COMMITTEE ON INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AND TEACHING

REAPPOINTMENT, TENURE AND PROMOTION POLICIES, PRACTICES AND CULTURE AT LEHIGH: RECOMMENDED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

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Committee Charge
Provost Farrell charged the committee in Spring 2011 to evaluate the policies, practices and culture that govern the reappointment, tenure and promotion procedures at Lehigh University, with a particular focus on interdisciplinary research and scholarship, teaching, and service activities in which faculty members engage, and to recommend changes, if appropriate, to render these procedures more effective and equitable.

Issue Background
Interdisciplinary effort in both research and teaching is an increasingly important dimension in the evaluation of Lehigh University faculty members for reappointment, tenure, and promotion (RTP) procedures. And there is every reason to believe that this trend will continue, and perhaps accelerate, into the future. The success in generating campus-wide engagement in the recent cluster development initiative highlights the growing importance of interdisciplinary work from a faculty perspective. Lehigh’s NSF Advance Grant activities focus on the importance of interdisciplinary mentoring and networking relationships for women STEM faculty members at mid-sized universities. This initiative thus provides another compelling reason to examine how the interdisciplinary achievements of faculty members are evaluated in judging their record by the standard of excellence in teaching, research and scholarship, and service within the RTP process.

Process of Information Collection
The challenge of how to evaluate adequately and properly the interdisciplinary contributions and achievements of faculty members in teaching, research and scholarship, and service requires an examination of both the policies that govern the evaluation processes and the discipline and/or departmental ‘faculty culture’ within which individual faculty evaluators make the judgments
upon which decisions are based. The Committee has been as inclusive as possible in assessing
the perspectives of different Lehigh stakeholder constituencies to inform our thinking and
recommendations.

The committee met initially to discuss its charge and determine with which campus
constituencies it should meet to obtain as full an understanding as possible of all of the
dimensions of this issue. The committee then held meetings to discuss the issue with five
groups.

1) A group of pre-tenure and recently tenured faculty members identified as having a
distinctly interdisciplinary dimension in their teaching and/or research and scholarly work. Some members of this group hold formal joint appointments between a home
department and a program or a center. Others have a single (home department)
appointment but an explicit commitment to engage in the activities of a program or
center.

2) A group of program and center directors who have participated in reappointment
and/or tenure cases. Some members of this group participated as the chair of a
special committee under the procedures of R&P Section 2.2.3.1 which apply to cases
where a candidate holds a formal joint appointment. Others participated informally
representing the interests of a program or center in cases where the candidate does not
hold a formal joint appointment but does have an explicit commitment to engage in
the activities of that program or center.

3) Academic Department Chairs.
4) Chairs (or their representatives) of the College Tenure and Promotion committees.

In sum, the Committee feels confident that we have heard a wide variety of perspectives and
provided ample opportunities for the generation of ideas. The Committee has spent considerable
time discussing the issues and reflecting upon the input that we have received. While no report
can capture the full essence of this complex issue, our goal is to highlight some key challenges
and strategies as a starting point for implementation.

Major Findings and Recommendations

The committee identified three distinct categories of faculty members for whom evaluating
interdisciplinary effort in research and scholarship, teaching, and service present challenges.
These three categories are: first, faculty members with formal joint appointments between an
academic department and a second academic department, a center or an academic program;
second, faculty members without a formal joint appointment but with a formal commitment in
their (single) appointment to engage in some combination of research and scholarship, teaching,
and service for a center or program; and third, faculty members whose research and scholarship,
teaching and/or service interests have a significant interdisciplinary dimension but have neither a
formal joint appointment nor a formal responsibility in their (single) appointment to a center or
program. For each category this report identifies a number of major findings and, based on these
findings, puts forth several recommendations for changes in some combination of practices, rules
and procedures and the perspectives of academic culture that should lead to improvements in
how we accomplish this task.
A. Faculty Members with a Formal Joint Appointment between a Department and a second Department, Center or Academic Program.

Section 2.2.3.1 of the Rules and Procedures (R&P) of the Faculty, approved at the October 2008 Board of Trustees meeting, describes the procedures for reappointment, tenure and promotion (RTP) cases and associate professor triennial reviews for faculty members holding a formal joint appointment.

