Questions and Discussion notes

1. Evaluation of clinical faculty

Clinical faculty members not only provide service, they are also embedded in the teaching mission, and that activity would be a part of the teaching portion of the dossier. Whatever scholarly work associated with clinical training or publications would be included in the appropriate areas. Possibly add a section for clinical professors that would highlight something that may be missing. Dossiers are really for the department and the college who should understand assignments of clinical faculty. University P&T Committee does not evaluate clinical faculty professor promotion. Departments and colleges can create the flexibility that is needed. The clinical series of faculty appointments is a non-tenure-track series. It is possible to advance to associate professor and professor on the clinical track.

For tenure-track appointments, the university is looking for the scholarly dimension of clinical work, work that is publishable and reviewed, with peer review, demonstrated impact, and scholarship behind it. Virginia Tech takes a broad view of research, as long as the work can still be evaluated, peer reviewed, and shows impact.

2. Professor of practice promotion criteria? How they were hired? What were the criteria for hiring and criteria for assessment? Committee confused.

The professor of practice appointment was created to give a lot of flexibility to the units. Individuals on that track should have a national reputation in order to be promoted to full professor. That includes the ability to give talks, but not necessarily looking for scholarly reviewed publications from individuals in that track. Evaluation of professors of practice is an evolving process. It may be useful to set up a small group to discuss further.

What does practice mean for those in classroom? They provide real life experience in their teaching, but not necessarily still practicing.

3. How does tenure clock extension impact evaluation? Should a person who has extended the clock have slightly more accomplishments?

No. The university has tried hard to make stop the clock a non-factor in evaluation, as if that year does not exist. External reviewers are made aware also and instructed not to just count years. Once the clock is stopped, it should not factor into any evaluation. In the case of a non-mandatory review, the committees should be very sure that the person has met expectations for promotion.

4. Difference between committee and chair letters?

Department committees and their letters vary, although it is generally a faculty committee that evaluates and writes a letter, a vote is taken and recorded. This is a big piece of the evaluation process.
The chair has an independent opportunity to review each case and to write a letter of evaluation and make a decision on whether they support or don’t support the committee’s motion. The college committee is a faculty based committee that makes its own independent assessment of the candidate and provides a letter. The college dean also evaluates and writes a letter. These four independent evaluations take place before the case gets to the university committee.

The most important part is the department head’s letter. The department head knows her or his colleagues very well and can tell the story in such a way that you and your colleagues want this person promoted. It is very important in letters to explain “no” votes. If the committee doesn’t explain, the department head should address in his or her letter.

5. What about the case where it is the mandatory year and the candidate is not looking good but next year will look great? Can anything be done?

The harsh reality is no. The 2 and 4 year reviews are important to gauge progress and make adjustments if necessary. Stop the clock must be taken within a year of an event, not at the end of the probationary period when things don’t look good. Don’t try to fix it at the end.

6. What is an invited keynote presentation or lecture?

A keynote implies a significant audience, a conference, a prestigious event. A lecture could be a seminar series, a smaller event, etc. The general notion is that you have to be invited to go visit another university. Invited addresses are those that are labeled, or featured at a conference or documented somehow. Consider how the event is going to be evaluated by a committee, just an invited lecture is not necessarily that significant.

7. If there is a “no” vote at the department level, what would be your preference for letters? Would there be two letters, one for yes, one for no, or combined?

It’s more effective to have a single letter. Integrate the comments, share the positive ones, and capture why someone voted no (e.g., the significance of research wasn’t quite enough). If there is a fundamental philosophical split, we don’t disallow a minority letter; however, it is rarely used and rarely needed.

8. When we think about scholarship, it’s natural to think about it in terms of research. Would you comment on value of scholarship for instruction and service, specifically clinical service? What is the expectation from the university committee?

Scholarly activity of all types that is peer reviewed is a legitimate part of research and scholarship. Scholarship of teaching could be demonstrated by effective teachers, engaging their students. The activity gets documented in teaching evaluations, department comments, and peer evaluation of teaching. Scholarship of teaching could also be demonstrated by publishing papers to include as their research accomplishments. People who succeed at the university when their scholarship is focused on the discipline in which they are working are perfectly legitimate. Similarly, clinical contributions may be an important part of a faculty member’s assignment, and for this work to be recognized as scholarship,
we would expect peer-reviewed publications related to clinical innovations, new approaches, and the like.

9. Getting letters from external referees can be a challenge. Is there discussion of moving the schedule up or compressing?

There is an increasing concern that it is harder to get reviewers to write letters. Every discipline is different. Some departments have figured out a timetable that works best for them; but you don’t want to request letters too early. Some departments have been overshooting the number of requests for letters with hope they get enough for a fair evaluation to candidate.

10. Are materials sent to external reviewers same as the committee receive? How much leeway?

What goes to reviewers varies across departments; some departments send the cv and all documents; some send a draft dossier with a selection of papers and don’t require that the dossier itself go out. The CV and papers sent should be reflective of the entire dossier. If the packet is sent out in August, that is going to be the basis for the evaluation for promotion. Beyond September, departments run into problems with reviewers getting bogged down in fall semester work, and risk letters being late or not received at all.

Comment from Brenda Winkel: The last thing you want is letters to come in after the committee is finished with their discussion. Letters are critical to conversations. Biological Sciences starts in June and asks for 1 more outside review than needed and gives a tight deadline to the reviewers. We don’t send the full dossier. Getting back to where to put invited lecture, we put invited keynote presentations and lectures under a sub heading. We make sure we define what they are and break out abstracts vs. published.

11. Complexity of considering people early (non-mandatory)?

It’s a question of whether you are convinced the person achieved what you expect and you are confident you are ready to recommend this person for promotion and tenure. It is a judgment call between the department and college.

12. What about promotions for professors of practice? Are they eligible for promotion?

For employment purposes, we have restricted and regular (non-restricted) appointments. If a professor of practice is on a regular (non-restricted) appointment, the expectation is that employment will continue as long as performance is up to expectations, and they should be eligible for promotion.

13. Could an honorarium be provided to assist with expediting external letters?

An honorarium for external reviewers is bad practice. Providing letters for promotion ought to be accepted as a professional responsibility and shouldn’t be compensated.
Comment: Writing external letters should be included in FARS and it should be recognized that some are called upon to write more than others.

14. What about potential conflict of interest? For example, what if the department chair or dean collaborate with the candidate?

The department head has to write a letter, and the system trusts that they can be as objective as they can be. If they are working collaboratively with the candidate, they should note the collaborative relationship in the letter. Full disclosure is important, but it is also important that the department chair or dean not disadvantage a faculty member with whom collaborative work has been involved. There are very clear guidelines for not writing review letters for people you work with directly, including grad students, post docs, and co PI’s. It’s just not good practice. But some internal collaborations are unavoidable and require disclosure. Department heads and deans play a key role in promotion and tenure and it may disadvantage the candidate if these letters are not included.