Auburn University Post-Tenure Review Policy

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Provost's Policy for a Triggered PTR Mechanism Commencing in 2008

I. Purpose

This document, prepared by the Provost's Office after consultation with faculty leadership, outlines the post-tenure review policy to be used by the Office of the Provost beginning with the 2008-2009 academic year. Post-tenure review (PTR) is intended to support faculty development and productivity. It considers the professional quality with which faculty members discharge the academic duties associated with their positions. It does not consider whether the previously tenured faculty member would meet current standards for the awarding of tenure. The policy on post-tenure review is not a dismissal policy and should not be viewed as such; the University's Dismissal Policy appears in Section 16 of Chapter 3 of the Faculty Handbook.

The purpose of post-tenure review at Auburn University is to enhance public trust in the University by ensuring that the faculty holds itself accountable to high professional standards. As chief academic officer of Auburn University, it is the responsibility of the provost—with advice from faculty leadership—to formulate, implement, enforce, and review and revise as needed the University's policy and procedures for post-tenure review. Post-tenure review is a natural extension of Auburn University's process of annual faculty evaluation as specified in the Faculty Handbook. PTR requires tenured faculty whose annual overall performance is found unacceptable twice within any six-year period to undergo more extensive review, prepare a written plan for performance improvement, implement this plan, and show progress in restoring performance to a satisfactory (or even exemplary) level.

II. Background

Post-tenure review policies have been adopted at many institutions of higher education across the USA in an effort to restore public trust in academics. The American Association for Higher Education has tracked the progress and results of PTR in a series of comprehensive reports (Licata & Morreale, 2002; Licata & Brown, 2004; Licata & Morreale, 2006), and the American Association of University Professors (1999) has provided helpful commentary on procedures for PTR. There are two primary mechanisms for PTR. Universal PTR reviews all tenured faculty members within the university across a set period of time. Triggered PTR, on the other hand, calls for more extensive review of only those tenured faculty members whose annual reviews document deficiencies that need to be addressed. Both systems can be effective, but triggered systems are far more efficient in terms of effort, time, and cost. In order for a triggered system to be effective, however, a university must already have implemented an effective annual review system for faculty, given that the annual review serves as the trigger mechanism for post-tenure review.
During the 2006-2007 academic year the provost of Auburn University implemented a universal PTR mechanism on a pilot basis. This decision was made because an audit of AU's existing faculty review system indicated that considerable improvement in the process of annual evaluation was necessary before AU could move to a triggered mechanism. In 2007 the provost mandated minimum standards for faculty evaluation in every department, and a second audit of the faculty annual review process showed considerable improvement in methods used across the University. Before the 2007-2008 academic year the provost provided mandatory training for all department heads/chairs in how to conduct faculty annual reviews, but retained the universal PTR mechanism for one more year. Post-tenure review was carried out successfully in 2007-2008, but the universal mechanism proved to be cumbersome, time consuming, expensive, and inefficient. The clear improvement of the faculty annual review process now makes implementation of the more efficient trigger mechanism feasible at Auburn University. Thus the 2008-2009 PTR process will be one whereby more extensive review and planning is triggered by an overall unacceptable performance evaluation as documented during the faculty annual review process.

III. Faculty Annual Review

The faculty annual review process for Auburn University is described as follows in Chapter Three of the Faculty Handbook:

All department heads and unit heads shall conduct at least one yearly review before April 30 with each faculty member to evaluate his or her performance and to discuss his or her future development. In order to review the faculty member fairly, the head shall request a current vita and any supporting material the head or the faculty member deems appropriate prior to the review. More frequent reviews may be conducted at the discretion of the faculty member or the department head.

In the case of faculty members who have not achieved tenure or promotion to associate professor or professor, particular care shall be taken by the department head to relate the faculty member’s job performance to the promotion and tenure criteria set forth in this document. Significant achievements or deficiencies which might enhance or impede the candidate’s progress toward higher academic rank or tenure shall be noted.

The head shall prepare a written report covering the major points of the conference. A copy of the report shall be provided to the faculty member within a month of the conference. The faculty member shall be asked to sign it as confirmation of having seen it. If the faculty member does not agree with material in the report, he or she may write a response to be appended to the report. One copy of the signed report and response, if there is one, is to be retained for the faculty member’s departmental personnel file; another copy is to be given to the faculty member. This report is to remain confidential, available only for the use of the concerned faculty member and any University officials who have supervisory power over the faculty member.
The annual review process described above applies to all tenure-track faculty members at AU, including those who have already earned tenure, with the exception of faculty members holding full-time administrative assignments, who are evaluated using a different mechanism. It is an implicit assumption within this process that faculty members whose performance is found to be below expectations during the annual review will take the steps needed to restore performance to a satisfactory (or exemplary) level.

