

AAU

POST-TENURE REVIEW

April 10, 2001

Association of American Universities

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## Post-Tenure Review

Over the past decade, higher education institutions have given increasing attention to the concept of post-tenure review. Because “post-tenure review” can convey both general and specific meanings, it is important to define the term. In the general sense, post-tenure review might apply to any form of evaluation or performance review of faculty members who have achieved tenure. Such forms of review are numerous, including annual performance or merit salary reviews, more thorough reviews at the time of promotion, student evaluations, peer reviews of research performance through federal research grant competitions, and faculty reviews as components of regional or specialized accreditation or other internal or external program reviews. In this brief note, however, we use the term post-tenure review (PTR) to refer to a formal periodic review procedure for tenured faculty that is separate from and operates in addition to traditional evaluation procedures such as those listed above. Post-tenure review policies have both supporters and opponents.

As early as 1983, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) stated a position on PTR:

The Association believes that periodic formal institutional evaluation of each postprobationary faculty member would bring scant benefit, would incur unacceptable costs, not only in money and time but also in dampening of creativity and of collegial relationships, and would threaten academic freedom.

In 1999, AAUP issued a report that reaffirmed the principles of its 1983 statement but also expanded on that position, expressing a strong concern that post-tenure review, if substituted for dismissal procedures, could obscure actions that might constitute violations of academic freedom. The 1999 report included a set of guidelines and “best practices” intended to ensure that post-tenure review, if implemented, would contribute positively to faculty development without infringing academic freedom.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to the reservations about PTR expressed by AAUP, a number of universities believe that their PTR procedures have produced clear benefits ranging from improving the quality of faculty performance to building support within the governing boards for the tenure system.

To better understand the extent and nature of PTR policies at AAU universities, the AAU Tenure Committee contacted AAU universities requesting information about any such policies they might have, and inviting comments from member presidents and chancellors on PTR. The responses to this request indicated that member institutions differ widely with respect to PTR policies.

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<sup>1</sup>“Post-Tenure Review: An AAUP Response,” a report endorsed by AAUP at its 1999 Annual Meeting (Attachment 1). It should be noted that several AAUP recommendations for PTR are reflected in PTR provisions adopted by a number of universities included in the AAU survey of university PTR policies.

## 1) Institutional Responses

- The committee received 41 responses to its query about PTR policies: 28 of 34 public institutions (including the two Canadian members) and 13 of 27 private institutions responded.
- Twenty-two of the 28 public institutions that responded had PTR policies, while only two of the 11 private institutions had institution-wide PTR policies, and one private institution's engineering college had a PTR policy.
- Five sample policies are attached to this report (see Attachments 2-6). All of the policies submitted to the committee are available from the AAU Washington Office.

## 2) Variations among policies

The various policies differ widely in their intent, degree of formality, and implementation. The impetus for some policies seems to have been the need to respond to external criticisms of tenure, while others are internally focused on faculty recognition and development; most policies have elements of both accountability and faculty development. Some policies apply to all faculty members at regular intervals; others apply only to those faculty members for whom annual reviews or other events trigger a set of PTR actions.

Because of their wide variation, it is difficult to characterize the institutional PTR policies by discrete properties, but the following descriptions attempt to give some sense of the nature of the policies submitted:

- *Purpose:* About half of the policies indicate that their purposes are both to facilitate and reward strong performance and to address substandard performance (13 policies). Four policies seem to focus solely or primarily on faculty reward and development, and five seem to be organized solely or primarily to detect and respond to substandard performance. Two policies also identify harmonizing faculty interests and departmental needs as a purpose, and three cite the provision of external accountability as a major purpose.
- *Coverage:* Twelve policies apply to all faculty members, with reviews conducted generally at least every five years. In contrast, ten policies are event-triggered: typically, an annual review triggers differential outcomes, with satisfactory reviews generating no subsequent action but unsatisfactory reviews triggering some more formal action such as a performance improvement agreement developed by the faculty member and department chair. Four policies include a review of department chairs and deans as well as faculty members.

