellectuals,” 1948

Tenure for Teaching Intensive Appointments at Portland State University: A Green Paper* for the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

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Fall 2013

Summary

This paper explores alignment between 2012-13 CLAS visioning and planning reports and state and national trends around faculty mix in higher education. It argues for pursuing the instructional excellence highlighted in many of the CLAS reports by investing in tenure. Tenure anchors authentic academic freedom through robust peer review and shared governance, the pillars of academic life. Tenure also provides the tested and proven means for providing a faculty stability, professional development, and an appropriate reward structure. This paper recommends expanded pathways to tenure, particularly for teaching intensive appointments traditionally described as "full-time fixed-term" at Portland State University. This adjustment would likely entail more systematic peer review of teaching as part of the evaluation process and reward structure for all faculty at PSU. Departments might foster more active roles for curriculum and hiring committees as well. CLAS is poised to lead the campus in converting full-time teaching intensive positions to tenure-eligible and tenured faculty appointments. Such conversions have ample precedent at PSU. And so doing protects and enhances the college’s acknowledged “abundance of faculty talent, commitment and experience in promoting students success,” and steers PSU toward a more equitable and secure future.¹

CLAS Task Force Reports Highlights

Among the many insights of the CLAS reports, three seem especially salient for a discussion of the place of tenure in instructional excellence. First is the striking emphasis in the Development Task Force Report on student-faculty relationships. The report takes the long view of these relationships; much as education is couched today as “life-long learning,” faculty contacts begin with potential PSU students in high school or during community college, proceed through the longish undergraduate years, and then beyond, to career launch, graduate study, or even to later professional collaboration. More consistent

* A “green” paper is a document for the discussion and crafting of policy; a “white” paper explicates a settled or changed policy. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_paper
documentation of long-term mentoring, of student success in academic achievement during the college years, and tracking employment after graduation would raise the profile of such relationships and their value. In other words, building PSU’s alumni relations for fundraising means nurturing faculty-student relations in the classroom, the campus, and the community, potentially K-through-life. A campus faculty rooted in a stable and committed community of scholars, rather than a shifting series of contingent contract workers, seems essential to the realization of this tested, and indeed treasured, vision of higher education.

Second, the Visioning Task force noted and emphasized the need to "change the distribution of tenure line and contingent faculty in order to create a strong, permanent faculty." The main argument repeated in this document was that a "strong, permanent faculty is central to student success and the creation of a world class learning environment." The report also emphasized the current profile of the college's faculty: a seasoned and prized body of professionals to be nourished and rewarded not squandered or exploited. Similarly, the Enrollment Management and Curriculum group repeatedly stressed the need for “investment in tenure lines” and the importance of “career-length investments...to support the curriculum,” in terms of innovation, quality, consistency, and responsiveness to student needs. Each task force cited research demonstrating that long term investment in faculty development, not hit or miss rotation of course offerings and instructors, yields an innovative and responsive curriculum.

Like the Enrollment and Curriculum report, the Faculty-Staff Development Task Force noted the idea of tenure for teaching appointments to be a “promising possibility for the college,” but declined to pursue the idea for two reasons. First was the "unevenness of expectations across the college" and the confusing proliferation of “incoherent job titles” which made generalizations about current and past practices difficult. Second, the report echoed the finding of the Minority Report from the New Faculty Ranks (2012), namely, that neither our campus or the state system has explained why teaching intensive appointments do not merit the academic freedom that comes with tenure. A clear statement of the value and place of tenure in the work of the college is acutely needed just now, and the Faculty-Staff Development Report recommends that "clarification of faculty career paths and promotion guidelines should precede any decisions about instituting tenure lines for teaching faculty." This green paper suggests placing tenure—meaning academic freedom, peer review, high standards, and shared governance—at the heart of that discussion.