The following are the minimum standards for departmental/school/college faculty annual reviews (FAR). Each FAR must be typewritten and include:

- The department head/chair's (or dean's) signature
- The faculty member's signature
- The nature of the faculty member's assignment, including the percentage of assignment devoted to teaching, research, outreach/extension, administration, and service
- A clear indication of any change (including the percentage assignment) in the faculty member's assignment for the coming year
- Coverage of university mission areas (teaching, research, outreach/extension) in alignment with the faculty member's individual assignment
- An indication of the faculty member's performance in each of the university mission areas consistently using the following descriptors: "exemplary," "exceeds expectations," "meets expectations," "marginal," "unacceptable."
- Qualitative evaluative comments, and
- An indication of the faculty member's overall performance level using the following descriptors: "exemplary," "exceeds expectations," "meets expectations," "marginal," "unacceptable."

If the faculty annual review is to be used effectively as a trigger for post-tenure review, it is essential that faculty members know where they stand with respect to their performance. Overall "unacceptable" performance must clearly be specified as such on the faculty annual review form. It is the responsibility of every department head/chair and dean to ensure that the annual faculty review is conducted properly in accordance with University policy and that any faculty member whose overall performance is judged "unacceptable" be clearly notified of such in writing on the evaluation form. The Office of the Provost will continue to audit all annual faculty reviews to make certain the minimum standards listed above are met consistently throughout the University.
IV. **The Trigger Mechanism**

An overall "unacceptable" annual evaluation will put the tenured faculty member on warning that the PTR process may be triggered by a second overall* "unacceptable" annual evaluation received during the next five years. (In other words, two overall unacceptable annual evaluations over a six year period will trigger PTR.) It shall be the department head/chair's responsibility, in consultation with the dean, to notify in writing, by May 15 of each year, the faculty member and the Office of the Provost whenever PTR is triggered by a second overall "unacceptable" evaluation during any six year period. Failure to provide this notification does not negate the requirement for PTR.

* The overall score is to be determined by the composite of the weighted evaluations of the faculty member's workload assignments.

V. **Commencement of the Policy**

This policy becomes effective for the 2008-2009 academic year. Annual faculty evaluations conducted in Spring, 2008 (which considered the faculty member's work during calendar year 2007) are considered "year one" for the purpose of implementing this policy. Faculty whose performance was judged overall as "unacceptable" for calendar year 2007 are thus put on notice that a second overall evaluation of "unacceptable" occurring over the next five years (calendar years 2008-2012) will trigger PTR. Evaluations for years prior to 2007 are not to be considered under this triggering mechanism.

VI. **Review of Tenured Faculty Holding Full-Time Administrative Posts**

Faculty members holding full-time administrative assignments are to be evaluated by their administrative supervisors. They serve in their administrative posts at the pleasure of the University. They are exempt from PTR as faculty while serving as full-time administrators. However, any tenured faculty member whose administrative term expires becomes subject to the PTR triggering mechanism described in Section IV above.

VII. **Review Criteria**

The review assesses the quantity and quality of the faculty member's work over the preceding six years with respect to her or his assigned duties in terms of teaching, research, outreach/extension, and professional and university service. These criteria are stated in general terms as the basis of an overall policy applicable to a wide range of academic disciplines. The criteria are flexible to accommodate differing expectations in different disciplines and changing assignments at different stages of faculty careers. The criteria for appraisal should reflect the overall mission of the unit or department and be sufficiently flexible to accommodate faculty with differing responsibilities who contribute to the mission of Auburn University in varied ways. The criteria shall be applied in a manner that respects and safeguards first-amendment rights and academic freedom, and that produces a fair result. The application of the criteria shall not be biased by consideration of the faculty member's race, sex, religion, national origin, age, physical handicap, marital status, or sexual orientation.
VIII. **Materials to be Reviewed**

Once a faculty member has been identified for post-tenure review as described in Section IV—and the Office of the Provost and the faculty member have been notified by the faculty member's dean and department head/chair—the Office of the Provost will send instructions to the faculty member, department head/chair, and dean regarding how to prepare the faculty member's PTR packet. The faculty member and department head/chair are to prepare materials for review following these instructions, then submit them to the Office of the Provost through the Office of the Dean. The dean has the right and responsibility to review the packet before it is submitted to the Office of the Provost, and to comment on the packet as desired. The materials for review include:

1. **Annual reviews by the department head/chair (or dean if the school has no departments) for the previous six years.** (Note that, for confidentiality purposes, these reviews will be retained in the Office of the Provost and will not be shared with anyone who is not in a direct line of administrative authority over the faculty member.)

