

Report of the Faculty Forum, 11/17/2009

Professor Dietrich Neumann (History of Art and Architecture) convened the Faculty Forum on November 17, 2009 at 4 p.m., for a discussion of tenure and faculty development policies at Brown.

Provost David Kertzer presented an overview of the Ad Hoc Committee to Review Tenure and Faculty Development Policies and the committee's charge. The Provost reported that the Academic Affairs division of the Brown Corporation requested the Ad Hoc Committee in reaction to the 2009 NEASC report, and in particular to the report's observation that Brown has an "unduly high proportion" of faculty getting tenure. The members of the Ad Hoc Committee to Review Tenure and Faculty Development Policies, appointed by the Provost, include Professors David Kertzer (Chair), Susan Alcock, Sheila Blumstein, Barry Connors, Sharon Krause, Charles Larmore, Arto Nurmikko, Tricia Rose, Andries van Dam, Rajiv Vohra (DOF), and Edward Wing; Associate Professor Govind Menon. The committee is staffed by Beth Doherty (Senior Associate DOF). The Provost said that the Ad Hoc Committee has already been at work for several weeks and had met with the Committee on Equity and Diversity (CFED) and was planning upcoming meetings with TPAC, the FEC, and student government organizations. The Ad Hoc Committee is gathering tenure data from peer institutions, and its goal is to prepare a report to go to the faculty for a vote.

Dietrich Neumann then asked the faculty present to suggest topics to be covered in the Faculty Forum discussion, and he listed them on the blackboard. Topics suggested were as follows:

Percentages of faculty? (Tricia Serio, Bio Med Molecular, Cellular Biology Biochemistry)
Recent changes elsewhere? Results? (Dov Sax, Bio Med Ecology and Evolutionary Biology)
Peer institutions? (Tricia Serio, Bio Med Molecular, Cellular Biology Biochemistry)
Role of tenure / standards? (Naoko Shibusawa, History)
Data gathering (aggregate vs. by discipline)? (Bob Pelcovits, Physics)
Evaluation processes specific to discipline? (Jim Padbury, Pediatrics)
Categories (of rank, considered in statistics) - lectureships? (Peter Scharf, Classics)
Hiring senior professors (how proportions affect percentages) (Peter Scharf, Classics)
Low (tenure) percentage rates (downsides or complexities at other schools)? Kay Warren
(Anthropology)
Impact on salary (equity during period of change)? (David M. Williams, Community Health)
Would changes apply to current faculty? (Jamie Dreier, Philosophy)
Department size (considered as a factor)? (Nancy Khalek, Religious Studies)
(Are there) Existing notions of need for change? (Greg Elliott, Sociology)

Professor Neumann grouped these suggestions into the following broad categories for organizing further discussion:

1. Reasons for the Committee
--questions

- research
- the "track"
- healthy faculty

2. Data gathering, evaluation, disciplines
3. Peer comparisons (followup questions about, including peers's) resources
4. Timing

General discussion began with the topic of "Existing notions of the need for change." Diane Hoffman-Kim (Molecular Pharmacology, Physiology & Biotechnology) echoed a previous suggestion that there is not much statistical substance in the NEASC report to support the claim of a "high tenure rate" and therefore there is a problem of lack of data. Corey Walker (Africana Studies) reiterated that there is no methodology presented in the NEASC report and, citing statistics from Yale and the need to have numbers on cohorts and measurements across time, said the evidence is less than robust. Greg Elliott said that in most research departments, the NEASC report would not pass muster because there was no way to judge the reliability of its figures. Peter Scharf suggested the faculty start by requesting reasons for the NEASC conclusion and looking at what the data is. Phil Rosen (Modern Culture and Media) suggested the faculty ask the Committee for more data. Provost Kertzer responded to these concerns by saying that the NEASC used data provided by Brown and that gathering data was not the NEASC committee's job. Finding the data about peer institutions is the task of the Ad Hoc Committee. He mentioned some peers being looked at, including Vanderbilt, Washington University, and NYU. Beth Doherty added that the Ad Hoc Committee excluded Harvard and Yale from the peer comparisons because they have a different tenure model, and that the peer comparisons include other Ivies and some liberal arts colleges. In their data-seeking, the Ad Hoc Committee is looking at two things: 1) how does the tenure process work at each school? and 2) what are the tenure rates, the numbers of people who end up tenured and the people who come up for tenure review and receive tenure? Tricia Serio argued that the Ad Hoc Committee should also consider faculty-to-graduate-student ratios and external funding at different institutions. She emphasized the question of varying resources. Greg Elliott suggested that until data are confirmed, the claim that Brown has a high tenure rate should be considered as a question, not a fact. Ralph Rodriguez (American Civilization) questioned the premise that a high rate of tenure is equivalent to low standards. Nancy Jacobs (Africana Studies and History) called attention to the tone of the NEASC report and pointed out that the NEASC report did not say that tenure rates were too high, but that the high rates needed discussion.