Major Findings:

1. **Treatment of Candidate:** Experience under the procedures, adopted in October 2008, governing RTP cases for faculty members holding joint appointments is not extensive. To date only one tenure case (and no promotion cases) has been completed. Everyone with whom we conferred, however, expressed confidence that the new procedures in place in R&P appear to ensure that the interdisciplinary dimensions of a candidate’s research and scholarship, teaching, and service contributions are being considered fully in the limited number of reappointment and tenure decisions that have taken place. A consensus view is that the ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ (MOU) (R&P 2.2.3.1.2) and ‘Special Committee’ (R&P 2.2.3.1.3) procedures put in place for faculty members with formal joint appointments have both been important in achieving this result. An important concern expressed by several individuals in the meetings conducted is that there is no formal mechanism in place to guarantee that MOUs are revised over time to reflect adequately changes that may evolve in a candidate’s interdisciplinary efforts and the expectations about research and scholarship, teaching and/or service responsibilities to both the candidate’s home department and a center or program in which (s)he holds a joint appointment.

2. **Space Allocation:** Space allocation decisions in the case of faculty members with joint appointments are particularly significant, especially when the physical location of the secondary department, program, or center is not proximate to the home department.

3. **Faculty Search Process:** When a department comes into a search process later because a joint appointment is approved primarily for a program, the logistics can be challenging. The process works best when the department and program work as partners from as early in the search process as possible.

4. **Service Expectations:** The combined expectations in the area of service to both the home department and secondary department, program or center in *toto* can be unduly onerous, especially in the case of pre-tenure faculty members given the teaching and research expectations that they perceive.

5. **Composition of the Special Committee:** Special Committee members aren’t necessarily well qualified in all instances to judge the quality of a candidate’s research and scholarship – and in tenure and promotion cases they may rely very heavily on the evaluations of external reviewers. This makes the selection of external evaluator panels especially important in joint appointment cases and highlights the responsibility of members of the Special Committee in informing this selection process (R&P Section 2.2.3.1.8)

6. **Reappointment, Tenure and Promotion Process and Associate Professor Triennial Reviews:** To date, the procedures approved in October 2008 appear to ensure appropriate evaluation of faculty members with formal joint appointments. However, several individuals involved in administering the evaluation process have noted that
the procedures are “clunky” to implement. This “clunkiness” derives from somewhat, but not perfectly, parallel activities of the home department and the special committee faculty members performing the evaluation.

The RTP and triennial review procedures all begin with a joint meeting of the home department and special committee faculty members to discuss the candidate’s portfolio (and the external letters in the case of Tenure or Promotion). After this, the two groups split and operate for the most part in a parallel procedure, with substantial coordination by the respective chairs of the two groups. Evaluating faculty members in each group write individual letters in support of their recommendations and submit these to the chair of their group. Members of the special committee provide copies of their individual letters to the home department chair. Members of the home department do not provide copies of their letters to the chair of the special committee but only to their department chair. Individual letters from the home department faculty members are not shared with special committee members and vice versa. These letters are summarized by the chair of each committee, allowing all individual letter writers to review and comment upon the summary letter, and then the respective chairs revise them accordingly. The special committee chair then gives this group’s revised summary letter to the home department chair. The home department chair then revises the department summary to include the special committee summary. The home department chair then sends this letter to members of both groups for review and comment. In the event of a major disagreement the home department chair convenes a meeting of all faculty evaluators. If the disagreement cannot be resolved the home department chair designates a member of the minority vote to write a letter that becomes part of the RTP or triennial review file. For both reappointment and Tenure / Promotion cases R&P states that “The individual votes of the participating department faculty and special committee members will be tallied and recorded on the tenure/promotion recommendation form.”

A couple of observations about this procedure are worth noting.

First, from the perspective of the role of the special committee, the initial meeting between evaluating members of the home department and the special committee provides the sole opportunity to provide input to RTP decisions about the candidate’s interdisciplinary achievements in research and teaching,. The special committee is “charged with evaluating the faculty member’s teaching, research and scholarship, and service, taking into consideration the expected contributions of the faculty member to each participating unit.” (R&P 2.2.3.1.2) The procedure does not provide a mechanism to inform the recommendations (and votes) of the members of the home department about (1) any further insights that members of the special committee obtain while reflecting on the candidate’s achievements during the process of writing their own letters of recommendation and (2) the synthesis of the contents of these letters into the summary prepared by the special committee chair.