2. A current, comprehensive *curriculum vitae*.

3. A summary of accomplishments and plans during the faculty member's past six years at Auburn University, prepared by the faculty member, not to exceed two pages in length.

4. A letter of evaluation, not to exceed two pages, to the provost from the department head/chair through the dean (or from the dean if a school has no departments), that describes the duties assigned to the faculty member during the review period and assesses the satisfactoriness of the faculty member's overall performance of the assigned work. The department head/chair is expected to consider the viewpoints of all tenured faculty in the department while preparing this letter. The procedure for doing so is described below in Section IX.

5. If the faculty member wishes to waive his or her rights of confidentiality, copies of the faculty member's annual reviews for the previous six years may also be included in the materials submitted for review.

**Advice from Tenured Faculty**

Prior to preparation of the department head/chair's letter (mentioned in Section VIII, item 4), the department head/chair is to make available to all tenured faculty within the department for their review (a) the *curriculum vitae* and (b) the summary of accomplishments and plans prepared by the faculty member. The tenured faculties are to inspect these documents and vote (by secret ballot: yes, no, abstain) whether or not the faculty member under review is discharging satisfactorily the academic duties associated with his or her position. The faculty member under review is to be informed of the results of the vote. The results of the vote—including the actual numerical vote—shall be included in the department head/chair's letter.
University PTR Committee

The university-wide Post-Tenure Review Committee shall consist of at least six tenured faculty members from representative schools and colleges plus the provost, who shall serve as chair. The president will appoint the members of the Post-Tenure Review Committee following the same process and with all the restrictions that currently apply to the selection of candidates for the University Promotion and Tenure Committee. All deliberations of the University PTR Committee are to remain confidential.

Outcomes

1. The University PTR Committee, chaired by the provost, shall provide the faculty member with a concise written summary of its review and a conclusion as to whether the faculty member's performance is deemed satisfactory. This summary is also to be provided to the dean and department head/chair. The faculty member shall have the opportunity to appeal this decision using the appeals process described in Section XII.

2. A faculty member whose performance the review committee assesses to be unsatisfactory will undertake a development plan to be prepared jointly by the faculty member and academic unit administrator and approved by the dean and provost. The development plan will outline what is needed to move the faculty member to a higher level of performance. It must have specific, measurable goals that can reasonably be attained during a twelve-month period. Progress on all plans will be reviewed and assessed after twelve months using the procedure described in item 3 below. The nature and source of any resources needed to accomplish the plan must be spelled out in writing.

3. At the conclusion of the twelve-month development period, the faculty member will prepare a report summarizing his/her progress on achieving the goals specified in the development plan. This report shall be forwarded to the provost through the department head/chair and dean, who will jointly review the faculty member's progress and prepare a report that is also submitted to the provost. Faculty members who are judged not to have demonstrated progress after completing a development plan will be notified and given an opportunity to respond to the provost before the imposition of further sanctions. The provost’s decision can be appealed using the process described in Section XII. If the provost (or president through the appeal process) decides that sufficient progress has been made, the faculty member shall be deemed to have completed the post-tenure review process. The faculty member would be reviewed annually (along with other faculty) using the process described in Section III above. Further PTR shall not be required unless triggered by two subsequent overall "unacceptable" evaluations on annual reviews during another six-year period.

4. Sanctions for failure to meet the goals specified in the development plan may include—but are not limited to—a letter of notice to the faculty member, withholding of merit-based salary increases, reassignment of duties, and loss of eligibility for such privileges as travel funds, summer appointments, internal grants, and professional improvement leave.
XII. Appeals Procedure

There are two points in this process where decisions made by the provost can be appealed: (1) The PTR committee's decision regarding unsatisfactory performance (step 1 in Section XI) and (2) the provost's decision that the faculty member has not satisfactorily completed the development plan (step in Section XI). In both cases the faculty member may appeal the decision in writing within ten working days of receipt of the provost's decision. The appeal process will parallel the process used in cases of promotion and tenure appeals. The appeal will be made in writing to the PTR Appeals Committee, which consists of the PTR Committee plus two additional members as selected by the Rules Committee. The PTR Appeals Committee shall have ten working days to respond to the faculty member's appeal and has the right to request and consider additional information beyond that listed in Section VIII if the committee believes such information is valuable for evaluating the appeal. The PTR Appeals Committee will make a recommendation regarding the appeal to the president for consideration. The president will render a decision within ten working days and that decision shall be final.

References


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