Oregon in Context

Tenure is the ship that carries the precious cargo of academic freedom, peer review, and shared governance. That ship remains sturdy but it has been jostled and crowded by other vessels and swimmers on the seas of higher education. The national trends and diagnostics about the composition of higher education faculty are well known and undisputed. Over the last thirty years, the ratio of tenure track to non-tenure track faculty has roughly reversed, from 70:30 to 30:70. Notably, the absolute number of tenure lines across the country has stayed roughly the same or even grown a bit; that’s the sturdy ship. The growth has been in hiring off the tenure track, of people wearing little more than a life jacket bobbing in the ocean of a now global education labor market. The number of college students has increased dramatically; between 2000 and 2010, U.S. enrollment increased 37 percent, from 15.3 million to 21.0 million, much of it among full-time students. The world (maybe except for Japan) has never been younger or more hungry for education. Indeed, the private sector is snapping around the ocean of these global education markets, eager to sell learning or skills over the internet or poised to hollow out weaker campuses by selling them technological “platforms” to deliver on line courses. For their part, elite colleges and universities seek a return on investing their prestige abroad, sometimes with minimal
regard for genuine academic freedom. In order to balance their budgets, poorer public institutions import tuition fees and gain global relevance by marketing to a geographically mobile transnational nascent middle class. Oregon schools charge foreign and out-of-state students more tuition than citizen students. The good news in all of this is that there is no shortage of teaching work in current education markets, despite the debt crisis facing far too many undergraduates in the U.S.

Technology has been the distracting shiny object in this larger ocean of neoliberal marketing efforts. There is no job shortage nor have machines replaced instructors. Rather, management choices have eroded tenure and degraded faculty work conditions, charging students more for less to boot. The private sector crows about inexorable revolutions to market gizmos to nervous and abandoned public higher education administrators faced with shrinking budgets. In this scenario, public universities shift their feet uneasily, unsure about how to spend diminishing state dollars and unclear about what exactly it’s worth asking students to go into debt for. PSU’s "reThink Vision" draft statement from March, 2013 states: “The goal of reThink is to make the university a local and national leader in academic innovation that empowers learners—everywhere, anytime—whether online, in the classroom, in the lab, in the community or engaged in student life.” This sweeping statement requires at minimum a highly committed, supported, and rewarded faculty in order to be considered much less realized. After the media buzz of last winter, MOOCs as a fix for broad, on demand access to top faculty is falling flat. These courses are pedagogically narrow (“sage on the stage”) and turn intellectual stagnation into a virtue. As one technology shill put it: “much of the teaching work can be scaled, automated or even duplicated by recording and replaying the same lecture over and over again on video,” which might save money in the very short term but fails as a vision of an educated free citizenry (or professoriate).

Tenure and academic freedom are the screaming silences in Oregon public universities’ effort to be heard in the political sphere. The oral folklore about political lobbying in Salem warns us against ever raising these topics; somehow “tenure” disqualifies higher education’s claims on public commitment and investment. Oregon is hardly unique, as discourses of cost-benefit analysis and return on investment dominate the mainstream media and state legislatures on the topic of education. At other moments, tenure-bashing feels like a national pastime. Our Oregon political leadership remains agnostic at best about academic freedom and tenure. Politicians focus instead on quantifiable goals, like graduation rates and time-to-degree, enunciated in 2008 as 40-40-20,” with only vague interest in exactly how those goals are achieved. Recent changes in governance make higher education ever more political, with control consolidated by upper administration, state legislatures, and new boards of trustees rather than providing more resources for students to achieve their educational potential or for better support of faculty work.

The administrative apparatus expressed through the revised Oregon Administrative Rules puts a target on tenure’s back. The 2011 revised description of tenure appointments is largely evacuated of meaning, especially when compared to the detail found in a new set of job categories entitled “Non-Tenure Track.” The language in the new OARs gives ample room for Oregon to deliver on 40-40-20 constrained

