STANDARDS AND CRITERIA FOR PROMOTION AND TENURE

Introduction

This English Department statement of policy is to supplement and support the procedures, guidelines, and criteria for tenure and promotion of faculty as outlined in the *Indiana University Academic Handbook* and the “IU Northwest Promotion & Tenure Guidelines.”

Although candidates only need to announce their intention of applying for promotion or tenure by May 1 and to present their file for consideration the following September, they are well advised to indicate this intention – and their area of excellence – to the Department early the preceding semester. Candidates will inevitably be asked at their third-year review what they expect to claim as their area of excellence. This is not binding, but it is advisable to prepare cases for excellence well in advance of the time, in the fifth year, when they compile the actual dossier. Those who are working toward tenure, especially, are urged to consult widely during their pre-tenure years with other faculty in the Department, to discuss their research, and to invite colleagues to visit their classes.

TEACHING

Discussion and Suggestions

Materials and evidence that can be used to evaluate teaching include: syllabi, course descriptions, exams, and relevant handouts; evaluations and responses of colleagues or others who have visited the candidate’s classes, unsolicited letters from students, letters solicited by the chair, and student evaluations, perhaps a graded/edited student paper, the development of any new or innovative teaching techniques or programs; awards and nominations for awards, responses from any off-campus or outreach teaching situations in which the candidate has been involved; textbooks, instructional publications, and articles on pedagogy (scholarship of teaching and learning). The candidate should also be aware that promotion and tenure committees do pay serious attention to grade distributions, including a proliferation of D, W, and F grades. They are concerned about “grade inflation,” but do consider the difference between required courses and upper-level majors or elective courses. Much of the candidate’s practice will be indicated in his or her teaching narrative.

Members of the Department’s Promotion and Tenure Committee and the Chair should be familiar with the candidate’s teaching. The discussions and letters that result from visits constitute important evidence concerning teaching. A significant number of unsolicited student letters (presumably laudatory, but possibly critical) would represent another strong indication of classroom effectiveness. The Department expects tenure-track faculty to evaluate all of their classes – and that
all of these evaluations will be included in the file. However, student evaluations are sometimes difficult to weigh. If hundreds of student comments present a very clear overall picture – either because they are characteristically enthusiastic and appreciative, by and large humdrum and middling, or frequently disapproving (or worse), then they also, compositely, represent viable evidence. If the evaluations en masse do not present any clear or compelling view, then they are less useful. The Committee is aware that evaluations from required courses are likely to differ statistically from those delivered by elective courses. Ultimately, it is up to the Committee and the Chair to judge the evaluations as well as any letters commenting on teaching. Candidates should include some analysis of their evaluations as part of their teaching statement, indicating how they have learned from both the comments and numerical evaluations and responded to them (altered course design or approach).

In the years preceding a tenure decision, candidates, by “living” in the Department, talk much about their classes, subject, and teaching, and have very likely created an impression or view of themselves as teachers. These observations can often be an important and valid part of the evidence concerning teaching. Evidence of quality in teaching could include printed or instructional material: teaching guides or manuals, textbooks or anthologies designed for student use, scholarly pedagogical publications, and lectures or seminars given on teaching. Nevertheless, the candidate should be selective in including syllabi, manuals, exams, and assignments, not burdening the file with repetitive or irrelevant material.

Candidates claiming excellence in teaching need extensive documentation; this could include teaching awards or finalist status, outside peer reviews of classroom effectiveness and teaching materials, videos of classes, and careful analysis of student evaluations. A case for excellence in teaching should be built over several years, not because a candidate falls short of research at the last moment. The Department will look for indications of the potential for further accomplishments. A teaching record that demonstrates an effect beyond the classroom and campus makes a strong case for excellence in teaching; publications about pedagogy, for example, would be appropriate. Such evidence is particularly appropriate for candidates applying for promotion to Professor.

RESEARCH AND CREATIVE ACTIVITY

Discussion and Suggestions

Although “research and creative activity” has the reputation of being a far more objective province to appraise than teaching, it is not without its ambiguities. Two decisions need to be made by the Department: what exactly do we include under research and creative activities – as distinguished from published material that is primarily a teaching support or service, and, how much represents “excellence” and how much “adequacy”? It is not sufficient merely to have published a number of articles or essays on various subjects; the candidate must show evidence of a continuing and evolving “research program” or creative body of work.