Mark Suchman (Sociology) rephrased the question as "Are we OK or not?" and argued that one danger of using percentages to frame a problem is that the focus is put on the end stage. Alternately, he suggested, we could ask "Do we have a healthy tenure track process, with appropriate mentoring and department feedback?" It would not be easy to get this information but it would be valuable. Ann Dill (Sociology) elaborated the question: "Do we have a healthy faculty, in terms of its composition and support?" She wondered if a Senior Lectureship at Brown might be equivalent to an Assistant Professorship elsewhere, and she urged that we make sure we are comparing equivalent categories. Michael Satlow

(Judaic Studies) added that tenure is only one component of measuring whether a faculty is healthy, and posed the question whether the quality of the faculty is where we want it, and whether we can improve it, and to what end?

Dietrich Neumann moved the discussion to self evaluation. Ann Dill suggested that evaluation be based not just on individual faculty performance but on academic units, and how different faculty contribute to departments, centers, and programs. Michael Satlow initiated discussion on how interdisciplinarity relates to evaluation of individuals, especially where grants are concerned. Tricia Serio advised attention to the framing of the package that goes out to reviewers in tenure cases, and she questioned relying solely on field-specific reviews. Corey Walker asked how the relationship of research to teaching and service at Brown is communicated to outside reviewers. Greg Elliott asked how our process does and should take account of huge differences in disciplinary paradigms, kinds of evidence, and performance. He said that we have no sense of whether "high tenure rate" means that we are too lax or that we hire good people to start with. Naoko Shibusawa pointed out that asking these questions is not criticism of the Committee per se, and that the important thing is to ask "what does the tenure rate *mean*?" Michael Satlow suggested that one way to answer that question would be to look back at those tenured (and those denied tenure) and ask whether they had been productive faculty. Corey Walker said that President Simmons' response to the NEASC report had some corrections to the NEASC data, and he observed that the Committee charge is narrow and is dictated by the faulty premise that a high statistical rate is equivalent to cause and effect. Greg Elliott asked if it is the case that Brown has increased hiring at the Full Professor level, and if so, could that hiring be one explanation of a high percentage of full professors. He questioned the framing of the problem: is it a problem of administration or a problem of faculty? He worried that the Corporation might be getting into areas that are not their expertise, with the possible negative outcome that the intellectual ambience of a great university could be drastically changed because of assumptions that corporate models always applied. He suggested consideration of how corporate models are being applied as well as consideration of the narrowness of the Ad Hoc Committee's charge. The Dean of the Faculty, Rajiv Vohra, responded that all the relevant statistics are available on the DOF website, and that over seven years, most hiring had been at the junior level. Discussion followed about what the 25% hire rate of Full Professors means and does not mean. Ruth Colwill (Psychology) expressed a concern of the faculty about TPAC's reliance on outside evaluation letters, and she urged the Ad Hoc Committee to look at who has been evaluating our faculty. Tim Herbert (Geological Sciences) said we should always be willing to question ourselves and that numbers were a losing game. He posed questions for the Committee: Is there a widespread pattern of departments, or of TPAC, recommending tenure candidates in whom they don't believe? Tricia Serio asked that the Committee look at whether standards of hiring have changed over time, and she wondered whether such a pattern might explain changes in tenure rates.