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* Approved by the Oregon Legislature in 2011 in Senate Bill 253, the “40-40-20 Goal” is for 40% of adult Oregonians to hold a bachelor’s or advanced degree, 40% to have an associate’s degree or a meaningful postsecondary certificate, and all adult Oregonians to hold a high school diploma or equivalent by the year 2025.  
[http://www.ous.edu/partner/404020](http://www.ous.edu/partner/404020)
only by what accredit ing agencies will tolerate for campuses to pass muster in terms of tenure ratios. Recent reformist efforts around expanded ranks, promotion schemes, and steps for pay increases also bracket the issue of tenure. This avoidance entrenches the notion that academic freedom is a dispensable part of academia and puts tenure itself in further jeopardy as the minority dwindles. It is up to our campus to give weight and meaning to tenure and academic freedom as constitutive of our practice and as absolutely essential to the value of our interactions with students across the educational life cycle.

The urgency for rearticulating professional practice is well upon us. As many of the CLAS documents suggest, today’s college presents an uneven field of approaches, limited tracking of best practices and outcomes, and spotty accountability to our students. Departments are often most deeply committed to the development of tenure-line appointments, rooted in their training in the disciplines, their intimate contact with student learning needs, and their long-term view of the curriculum. The current upper administration is moving in the opposite direction, however. That OAA terminated a tenure line in Honors before the seven year clock had run seems a harbinger of lightness with which tenure lines are held. In current collective bargaining, upper administration opposes AAUP’s efforts to retain the supportive language in article 18 of the contract regarding fixed-term faculty, threatening to reduce this segment of the faculty to at-will employees of the university. Their stance is precisely the opposite taken by AAUP nationally and by some departments in CLAS, like history, that is, to structure FTF appointments in such a way as to roughly parallel the guarantors of academic freedom (longer term appointments) and peer review (procedures, timing). In between these two poles is the CLAS leadership, mediating these tensions and pulls. The P&T guidelines retain language permitted fixed term appointments’ conversion to tenure eligibility. “A fixed term appointment does not foreclose the possibility that a department may wish to consider that faculty member for a tenure-related appointment.” A fuller rationale for such conversions could help diffuse this practice to salutary effect across the college. CLAS leadership is well-positioned to energize the potential in this document. Like the efforts to normalize the various affirmative action hires in the late 1970s, we need a correction in CLAS to pull together the faculty hired to meet shifting needs around enrollment and technology. Conversion to tenure is the way to go.

**Stabilizing the Faculty Through Tenure**

Having articulated tenure almost a century ago, the American Association of University Professors today takes the position that tenure should embrace all or nearly all faculty who generate, analyze, and teach current research in the academic disciplines. The structural and ideological contradiction at PSU between prioritizing student success in the classroom and rewarding primarily research through tenure needs resolution. It is not sustainable to expect continued self-sacrifice from the fixed-term faculty as they create and carry out an increasing share of undergraduate teaching, the activity that is the most visible, valued, and enduring work of our institution in the state. To be sure, almost all faculty are being asked to do more with less. Today, nearly all faculty teach more students without concomitant support in IT, library materials, or sufficient graduate assistance. This stress on resources is particularly ominous (and unfair) during the recession, during which students are needier and more fragile than in flush times. While almost everyone’s class sizes are growing, NTT faculty teach more students overall than those on tenure track at PSU, and they do so without meaningful academic freedom. "Academic freedom in the classroom is not merely a matter of constitutional free speech nor should it be regarded as a privilege of the faculty," notes education sociologist William Pendleton, "It is a fundamental requisite of effective education."
Tenure delivers not just job security and efficiency (i.e., fewer but more robust appointments) but enables genuine participation in a community of self-regulating professional scholars, the basis for free inquiry in a free society. Moreover, job security is not the same as academic freedom, which involves the engagement of a community of scholars, not just an employment sinecure. PSU’s motto, “Let Knowledge Serve the City” entails the idea of education as a social project of engagement: the intergenerational work of discovery, reflection, application, and revision. This mission involves a vision of the public good, a shared, negotiated sense of value, rather than a privatized and strictly monetized one. Academic freedom is essential to seeking and fostering this sense of shared purpose. AAUP has held since 1915: “The common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition.”

