Re-Thinking the Structure of Tenure: A Case Analysis of the Adoption of a Part-Time Tenure Policy

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Introduction
• Family responsive policies may increase recruitment and retention of women faculty at academic health sciences centers
• Parental leave policies
• Tenure clock adjustments
• On-campus child care facilities
• Part-time tenure options
• Adoption of part-time tenure has been contentious at some institutions
• The SOM Dean at the University of Utah viewed this as a priority
• At our institution, a formal university-wide policy is required
• In 2011, the University of Utah adopted and implemented a formal Part-Time Tenure policy

Purpose
Discuss our successful approach to implementing a part-time tenure policy with little controversy at a campus where there was initially much resistance.

Approach
• Collaboration between SOM and Main Campus advocates
• Main Campus Associate VP for Academic Affairs
• SOM Director of Faculty Administration
• Director of WiMS
• The Presidential Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) took the lead role
• Researched and developed a proposed policy
• Key stakeholders and potential sponsors were identified and consulted throughout the process

Discourse and Politics
• Major issues during review and debate:
  • How to implement an extended pre-tenure probationary period without “diluting” standards of excellence
  • Concern whether a part time faculty member could ever be as good:
    • “We don’t want someone with half a national reputation.”
    • Are part time faculty less committed?
  • How to protect junior faculty from a protracted probationary period (up to 14 yrs) with a non-retention decision at the end
  • Concern that part-time tenure faculty would be “marginalized in ways that would make getting tenure extremely difficult”
  • Concern that faculty might “game the system” by having “more time to accomplish the same work”

Outcome
• Debated at length by the Academic Senate in April 2011
• Revised policy presented to the Academic Senate in May 2011
• Passed unanimously with little discussion
• One faculty member in the SOM has since negotiated a temporary part-time tenure position

The Approved Policy
• Three types of part-time arrangements (< 0.75 FTE)
  • Renewable 2-year part time appointment
  • 1-year partial leave of absence at part time pay
  • Permanent part time appointment (tenured faculty only)
• No right to a part time position
• Part-time faculty will be “assessed on the same quality and generally similar overall quantities of accomplishments”

Conclusions
• We believe the adoption a part-time tenure policy with little controversy at our institution resulted from:
  • Strong and consistent advocacy by SOM leaders
  • Coordinated and careful development of the policy
  • Education of the campus
  • Wide dissemination of the policy and opportunities for feedback and revision before presenting to the Academic Senate
• Feedback and debate strengthened the policy

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