Second, the relationship of if/how recommendations (i.e., votes) by members of the special committee in tenure and promotion decisions ‘enter’ the ‘Departmental Recommendation’ should probably be stated more explicitly in R&P. Both Section 2.2.6.9 (tenure) and Section 2.2.9.9 (promotion) state: “When the College tenure (2.2.6.9) / promotion (2.2.9.9) committee agrees with the departmental recommendation, their recommendations together constitute a ‘faculty
recommendation.’ If the committee’s recommendation is contrary to that of the department, there is not a ‘faculty recommendation,’ as defined in Section 2.2.2.1.” Section 2.2.3.1.3 states: “A committee member from the faculty member’s home department will participate in the home department and special committee discussions but will vote only with the special committee.” This appears to imply that the ‘Departmental Recommendation’ will comprise the aggregation of the individual recommendations of members of BOTH the home department and the special committee. If this is the case then the R&P language (bolded above) in Section 2.2.3.1.8 should replace ‘on the tenure/promotion recommendation form’ with ‘as the tenure/promotion departmental determination’ to remove any possible ambiguity.

7. **Interdisciplinary Journal Publications:** The issue of how publications in (oft times new) interdisciplinary journals are weighted by individual faculty evaluators and overall in tenure and promotion decisions arose in virtually every meeting during the information gathering process leading to this report.

**Recommendations:**

1. **Disseminate the major findings listed above to all department chairs and center/program directors, those currently appointed and newly appointed in the future.**

2. **Revise R&P Sections 2.2.3.1.6 through 2.2.3.1.9 so that the participants in the all departmental evaluations – annual review, reappointment, tenure and promotion, and associate professor triennial reviews – include both the appropriate rank delimited members of the home department and the members of the special committee. The ‘Departmental Recommendation’ in tenure and promotion decisions will then be based on the recommendations of this combined group. This revision should specify that the departmental summary will be co-authored by the home department chair and the chair of the special committee, both of whom will read the individual recommendations of all members of the group.**

3. **Retain as in the current version of R&P the provisions for the event of a major disagreement between the special committee and the department (convening a meeting of all concerned and including in the dossier a minority opinion should this meeting not resolve the disagreement).**

4. **Revise R&P Sections 2.2.3.1.6 through 2.2.3.1.9 to specify that prior to the initial meeting to review the candidate’s portfolio in all evaluations, the special committee will meet to prepare a summary of the candidate’s interdisciplinary achievements in research and scholarship, teaching, and service for the purpose of this evaluation. The special committee chair will then write a letter documenting these achievements and share this letter with other members of the special committee for review and comment. This letter will then be included in the candidate’s dossier, in the same section as the external evaluator letters in cases of tenure and promotion and in the same section as the candidate’s personal statements on research and scholarship, teaching, and service in cases of re-appointment and associate professor triennial reviews.**

5. **Revise R&P Sections 2.2.3.1.6 through 2.2.3.1.9 to specify that for reappointment and tenure cases, as well as part of triennial reviews for associate professors, the candidate will include in the dossier a copy of her/his current MOU indicating**
suggestions for revisions to reflect any change in circumstances that may have occurred since the current version was adopted. The department chair and special committee chair will share and discuss any proposed revisions with the department and special committee faculty members as part of the review process. If all parties agree to the proposed changes then the revised MOU will become effective at the time of reappointment, tenure or the completion of the triennial review and a copy placed in the candidate’s file. If there is any disagreement about the proposed changes then the college dean of the home department will convene a meeting of the candidate, the home department chair and the special committee chair to resolve the disagreement. Any changes to the MOU must have the candidate’s approval.

6. Add a sentence to the 4th line of the 2nd paragraph of Section 2.2.3.1.8 to state that it is the responsibility of the special committee to ensure that there is adequate representation among the list of external evaluators to judge the candidate’s interdisciplinary achievements in research and scholarship.

7. Revise Section 2.2.3.1 to indicate that Professors of Practice with formal interdisciplinary responsibilities are also covered by this section of R&P for the purposes of annual review and reappointment. Include a reference to this in Section 2.12 where reappointment is discussed.