The contradiction between privileging teaching in faculty work assignments and in our marketing to the public (including politicians) but tenuring primarily for research needs correcting at PSU. Tenure must be re-centered in our approach to excellence and accountability to our students. The practice of rewarding research and scholarship with tenure is a relatively recent phenomenon in U.S. higher education in general, and on the PSU campus in particular, probably up until the early 1980s. Research on this question would demystify present practice. AAUP reminds us: "Tenure was not designed as a merit badge for research-intensive faculty or as a fence to exclude those with teaching-intensive commitments." Unless teaching---not just the 'scholarship of teaching'---earns the status and professional imprimatur of the academy’s highest mode of validation, faculty face an uphill and exploitative struggle to maintain standards, critical practice, and adequate control over the curriculum and their classrooms (and, to be sure, research agendas). Rather than work in strict hierarchy, departments or groups of departments might usefully reframe their work as being part of a research community whose members collaborate in crafting and advancing the curriculum. This approach fosters a way to “use intellectual commitment to creative meaningful faculty cohorts and build genuine cohesion” around instruction. This kind of cohesion is crucial if faculty members are to meaningfully negotiate pressures of digitization and online learning, with all the out-sourcing and perma-tempting of labor variously implied.

Such cohesion is built into the profession primarily through the peer culture of criticism, review, and mentoring. These behaviors and traditions foster openness while mitigating the scattershot or “free for all” approach; they can foster excellence and accountability without a “universal design,” reductive approach. Openness and high standards must be defended for our students, especially in Oregon where access is a vital and historic value. Education scholar Michael Peters recently restated the power of horizontal learning and critical practice as the big “what’s missing” in the educational technology buzz: namely, self-critical and self-regulating practices among faculty. Peters states:

"peer philosophies" are at the heart of a radical notion of "openness" and would advocate the significance of peer governance, peer review, peer learning and peer collaboration as a collection of values that form the basis for open institutions and open management philosophies…. Expressive and aesthetic labor ("creative labor") demands institutional structures for developing "knowledge cultures" as "flat hierarchies" that permit reciprocal academic exchanges as a new basis for public institutions.

The idea of “reciprocal academic exchanges,” could open out in any number of directions, especially when enabled by technology. But the visioning documents cry out for some common ground from which to speak and engage one another: embedding more of the faculty more directly and actively in the “knowledge culture” of CLAS itself.
Tenure should be the container for our knowledge culture, as it is the idiom and mechanism for self-regulation and self-knowledge. And structurally, as Mary Burgen of the University of Indiana, observes: “Once the members of this [faculty] network are considered to be disposable by means other than the serious judgments of peers within their fields, the trust embedded in its procedures must wither.” To this end, the national AAUP recommends “moving contingent faculty to tenure-track slots.” A number of campuses across the country have so moved, some achieving this goal through collective bargaining, some through initiatives by faculty senates or other modes of faculty organization. "The best practice for institutions of all types is to convert the status of contingent appointments to appointments eligible for tenure with only minor changes in job description. This means that faculty hired contingently with teaching as the major component of their workload will become tenured or tenure eligible primarily on the basis of successful teaching.” The history of awarding tenure at PSU (and elsewhere) might show that we are really tapping into older traditions in order to keep up with the times.

Allaying Concerns

**Rewarding teaching excellence with academic freedom via tenure “dilutes” the value of tenure.** This position misstates the purpose of tenure, which is to foster free inquiry and to firmly root shared governance rather than confer a prize for research and publication. While inaccurate, this position reflects something of the inner workings of academic life. Within fields and disciplines, scholarship—rather than teaching—tends to open outward within a highly articulated communication apparatus, reinforced through conferences, journals, publications, hiring, grants, prize committees, and peer review. While nothing prevents the peer review of teaching (or service) for tenure, evaluation procedures around teaching have not kept up with the explosion in peer review of scholarship. Evaluation of teaching is often where students, the “consumers” (“products”?) of teaching, weigh in on faculty effectiveness and preparation in the classroom. Teaching is usually understood as activity primarily between students and faculty, rather than horizontally among the faculty. It is worth noting that in the PSU P&T guidelines “scholarly accomplishments suggest continuing growth and high potential can be demonstrated through activities of” research, teaching, and community outreach (p. 3).