Peer-reviewed books and scholarly articles are clear instances of research, as are chapters in peer-reviewed academic volumes. Reviews and anthologies or editions are less clear; while some are obviously research, others may more appropriately be seen as service. If a respected journal solicits a review of a book (or books) and that review requires not only assumed expertise in the
subject but also considerable scholarship and judgment to prepare, then the enterprise is legitimately seen as research. If the review is more casual and popular, its function is not primarily academic and it is not really research. Journalism, for example, is here to be distinguished from research – though it could conceivably fulfill the requirements of service. Consultations, because they are paid for, do not reasonably qualify as research (or service). Honoraria and even stipends are less clear and should be evaluated individually. We recognize that a candidate is being solicited for reviews, named lectureships, and to review manuscripts is evidence of a national reputation.

Every candidate is expected to be actively engaged in research or creative activities. The issue then becomes how much successful activity is “adequate” and how much is “excellent.” A peer-reviewed scholarly book would obviously represent excellence; five or so peer-reviewed articles (including electronic scholarly publications) would also presumably be seen as excellent. The prestige of journals, as evidenced by the MLA database, their acceptance rates, and reputation in the discipline, is a factor in evaluating articles. The Academic Handbook speaks to the issue of creative activities: “An original contribution of a creative nature is as significant or as deserving as the publication of a scholarly book or article.” In English studies, media for creative work would include publishing original poetry, fiction, essays or dramatic scripts in peer-reviewed, respected literary magazines, as well as directing or producing one’s play scripts in professional theatrical venues. Again, the quality of such work is more significant than the quantity. A poem published in a highly respected literary magazine could be as estimable for purposes of tenure and promotion as an article in a ranking scholarly journal. Published novels, plays, poems, chapbooks, as well as performed plays and invited readings are also evidence of creative activity. Likewise, five or six poems or pieces of fiction in respected journals or periodicals might qualify. Because of the temporal realities of our publishing “marketplace,” we should realistically minimize the distinction between material that is already published and material “unconditionally accepted for publication,” especially in the case of a tenure decision, when publication delays beyond the candidate’s control can be disastrous. A candidate who has published three substantial peer-reviewed articles, has had a fourth accepted by a reputable journal, and has submitted a couple of others, and can show strong evidence of being currently involved in research, might plausibly claim excellence in research. Untenured faculty are advised to consult with colleagues about the comparative merits of presses, journals, and, generally, about what publication venues or strategies are recommended. Time lags between submission and a press’s response can be critical.

Adequacy in research should also include solid evidence of scholarly activity. Two peer-reviewed articles in respected journals accepted and another submitted, or others obviously well on the way, could be reasonable evidence of adequate research. Papers delivered at professional conferences, especially those national conferences that referee their submissions, are also evidence of research. Reviews, notes, and minor articles are less weighty than articles in refereed journals, but they should be judged individually for their merit and substance and respected accordingly. The scholarly editing of a text is obviously research. Editorial or bibliographical work, for example, for a journal, would have to be judged individually to see if it is more properly considered research or service. Grants, research awards, and the frequent citing of a candidate’s work are also evidence of scholarship. Even the instance of an article’s being reprinted should be considered, as a useful indication of the quality of the research. It is obvious that journals have different levels of selectivity; for creative activities, those publications with a national readership would rate higher than a smaller or local publication. Committees reviewing the dossier will expect the departmental committee to describe the journals in which he or she has published: prestige, number of referees,
percentage of articles accepted, and focus. (Some of this information is available from the MLA index of periodicals.)

The English Department Promotion and Tenure Committee’s initial responsibility is to judge the quality of a candidate’s research or creative activity. It is also appropriate and necessary to obtain the written opinions of scholars chosen by the chair in consultation with the candidate. These outside reviewers should be identified professionally and their relationship, if any, with the candidate specified. It is then the committee’s responsibility, after considering the quality and the quantity of a candidate’s research, to render an estimate of its overall value: is the candidate for tenure likely to make an adequate or a significant scholarly and/or creative contribution to the profession; has the candidate for promotion to Professor made an adequate or a significant scholarly and/or creative contribution; is there evidence of a continuing and evolving program of research and/or creative activity?

