

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS STUDY
OF REQUIREMENTS FOR
GRADUATE FACULTY MEMBERSHIP

Procedures for reviewing graduate faculty status were implemented in 1984. Applicants for graduate faculty membership must complete an application identifying particular strengths in teaching, research/scholarly activity and service based upon the previous four years. A subcommittee of the Graduate Council with a representative from each College reviews the applications for membership. The recommendation of this committee is then forwarded to the Graduate Council for consideration. Based upon the Council's recommendation, the Dean of the Graduate School writes a letter to individual applicants.

The council and the subcommittee struggled to find an equitable way to apply the guidelines. The four members of the subcommittee reviewed hundreds of applications during the first four years. As committee membership changed, so did the emphasis on certain criteria, a natural phenomenon given human nature and the interests of individual faculty members. One committee may have placed greater emphasis on research while another committee may have emphasized teaching or service. These shifts in emphases may have been a natural result that the university was in the transition period from one president to another which left the entire university community asking pertinent questions about the institution's direction and goals.

In 1988 the guidelines were reviewed at length and changes were made based upon observations during the previous four years. These guidelines will now be applied as the first group of individuals who came under the previous guidelines must once again apply since the original membership term was for four years.

The guidelines specifically look at teaching, research/scholarly activity, and service. Each of these categories presents unique situations for individual faculty members. How can a panel of "judges" fairly assess other university colleagues given the diversity of a university faculty? A close examination of each criterion follows:

Teaching

What documentation can a university faculty member supply to the committee to adequately justify a claim of high quality teaching? Student evaluations are accepted as a standard part of Western's yearly evaluation of faculty. Much research has been conducted concerning student evaluations and yet little can be demonstrated regarding the validity of such evaluations.

Applicants can solicit letters praising the glory of his/her teaching; however, what applicant would solicit a letter from a disgruntled student?

Research/Scholarly Activity

Published work, presentations, and works in progress are the usual kinds of evidence presented in support of an applicant's research/scholarly activity. Each of these categories has separate parts for discussion: (1) Published work: refereed vs. nonrefereed journals; high quality vs. low quality journals. (2) Presentations: International, National, Regional, State, Local audiences; University related or special interest groups. (3) Works in Progress: The degree of difficulty in completing these works, i.e., time factors involved in writing a book or conducting long-term experimental research.

Service

University, College, and Departmental committee memberships are a standard part of a university faculty's load. Is membership on certain committees more prestigious than on others? Are members of certain departments more likely to serve on more committees because of size of the department? How can a new faculty member become active in university service?

RECOMMENDATIONS

We suppose that there is realistically no way in a bureaucracy such as ours to change the fact that unwritten principles give the real force to printed guidelines. We therefore submit the following recommendations:

1) That the Graduate Faculty Review Committee make specific recommendations to the individuals whose applications are denied as to the reasons for denial. These recommendations would be forwarded by means of the Graduate School Dean's letter to the applicant. In this way, the applicant would have some basis for shifting emphasis in his/her approach to wherever the deficiencies exist.

2) That Western Kentucky University establish a system whereby membership on the graduate faculty is both an honor and a privilege. Such a system would require that faculty receive some benefit from attaining such membership. Membership today is something less than an honor or privilege. As the system currently exists, graduate faculty membership entitles the majority of the faculty to teach graduate classes along with undergraduate classes without any reduction in course load. Membership entitles the faculty member to be on the graduate council, on subcommittees of the graduate council and on graduate committees in their respective colleges and departments which requires additional time on the part of the faculty member. Some equitable reward must be encouraged and enforced university wide.

3) The Graduate Faculty Review Committee is made up of colleagues who have a difficult if not impossible task to perform. Out of consideration for those we elect to the Council, we strongly recommend that applicants for Graduate Faculty be required to complete the application and not submit a professional vita which requires the review committee to decipher what is or what is not relevant to the current application. If the application is not completed as required, the application would be returned to the faculty member to be resubmitted in proper form.

CONCLUSION

The members of the Academic Affairs Committee hope that this report, while critical, is a balanced report. We realize that there are no obvious solutions to some of the problems we have dealt with, yet there are others which appear soluble.