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Faculty Focus

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Ginny Haight, editor

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Ensuring Fairness, Faculty Trust in Promotion and Tenure Practices

By Mark E. Workman, Ph.D.

In the tenure and promotion case study presented in their book *Complexities of Higher Education Administration*, Mary Lou Higgerson and Susan S. Rehwaldt provide a description that is probably reasonably representative of the tenure and promotion practices at many U.S. colleges and universities. With allowance for local variation, they effectively summarize the expectations that commonly pertain to teaching, scholarship, and service; the manner in which candidates typically document their accomplishments in these areas; and the review procedures that institutions employ in measuring the fit between standards and achievement. What the authors suggest is that broad dissemination of such policies to all participants in the tenure and promotion process and a "common

format for representing the supporting information" that candidates present to justify their worthiness for tenure or promotion "will help assure fairness in the decision-making process."

Perhaps so, but it is often the case that candidates for tenure and promotion are convinced that the decision-making process is anything but fair. Anyone who has served as an untenured assistant professor is intimately acquainted with the excruciating sense of anxiety attendant upon that intrinsically insecure and lowly position. While a hierarchy in itself is of course not without legitimacy, particularly in a meritocracy, what makes the academic hierarchy sometimes seem unfair to those who seek to climb the ranks is their perception that the rules of the game are constantly changing. This concern is compounded by their skepticism regarding the qualifications of the referees -- the typically diverse group of senior faculty constituting tenure and promotion committees -- to judge that game.

The first issue comes from the perception that standards for tenure and promotion inexorably rise. At many institutions, particularly those that value and support active scholarship and that recruit new faculty with an eye toward their demonstrated and potential scholarly productivity, this perception is in fact a reality. Not every difference makes a difference, however. In other words, while institutions might indeed experience a continuous increase in their expectations for tenure and promotion as a result of the ever more impressive credentials of their newly hired faculty, this increase is not likely to be significantly great over the course of any one person's probationary appointment as to catch that person by surprise. What will be noticeable over the course of several generations of faculty (counting a generation as the length of time it takes to get tenure) will be imperceptible or only barely so to most tenure candidates. Institutional change typically is evolutionary rather than revolutionary, and this is as true for tenure standards as it is for most other aspects of academic life.

The second issue -- the qualifications of tenure and promotion committees to judge the work of their aspiring colleagues -- also seems to me to be ungrounded because it comes from a misunderstanding of the roles of candidate and evaluator in the tenure process. Candidates for tenure or promotion sometimes revert to thinking of themselves as students who will be judged by their mentors. Instead, they should regard themselves as teachers who will provide the instruction necessary to enable their colleagues to appreciate the nature and quality of the work that is being offered to justify tenure and promotion. This is especially important in a profession in which competence often is measured by the abstruseness of one's publications, and it renders irrelevant the issue of whether the senior faculty sitting in judgment come from within a candidate's discipline - - and thus are likely to be conversant with the lingua franca of the candidate's scholarship -- or from a discipline far afield. Just as it is the responsibility of faculty, junior or otherwise, to facilitate the ability of their students to achieve access to esoteric knowledge so too is it the responsibility of candidates for tenure and promotion to teach their senior faculty colleagues what they need to know in order to appropriately judge the meaning and worth of the candidates' scholarly efforts. Indeed, that is the function of a

dossier, the effective construction of which is usually the subject of much institutional attention.

There is another and ultimately more important reason why the inevitably heterogeneous composition of tenure and promotion committees is not only not problematic but in fact appropriate. It is because tenure and promotion are not designations awarded by departments or (in a university) by individual colleges but by the university itself. Thus, it is to the university community at large that tenure and promotion candidates must demonstrate their accomplishments and, to the extent that they do so effectively, from which they will presumably receive just recognition. Broader dissemination of this fact will help assure that the tenure and promotion decision process not only is fair but is also *perceived* as fair.

Mark E. Workman is dean of the college of arts and sciences at the University of North Florida.

This article first appeared in *Academic Leader*, a newsletter dedicated to enhancing leadership within and between departments through better "middle management." Want to try *Academic Leader* for free? Go to <http://www-magnapubs.iproduction.com/subscribe/9altrial.html> to sign up for a 3-month trial subscription. You don't want to miss out on this great offer!

Building a Learning Community Throughout a Program

Nova Southeastern University's Master's in Health Law program is designed to encourage the creation of learning communities in which students view each other as partners rather than isolated individuals who happened to be working toward similar goals.

The two-year program, which is housed in NSU's Shepard Broad Law Center, uses a cohort model that features a combination of synchronous, asynchronous, and face-to-face learning, to encourage students to seek each others' opinions and advice. The program is intended to help working professionals understand and navigate the regulations governing the health care industry.

Summer Institute

Building the learning community begins with the Summer Institute where students meet at NSU for four-and-a-half days for both community building and instructional purposes. The Summer Institute occurs each year and provides students at different stages in the program to interact.