- *Implementation:* Five policies leave the development of a PTR procedure to academic units; the rest are central policies applied institution-wide. In nine of the policies, the department chair or other unit head carries out the core evaluations; in ten policies, the evaluations are carried out by faculty peer review committees.
- *Outcomes:* Outcomes are tied to the purposes of the policies. Those that are designed to identify and reward exemplary performance often have provisions for extra financial support or benefits beyond the merit raises provided through annual reviews. Several policies indicate that a re-proportioning of teaching, research, and service might be an appropriate response in individual circumstances. Responses to substandard performance reviews typically involve a series of steps moving toward resolution of the problem or toward increasing sanctions. In some policies, such sanctions can end in dismissal, although three policies state that PTR cannot lead to dismissal, which is carried out under a separate process.
- *Date of adoptions:* Though it is sometimes difficult to differentiate the date of adoption of a new policy and the modification of an existing one, most of the PTR policies seem to be recently adopted: 16 of the 25 policies appear to have been adopted since 1995.

### 3) Effectiveness of policies

Several letters accompanying the submitted policies contain statements about perceived benefits of PTR—that the procedure has been a major factor contributing to high faculty productivity, has led to improved faculty development and heightened faculty morale, improved the connection between stated goals and individual performance, enhanced faculty participation in the mission of the university, maximized the allocation of faculty skills and resources to unit missions, and provided improved accountability both within and outside the institution.

On the other hand, faculty PTR can be quite costly in faculty and staff time, money, and other institutional resources. From a cost/benefit standpoint, the question becomes whether the added costs of PTR produce benefits beyond those resulting from annual performance reviews and other evaluation procedures that are sufficient to justify those costs. For many of the university respondents whose institutions do not have PTR policies, that cost/benefit analysis does not warrant adoption of PTR.

It should be noted that the costs of PTR vary widely based on the nature of the policy, ranging from the high costs of formal policies requiring the review of all faculty on a regular basis to the lower costs of policies that engage only at the margins of performance, triggered by events such as a series of annual reviews significantly above or below average. Moreover, a number of institutions which do not have formal PTR

policies have the functional equivalent, with strengthened annual reviews and informal procedures for providing differential treatment of special cases.

That PTR is so dominantly a phenomenon of public universities may suggest that in many cases PTR policies are developed in response to pressure from state legislators or publicly appointed or elected governing boards. Nonetheless, a number of institutions have clearly developed PTR policies based on internally perceived institutional needs and benefits. Faculties seem to react at least initially with suspicion or disapproval of proposed PTR policies, fearing that they will undermine tenure and threaten academic freedom, as noted in the attached AAUP report. Yet some institutions report that PTR policies, once implemented, have led not only to faculty acceptance but to strong faculty support, particularly in those cases where the policy is understood to have led to greater recognition of outstanding performance or earlier redirection of malperformance.

The committee believes it is not appropriate for the AAU to suggest any particular system of ongoing review and evaluation of tenured faculty. Rather, we believe it is important for all presidents and chancellors to assure themselves that their system for ongoing evaluation of faculty is sufficiently robust to support their intellectual goals and to meet their responsibilities to the worlds of scholarship and education.



Attachment 1: American Association of University Professors report on post-tenure review

Attachment 2: Iowa State University post-tenure review policy

Attachment 3: University of California, Davis post-tenure review policy

Attachment 4: University of Colorado System post-tenure review policy

Attachment 5: University of Southern California post-tenure review policy

Attachment 6: The University of Texas at Austin post-tenure review policy

*If you would like a complete copy of the report including the attachments, please contact Sandie Dickerson, Assistant to John Vaughn, by email (sandie\_dickerson@aau.edu) or phone (202-408-7500) and one will be sent to you by mail. The attachments are not available electronically.*