B. Faculty Members without a Formal Joint Appointment but with a Formal Commitment in their (Single) Appointment to Engage in Some Combination of Research and Scholarship, Teaching, and Service for a Center or Program

Major Findings:

1. Scope of this Issue: It’s likely that among faculty members hired within the past 5 – 10 years, especially those at the rank of Assistant Professor, the number in this group exceeds the number with formal joint appointments. Part of the reason for stating that this is ‘likely’ is because the wording in some initial appointment letters is somewhat ambiguous as to whether the provisions in R&P Section 2.2.3.1 apply. In other cases initial appointment letters clearly indicate that a new faculty member will be affiliated with a program or center but not hold a formal joint appointment.

2. Determination of Initial Appointment(s): It is unclear what has been the policy and/or criteria for determining whether an initial appointment for a new faculty member who will clearly participate actively in the research and scholarship, teaching, and/or service activities of an interdisciplinary program or center is a formal joint appointment – and subject to the provisions of R&P Section 2.2.3.1 – or a (single) appointment with an explicit commitment to the program or center.

3. Potential misalignment of Primary Affiliation: A candidate’s primary duties and affiliation may be to a program or center, yet RTP decisions executed by the (single) home department have no mechanism to ensure that input about the candidate’s interdisciplinary achievements enters deliberations and judgments in these cases.

4. Input from Program and Center Senior Faculty: In the absence of a formal joint appointment, where the RTP procedures of R&P Section 2.2.3.1 are followed, participation by senior members of the program or center with which a candidate is affiliated appears to take place on an ad hoc and, according to input from some program and center directors, inconsistent basis.
5. **Program / Center Director.** Program or Center Directors are not guaranteed the opportunity to provide input to RTP cases and often don’t receive timely information about important deadlines within the process’s timeline. If the program or center director is not a member of the candidate’s home department, then he/she does not have the opportunity to write a letter of recommendation (i.e., vote) in a tenure or promotion case.

6. **External Evaluator Panel Selection:** Absent the provisions in Section 2.2.3.1.8 that apply for formal joint appointments only, senior faculty from the program or center may not have the opportunity to inform the selection of the external evaluator panel in a tenure or promotion case.

7. **Service.** It is not clear that service to an affiliated program or center always receives adequate consideration in RTP decisions and associate professor triennial reviews.

8. **Interdisciplinary Journal Publications:** The issue of how publications in (oft times new) interdisciplinary journals are weighted by individual faculty evaluators and overall in tenure and promotion decisions arose in virtually every meeting during the information gathering process leading to this report. *(Repetition of Major Finding in A7 above.)*

**Recommendations:**

1. **Revise R&P to state that the provisions of Section 2.2.3.1 will apply to all faculty members who hold a formal joint appointment and also to those whose current appointment letter specifies formal research and scholarship, teaching, or service commitments to another department, a center or a program. Appointment letters specifying formal research and scholarship, teaching, or service commitments to another department, a center or a program should state explicitly that the provisions of R&P Section 2.2.3.1 will apply for subsequent RTP procedures as well as associate professor triennial reviews. Ensure that initial offer letters from the Provost note explicitly in both of these cases that the provisions of R&P 2.2.3.1 will apply in RTP decisions and triennial reviews. Section 2.2.3.1.10 will likely need to be revised to accommodate this new definition as to whom the provisions of Section 2.2.3.1 cover, allowing for the possibility that a faculty member’s appointment may change to the traditional norm of sole affiliation to a home department.**

2. **Consider adopting a policy that will allow faculty members without either a formal joint appointment or a current appointment letter specifying formal research and scholarship, teaching, or service commitments to another department, a center or a program, but with significant interdisciplinary interests and activities, to ‘opt in’ to being covered by the provisions of R&P Section 2.2.3.1 in RTP procedures and associate professor triennial reviews. One possible mechanism to accomplish this would be to provide the opportunity for any faculty member as part of her/his first or third year annual review (the years immediately preceding the 2nd and 4th year formal reappointment reviews) or any year preceding an associate professor triennial review to request that the college dean of her/his home department convene a meeting of the dean, the home department chair, and the chair of the other department or director of the center or program that corresponds most closely with the candidate’s interdisciplinary interests and activities to discuss the feasibility of establishing an MOU and special committee for this purpose. If all parties agree then the dean will
request that the Provost issue to the faculty member a revised appointment letter that affirms that the provisions of R&P Section 2.2.3.1 will apply to subsequent RTP procedures and triennial reviews. Such a mechanism may be particularly appropriate in instances such as ‘cluster hires’ where faculty members have clearly identified interdisciplinary interests and activities.