During the first year, students learn about the American legal system's structure and history, the basics of the course system, and legal research and reasoning techniques. In the second year, students present their Individual Research Project ideas to peers, incoming students, faculty members, and practitioners in the field. In the third year, graduating students present the results of their Individual Research Projects, which helps others in the program refine their project ideas and gives them a clearer sense of the process.

"We start them off so they have some sense of who their classmates are. I really think that's important in our program to help create a community," says Kathy Cerminara, associate professor at NSU's Shepard Broad Law Center and former MHL director.

Online community building

The program has several features that build upon the relationships that are begun on campus.

To provide continuity and the tools to build a community, each course uses WebCT and features modules that include reading materials, links to pertinent materials, hypothetical problems, lecture notes, video clips of lectures, threaded discussions, chat, and quizzes. Each course offers chat at least twice per semester, but students are not required to participate to allow some flexibility. "Some professors use chat as a real pedagogical tool, asking preplanned questions, presenting hypothetical situations. Others use them as online office hours, asking questions like, How is the course going? What questions do you have? How does what we're learning fit in with current events?" Cerminara says.

Ensuring that all the courses are structured similarly is important, particularly because the instructors, like the students, are from all over the country. To further ensure continuity, faculty are invited to the Summer Institutes to share online teaching ideas with each other. The program director also evaluates each course.

For more information about the program, visit www.mhl.nslaw.nova.edu. Contact Kathy Cerminara at cerminarak@nsu.law.nova.edu.

The above is an excerpt from *On-line Classroom*. This newsletter covers topics such as student satisfaction, faculty workload, copyright, course development, asynchronous/synchronous interaction, creating online communities, online group work, student support, assessment, instructor's role, multimedia, online labs/simulations, student retention. Go to http://www.magnapubs.com/subscribe/magnapubs_oc.html to find out more and to subscribe.

Audio Conference Announcement

Learner-Centered Teaching is a live, interactive audio conference that will:

- introduce research that documents how students learn
- explore the instructional implications of what is known about how students learn
- identify five aspects of instructional practice that inhibit how much and how well students learn
- share specific, concrete strategies that can be used to promote learning
- analyze student response to instruction that puts them more in charge of their own learning
- help teachers plan and implement learner-centered strategies successfully
- consider the validity of individual attitudes and institutional barriers that prevent teachers from moving toward learner-centered teaching

Find out more details about this essential audio conference by visiting <http://www.magnapubs.com/calendar/12.html>.

Motivating Students: 8 Simple Rules for Teachers

By Lana Becker and Kent N. Schneider, East Tennessee State University,
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Principles of Accounting has the reputation of being a "hard and boring" course. It is difficult to motivate students to invest the time and effort necessary to succeed in the course. To meet this challenge, we have assembled a list of eight simple rules for keeping students focused and motivated. These rules are not original, and they aren't just for those of us who teach accounting classes. Indeed, most of these time-honored suggestions apply to any course students find hard and boring, and we think that makes them broadly applicable.

Rule 1: Emphasize the most critical concepts continuously. Reiterate these concepts in lectures and assignments throughout the course. Include questions relating to these critical subjects on every exam, thus rewarding students for learning, retaining, and, hopefully, applying this knowledge in a variety of contexts.

Rule 2: Provide students with a "visual aid" when possible to explain abstract concepts. A significant proportion of today's students are visual learners. For these students, a simple diagram or flowchart truly can be more valuable than a thousand words in a text or a lecture.

Rule 3: Rely on logic when applicable. Point out to students which information is merely "fact" that must be memorized and which course material is based upon "logic." Show students how to employ logical thinking to learn and retain new information. For example, in the double-entry bookkeeping system, "debits" equal "credits," and debit

entries cause assets to increase. These are "facts" or features of the system; they are not based on logic. However, once the student accepts the system, logic *can* be used to operate within the system. Continuing the example, if debit entries *increase* assets, it is logical that credit entries will cause assets to *decrease*.

Rule 4: Use in-class activities to reinforce newly presented material. After a new concept or subject has been presented via text reading, lecture, or class discussion, allow the students to put the concept into action by completing an in-class assignment. These assignments can be short, but they must be developed to ensure that the students understand the critical concepts underlying the new material. Typically, the most learning takes place when the students are permitted to work in small groups, to refer to their text and notes, and to ask questions of the instructor while completing the assignment. If these in-class assignments are part of the course grading scheme, class attendance also improves.

***Watch for the next 4 rules in next month's Faculty Focus.**

The above is an excerpt from *The Teaching Professor*, the premier faculty development newsletter in higher education. It provides a consistent theoretical research basis for sound pedagogical practice through scholarship on teaching. Subscribe today at http://www.magnapubs.com/subscribe/magnapubs_tp.html or call 1-800-433-0499.

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Lessons in Leadership/Dean's Dialogue

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Lessons in Leadership, written by Lynn Little, "fills the gaps" for those academic administrators who were never formally prepared in leadership and provides occasional profiles of outstanding leaders in action, along the way.

Dean's Dialogue, written by Dr. McDaniel, explores the range of challenges and issues that every academic dean faces, in colleges large and small, public and private, urban and rural. This collection will help deans energize their leadership role.

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