For at least twenty years, PSU has fostered culture of teaching innovation and professional development through the Center for Academic Excellence. Some of this work is reflected in the current P&T guidelines. Recently, CAE has significantly morphed into a conduit for helping faculty navigate and use instructional technology. On line learning’s connection to vital aspects of academic freedom, like intellectual property rights, free expression, and security/surveillance issues remains unclear on our campus. In order to appropriately assess teaching and reward it with academic freedom bestowed by tenure, however, teaching, including on line teaching, must be more central to the horizontal engagements among faculty. The assessment of teaching work by faculty must be explicit, consistent, and uniformly valued by the college in order to advance both academic freedom and excellence in instruction. The thing that dilutes the value of tenure is less tenure.

**Faculty not hired through a national search have only a marginal claim on the curriculum and are by definition less desirable or weaker than hires “tested’ in a national (or even international) pool.**

Some campuses have rules to insure that tenure-line hires occur through national searches as a bulwark against nepotism, favoritism, and other corruptions of power. In this spirit, our AAUP contract stipulates
that fixed term hires should come through a committee process, rather than at the sole discretion of a department chair. This sort of mindfulness is appropriate and necessary for forthright, equitable hiring practices. But accumulated long-standing negligence on this matter—abetted by fluctuating budgets and the need to fill classrooms on a very short term basis—hurts the faculty hired outside a committee process (another domain of peer review) and sets a precedent for marginalizing their careers within the college. Scrutiny and reform of such practices at the departmental level is important to reclaim faculty control over the curriculum and to put faculty imprimatur on the entire major or degree, 101 to 499.

A national search engages departments in ways that confer validation and prestige in a hire, but such engagement could take place for a hire scaled locally or regionally. National searches often mobilize discussions of curriculum within the college and department; this can be less so in the case of fixed term hires (data here would be helpful). The folklore grown up around these practices is that adjunct and fixed term hires are easier because their teaching assignments need not go through a curriculum committee or approval process (like a tenure-line hire). This creates a departmental scenario in which tenure line faculty teach “the” curriculum and fixed-term faculty teach...other things?

Shadow practices proliferate that spread exploitation and extract complicity. Fixed-term faculty carried bulging student enrollments through the recession and beyond yet occluded hiring and firing practices hide these colleagues’ movement in and out of the faculty. Teaching recognition in CLAS, usually awarded by upper division students, structurally neglects FTF faculty who cluster in lower division course offerings, hiding their labor and accomplishments and depriving their work of recognition and reward. A highly disruptive practice of cancelling courses and releasing faculty 1-3 weeks into the term has emerged of late. This atrocious practice turns courses, students, and faculty expertise into disposable things, imposing on remaining staff to pick up the slack and leaving students in the lurch.

Sometimes, national searches “fail” and cannot always guarantee a quality hire. Knowing this, our campus, like most, retains capacity to make “target of opportunity” hires for a variety of reasons, to take advantage of an especially outstanding individual or in order to diversify the faculty (or both). Major talents can and do show up at the doors of Portland State University. It is time to normalize their relationship to their departments, the college, and, most importantly, our students.

**Excellence in teaching is always tied to an active scholarly agenda involving original research and publication.** There is simply no way to prove this statement to be either true or false. Earning the terminal degree, especially a doctorate, qualifies a practitioner to assess other scholars’ arguments, methods, and interpretations. Some faculty keep on investigating and bring their findings into the classroom; some do not. Most faculty do not teach in their specialty but offer introductory, survey, or general courses to a wide spectrum of students. Academic folklore about the “rock star” professor who can’t teach or who doesn’t really teach at much all muddles our thinking and harms our case to the public. Sometimes great researchers make great teachers but I have yet to see a reliable social science metric to predict or produce such an outcome. As a Rutgers faculty committee put it in 2008: “The question is unresolved by current research and is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future.”