C. Faculty Members Whose Research and Scholarship, Teaching, and Service Interests Have a Significant Interdisciplinary Dimension but Have Neither a Formal Joint Appointment nor a Formal Responsibility in Their (Single) Appointment to a Center or Program.

Major Findings:

1. *Scope of this Issue*: Extremely Broad. Virtually every faculty member has at least some research and scholarship, teaching, or service interests of an interdisciplinary nature. The extent and potential significance in accounting for these appropriately in RTP decisions and triennial reviews, though, vary enormously. While an ‘opt in’ provision to apply the procedures of R&P Section 2.2.3.1 (Recommendation B2 above) may help address this issue in some/many cases, it will likely prove most challenging to define criteria that can delineate when ‘the interdisciplinary dimension’ of a candidate’s achievement warrants explicit special consideration within the RTP processes in all instances.

2. *Feasible Response(s)*: In this instance changing the culture of faculty perceptions as to what constitutes excellence (with particular focus on interdisciplinary achievements) in research and scholarship, teaching, and/or service may be a more sensible approach than attempting to amend formal policies.

3. *Examples of (Limited) Existing Policies*: While R&P does not provide provisions to ensure that teaching, research and scholarship, and service achievements that are specifically interdisciplinary in nature receive explicit weight in the RTP processes, each of the four colleges, and several departments within the College of Arts and Sciences, have adopted supplemental guidelines that apply to RTP cases of their faculty. For example:

   The College of Arts and Sciences guidelines state:
   - Under Teaching: “Instructional contributions to both departmental and interdisciplinary programs are valued.” (p. 2)
   - Under Research and Scholarship: “Contributions within and/or across disciplines, as well as collaborative efforts, are valued. Faculty engaged in collaborative research should document their individual efforts.” (p. 4)

   The Physics Department guidelines state:
   - Under Research: “Collaborative and interdisciplinary research is often an important part of a strong research program. In such situations, however, the candidate is advised to clearly identify some part(s) of the effort as his or her major responsibility and contribution.” (p. 22 of CAS Guidelines)

   The Psychology Department guidelines state:
   - Under Publication: “Collaborative research, both among psychologists and crossing disciplinary lines, is valued and of growing importance in the study of human thought and behavior. Collaboration enriches the research program,
and teams of researchers with different areas of expertise are increasingly essential to progress in many research areas.” (p. 24 of CAS Guidelines)

The College of Business and Economics guidelines state:

- Under Research and Scholarship Standards: “Both collaborative and solely authored research are recognized, as is interdisciplinary research.” (p. 2)

The College of Education guidelines state:

- Under Teaching/Advising: “Teaching of cross-program or cross-department courses that serve the college or the university” (are “of Secondary Importance”). (p. 2)

The P.C. Rossin College of Engineering and Applied Science guidelines state:

- (Under both the sections for ‘Guideline for Tenure and Promotion to Associate Professor’ and ‘Guideline for Promotion to Full Professor’):
  “When a candidate has been active in interdisciplinary research, that research should be given the same weight as disciplinary research. In this case, having an external reviewer from the interdisciplinary research area should be encouraged. Evaluations from Lehigh department chairs in areas of a candidate’s interdisciplinary research should be encouraged. In any case, the breadth as well as depth of a candidate’s scholarly impacts should be considered.” (p. 1 and p. 4)

This final example from the RCEAS is clearly the most explicit and proactive statement among the college and departmental guidelines in affirming the importance of valuing interdisciplinary work in RTP cases.

**Recommendation:**

1. Request the College Deans to charge their tenure and promotion committees and departments to review, with an eye toward revising, their supplemental guidelines for tenure and promotion, focusing explicitly on how interdisciplinary achievements should be considered in RTP cases, perhaps using the RCEAS language as a starting point.

This exercise, if undertaken and completed with widespread faculty engagement, has the potential to achieve two distinct results:

1) revisions to the college and supplemental guidelines that ensure more formally that interdisciplinary work is considered fully in RTP cases and associate professor triennial reviews; and
2) initiation of a conversation among the faculty that may change in a positive way the extent to which interdisciplinary achievements are valued.