Dietrich Neumann shifted the discussion to the topic of peer institutions. Jack Hermance (Geological Sciences) said the attitude in the charge to the Ad Hoc Committee seemed to be that Brown needed to "catch up" with peer institutions, and he observed that there is no creativity in such a framing. He pointed out that Brown would not have had its

innovative New Curriculum if not for a creative process. He acknowledged that we may be using an old template that could use some change, and he cited as example changes in demographics of faculty, but urged creativity rather than imitation. Peter Scharf lauded the calls for gathering facts about the Brown community, and asked specifically what percentage of faculty are senior vs. junior now as opposed to seven years ago, and Scharf questioned the functioning of hiring senior stars rather than young energetic teachers. The DOF said that data exists and is on the DOF website; Dietrich Neumann also directed attention to the Office of Research website. He stated that there are cases where we can learn from peer institutions, and it was observed that benchmarks are necessary but that the research is tricky. For example, how do peer institutions compare on requiring service commitments? Nancy Khalek suggested that to level the playing field, peer-to-peer comparisons be done at the department level rather than that of the whole institution, in part so that size could be considered. Ruth Colwill raised the issue of advising. She noted concern that academic advising was not on the list, when it takes a great deal of time for Brown faculty, and she suggested that the relationship between advising and research be compared with peer institutions. Ann Dill drew attention to the tenure-track process, and urged attention to the mechanisms for support available to candidates as they go through, in peer institutions as compared to Brown. Evie Lincoln (History of Art and Architecture), having thanked Beth Doherty for her work in selecting the peer institutions for comparison to Brown, pointed out that the library resources at Brown are far inferior to the vast library resources of Harvard or Yale, to the point that the Brown Library does not always have adequate support for Assistant Professors. Tricia Serio supported Lincoln's assessment and suggested to the Ad Hoc Committee that this would be a good time to collect data from peer institutions on what they do to support scholarship? To a comment on the discussion that many of the suggestions being made might increase the tenure rate and help more people get tenure, Dov Sax suggested taking a step back and framing the inquiry in terms of desired outcomes. What if Brown is peer-less? Brown must define what outcomes we want, before we can know how we relate to peer institutions. Greg Elliott suggested a focus on process rather than product. Corey Walker suggested that in addition to looking at peer institutions, Brown should also look at professional organizations and their concerns, which reflect the perspective of worldwide rapid changes in universities such as the statistic that only one-third of faculty are tenure-track or tenured, i.e., a minority.

Dietrich Neumann moved the discussion to suggestions to help the Ad Hoc Committee concerning the topic of timing in the process of tenure. Jamie Dreier asked whether the Committee is considering changes that apply to current junior faculty. Provost Kertzer said yes, though the specific changes are not yet formulated. Omur Harmansah (Joukowsky Institute, Egyptology, Ancient Western Asian Studies) suggested that voices of Assistant Professors be heard by the Committee, since they could testify to the real impact of timing and changes in timing. Nancy Khalek asked wouldn't a fourth-year candidate be affected differently from a first-year candidate by changes being imposed? Art Landy (Bio Med Molecular, Cellular Biology Biochemistry) posited alternative extreme models for tenure decisions: 1) the medical school model, in which nobody fails, once admitted; and 2) the Classical High School model, in which huge numbers are admitted but only a small fraction graduate. Ross Kraemer (Religious Studies and Judaic Studies) drew attention to the relevance for questions of timing of the difference in what the college faculty looks like

now, as opposed to the old model based on a different sociology of who the faculty was, predominantly men who were cared for by their wives. Of course, faculty were often married then, as now, but were mostly men who were relieved of child care duties. She suggested that the expectations for research by a relatively new faculty need to take account of these changes. Her point was clarified to note that both men and women may have children to care for. Ann Dill returned to a focus on process. She asserted the importance of assuring proper support and equitable treatment at each stage of the tenure process, and urged mechanisms to keep dialogue going, to include careful establishing of institutional memory, so that what works now will continue. Patricia Ybarra (Theatre Arts and Performance Studies) urged that for hybrid artistic - intellectual labor, tenure timing and processes take into account the category of labor and category of achievement that might require different amounts of time. A final suggestion was that timing should be considered in comparisons to peer institutions, so that the Committee was urged to make sure tenure clocks are the same when comparisons or outside evaluations are done. Dietrick Neumann concluded the Faculty Forum discussion at 5:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

Beth Bryan
Secretary of the Faculty Forum