In assembling a tenure and promotion file, the candidate should include copies of published research and creative work and other supporting evidence. Generally, only scholarship or creative activities that date from the candidate’s employment at IU Northwest are considered. In assembling a file for promotion to Professor, the candidate should concentrate on materials produced or published since promotion to Associate Professor, rather than simply augmenting his or her earlier file. It is more effective to emphasize strong worthwhile documents rather than load the file with marginal or irrelevant material. Since committees are especially vigilant about the writing in English Department files, all documents must be carefully proofread, edited, and arranged. (The smallest errors are sometimes circled or highlighted as the materials move along.)

SERVICE

Discussion and Suggestions

Every faculty member is expected to perform his or her “adequate” share of service within the university. Evidence of this includes participation in the affairs, discussions, decisions, and governance of the department. The designing and grading of departmental essays, contests, or programs, the designing and scheduling of courses and the fashioning of an English program, contributing to the discussions that go on within the department and between the department and the rest of the university, and the counseling of students are all among the services expected from each member. Beyond that, excellence in service might be demonstrated by the chairing of particularly active committees, the setting up and directing of a demanding program, or the performing of any function that is of clear benefit to the university and that demands a great deal of time and commitment. Such professional services as organizing and participating in academic panels, serving as an officer in professional organizations, or refereeing submissions for journals or presses all represent important contributions. Non-academic lectures, talks, or programs given outside the university also count toward service if uncompensated. Working with outside organizations, such as school districts or industries, where the university is obviously benefitting, may be counted as service. Popular or journalistic publications, because they can be beneficial to the “image” of the university, may also qualify as service.

Evidence of adequacy or excellence in service should be established over several years, and should be supported by letters from co-committee members, editors, or those familiar with the
activity. These are best solicited by the Chair (promotion and tenure committees are likely to be wary of candidate-solicited letters).

Since every faculty member is expected to provide service to the university and since extraordinary service is most likely to occur later in a faculty member’s career, it is unusual and difficult to base a candidacy for tenure on excellence in service.

BALANCED CASE

The academic handbook includes criteria for promotion or tenure resulting from the presentation of a balanced case: “A candidate for promotion (or tenure) should normally excel in at least one of the above categories and be satisfactory in others. In exceptional cases, a candidate may present evidence of balanced strengths that promise excellent overall performance of comparable benefit to the university. In all cases, the candidate’s total record should be assessed by comprehensive and rigorous peer review. Promotion to any rank is recognition of past achievement and a sign of confidence that the individual is capable of greater responsibilities and accomplishments” (2011 P & T Guidelines).

PROMOTION TO SENIOR LECTURER

The position of lecturer is normally appointed to teach four sections and is not eligible for tenure. A Lecturer is considered for reappointment every two years, and should establish evidence of accomplishment in the areas of teaching and service; there is no expectation of activity in research/creative activities. After seven years, he or she may apply for the position of Senior Lecturer, which is reappointed every three years. Application should be made to the same bodies as promotion and tenure cases (chair, department committee, promotion and tenure committees, academic vice chancellor, university authorities), and a portfolio assembled which should include resume, teaching and service statements, supporting letters, and student evaluations. Teaching awards and ample university committee work, in addition to department service, would be helpful support. As in the case of promotion and tenure, the candidate should announce intention to seek promotion by May 1 for Fall application, and prepare a file in consultation with senior departmental members.

PROMOTION TO PROFESSOR

Unlike the tenure decision and promotion to Associate Professor, there are no time constraints normally associated with promotion to Professor, nor is it required for continued employment. A department member’s achievement of sufficient teaching, service, and research or creative accomplishments to earn tenure and promotion is expected to continue. A tenured member of the English department is expected to show evidence of a continuing and successful program of research and/or creative activity. After a suitable amount of time in the rank of Associate Professor, which may be equal to or longer than the probationary period for tenure, a faculty member should inform the chair by May 1 of the intention to apply for promotion. A portfolio with supporting materials similar to that required for promotion and tenure should be assembled, with the added
criterion that an argument must be made that the candidate has achieved national recognition in the discipline.