Without a robust and consistent peer review of teaching as a basis for reward including tenure, discussions about the quality of teaching relative to appointment structure will simply go in circles.
Great college professors are appropriately trained and credentialed, keep up with the literature in their fields, and rigorously engage with students in a pedagogically informed manner. Sometimes that person is doing original research, sometimes not. The mentoring and peer review inherent in the tenure process can foster, recognize, and reward instruction in its many components: scholarly engagement, community connections, and professional growth. The tenure structure fosters a culture of excellence in instruction by extending peer review in the service of teaching and curriculum development. In addition, peer review of teaching is a critically important method of mitigating quantifiable or ideologically-driven assessments of student learning from outside credentialing agencies, boards of trustees, and government bodies. As Pendleton puts it: “rigorous educational and scholarly goals must remain first in efforts to make things better,” and “the faculty should have primary control over these goals and they should have the authority to resist efforts to subvert them to any other purposes.”

Historically, academia possesses ample means for making such evaluations both from the recent past and from new energy in peer review of teaching. Much of the value of an authentic liberal education is only visible over the course of a life time, both in the faculty and in our students. Integrating, rather than dividing the faculty around tenure and academic freedom strengthens us. How else to fulfill the mission of the college: “Advancing excellence in learning and scholarship in CLAS is the linchpin upon which rests this university as a public enterprise.”

### ADDITIONAL SOURCES


### NOTES

1 “Phase III Visioning and Planning Task Force Committee Report,” Spring 2013. For full text and related phase II reports, see [https://sites.google.com/a/pdx.edu/clas-phase-i-final-reports/?pli=1](https://sites.google.com/a/pdx.edu/clas-phase-i-final-reports/?pli=1)

See also “Proposed Changes to OAR [Oregon Administrative Rules] 580-020-0005,” 2 December 2011. The description for “Tenure-Track and Tenured Faculty” borders on empty: “Appointment for individuals who are primarily engaged in research at a level normally appropriate for a professorial rank.” By contrast, “Lecturer” reads: “A Non-Tenure Track Faculty appointment for individuals with unclassified instructional appointments whose functions may include significant responsibilities for graduate level instruction. The appointment may also include upper division undergraduate instruction. Such appointments must include significant mentoring and advising responsibilities and a significant measure of responsibility for graduate education. Appointments in the lecturer series will also require the terminal degree (or its professional equivalent for certain adjunct appointments), but the holding of a terminal degree in itself does not constitute an argument for appointment in the lecturer series.”


8 Oregon University System, “From Goal to Reality: 40-40-20 Report,” May 2012. Regarding online providers like Western Governor’s University, a report to the State Board of Education’s Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development asked “But do WGU online courses provide all the information a student needs to be highly educated,” asked in 2012. Then, in the next breath: “Does this matter?” Preliminary Report: Western Governors University Work Group, Higher Education Coordinating Committee (November 2012), p. 3. For WGU, see: http://www.wgu.edu/


10 For conservative attack on accreditation, see Heritage Foundation position: http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/09/accreditation-removing-the-barrier-to-higher-education-reform. Authors advocate that “reform can and should be driven by the private sector so that the skills students receive are the same tools valued by employers. Policymakers, lawmakers, and business leaders need to resist the efforts of existing institutions of higher education to thwart this necessary change.”


18 Nelson, *No University is an Island*, pp. 104, 108.

19 A number of these issues were raised in the PSU forum “Expanding On Line Education: Faculty Concerns,” 14 May 2013.


21 “Teaching at Rutgers: A Proposal to Convert Part-time to Full-Time Appointments and Instructional Full time Non Tenure Track Appointments to Tenure Track appointments, 2008,” p. 4.

22 AAUP, “College and University Governance: The University of Virginia Governing Board’s Attempt to Remove the President,” Report issued, March, 2013. According to AAUP’s investigation, a significant part of the disconnect between the Board and the campus concerned the place of on line teaching in the curriculum.

