

# UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

*The task of the university is the creation of the future,  
so far as rational thought, and civilized modes of appreciation,  
can affect the issue.* Alfred Lord Whitehead

## Pythian Papers on Academic Careers

### Best Practices for

### **CONSIDERING COLLEGIALITY AND SERVICE AS COMPONENTS OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE**

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## CONSIDERING COLLEGIALLY AND SERVICE AS COMPONENTS OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

**COLLEGIALLY.** Collegiality is a complex issue in any workplace. In academia, with its culture of academic freedom and tolerance for different modes of expression, the appropriate role of collegiality in performance evaluations raises even more questions than usual. There are at least three important aspects to collegiality in academe. There is the ethical imperative that we face in our professional roles; there is the task of assessing the extent to which collegiality affects job effectiveness; and there is the question of boundaries on the academy's tolerance for lack of collegiality.

The literature on collegiality is extensive and contentious, and no short discussion can do it justice. Two nationally recognized statements provide good entrees into this literature. One is a statement in Auburn University's faculty handbook<sup>1</sup>, included as an appendix to this document. The other is a lengthier, more nuanced and cautious statement by the American Association of University Professors<sup>2</sup>. Both statements do a good job of distinguishing the issue of collegiality from that of academic freedom. Finally, there is the legal view, established through case law<sup>3</sup>.

**The ethical imperative.** Teachers and scholars have a special role — one that holds us to high standards as exemplars, not only for the edification of our students but also as role models for society at large. As representatives of learned professions, university faculty members have a special responsibility to cultivate aspects of character that promote reason, civility, and the capacity for improvement through discourse and reflection. These three characteristics lie at the heart of collegiality. To many in our society, an inability to collaborate productively and to resolve disputes without resort to hostility or sociopathic behavior reflects a profound failing in someone who claims to be dedicated to the life of the mind.

**Collegiality and job effectiveness.** Although the ethical imperative may seem abstract, collegiality becomes a concrete issue when it affects faculty members' performance evaluations. The issue is often clearest when a lack of civility or collegiality interferes with a faculty member's teaching, research, or service or with the department's functions. A faculty member who cannot work willingly and effectively with colleagues also cannot contribute adequately to the activities needed to coordinate curricula, mentor new teachers, or sustain a productive community of scholars. And the persistence of a hostile climate in the workplace — no matter how few individuals are responsible for it — inhibits the

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<sup>1</sup> Accessed 21 January 2004 at <http://www.auburn.edu/academic/provost/handbook/policies.html#tenure>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/policydocs/contents/collegiality.htm>

<sup>3</sup> B.A. Lee, "Higher Education and the Law: Academic Affairs and Faculty Issues," Proceedings, 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on Legal Issues in Higher Education, Burlington VT, 5-7 October 2003. See, for example, *DeLlano v. Berglund*, 282 F.3d 1031 (8<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2002), cert. denied, 123 S. Ct. 434.

institution's ability to engage students and to recruit talented colleagues, both of which are essential to a healthy academic institution. When lack of collegiality reaches this level, as distinct from curmudgeonliness or egocentricity, a supervisor has valid reasons to rate the performance lower.

In light of this observation, it is unnecessary to treat civility and collegiality as distinct categories of performance. Instead, civility and collegiality are among the traits that one must exhibit to be an effective member of the professoriate. In this sense they are analogous to industriousness, intelligence, depth of knowledge, initiative, and leadership — other traits that are necessary to do one's job well but hold no special place among the standard dimensions of a job description.

So, the answer to the question whether lack of collegiality can affect a professor's performance evaluation is "yes," no less so than laziness, dull-wittedness, intellectual obsolescence, and other shortcomings of character.

**Limits to acceptable behavior.** The issue is most urgent when civility and collegiality utterly collapse. Examples include cases involving menacing interpersonal behavior, threats of physical violence, unfair discrimination, harassment, bullying, or violence itself. In these cases, neither case law nor university policy leaves any latitude for argument: UW does not tolerate threats, assault, intimidation, unfair discrimination, harassment, or battery. Taken this far, and borrowing from the language in the Trustees' Regulations defining cause for dismissal, lack of collegiality "seriously impairs the ability of the University of Wyoming to carry out its functions." Any faculty member who has to be informed or reminded of this boundary should think carefully about his or her suitability for an academic career, for that career is in jeopardy.

In sum, collegiality is a legitimate criterion in the assessment of faculty members' performance, not only from a legal standpoint but also because of the clear connections between collegiality and job effectiveness. These connections clarify the important distinction between collegiality and personal characteristics that some of us see as inimical to academic freedom: conformity, passivity, and acquiescence in the face of controversy. They also allow us to draw distinctions between collegiality and other character traits, such as humility, sociability, and charm, which many people admire but that may be largely inessential to one's effectiveness as a professor. In extreme forms, lack of civility and the rejection of collegiality can themselves be at sharp odds with the mission of the university. In these cases, the behavior in question is simply intolerable.

**SERVICE.** Teaching, research, and service form the traditional triad of faculty duties at research universities. At some institutions and for some faculty members, activities such as extension work (particularly at land-grant universities), advising, and administration also enter the mix as separate categories of duties. And for some disciplines the term "research" is less accurate than other terms, like "creative endeavors." These intricacies notwithstanding, this paper is focused on the traditional triad.

Service — especially professional service, as distinct from community service unrelated to one's job — is often the most puzzling dimension of the faculty job description. In its simplest and most familiar form, the issue takes the form of a paradox: why does service carry so little weight when it seems to take so much time? Moreover, faced with this riddle, how can faculty members fairly weigh their colleagues'

service contributions in deliberations on reappointment, tenure, promotion, and other elements of the academy's peer-review culture?

This paper offers a three-faceted resolution to these questions. First, some of the apparent paradox disappears when we resist the temptation to treat teaching, research, and service as non-overlapping categories. Second, in our roles as peer reviewers, we ought to avoid unnecessarily reductionist assessments of teaching and research. Third, service can have a negative side: not all activities listed as service are worthy of a faculty member's time; in fact some are better viewed as distractions. These points offer a set of guidelines that faculty members might use to gauge the service portion of their careers.

**Overlapping duties.** Teaching, research, and service overlap. Nowhere should this proposition be clearer than at a research university, where most faculty members face significant expectations to teach *and* produce original scholarship. It would be hard to justify these expectations if none of the scholarship ever found its way into classrooms, teaching studios, and instructional laboratories. One of the most concrete examples of the overlap between teaching and research is the supervision of Ph.D. students, where the professor can be a teacher, researcher, and learner all within the space of a one-hour conversation. Similarly, vibrant teaching ought to provoke questions, not all of which have ready answers. The core of scholarly work is the struggle to formulate, analyze, and answer precisely such questions. At a sufficiently advanced level — often in upper-division or graduate-level courses — this interplay can stimulate new knowledge and insights.

The point is that there is no bright line dividing teaching and research, even if they often seem to compete for faculty members' time. By the same token, service naturally overlaps with teaching and research. A presentation to community-college faculty, participation as a scientist or scholar in a public forum, a visit to a high-school class, chairing a symposium at a professional conference, and serving on a national panel all count as service in many resumes, but they contribute to one's teaching and research career in ways that many faculty members would be reluctant to forego.

**The pitfall of reductionism.** Unfortunately, there is a tendency to adopt our narrowest views of teaching and research when we assess each other's performance. In this setting, the all-too-common but ultimately futile quest for quantifiable metrics often leads to reductionist analyses of inherently complicated activities. For example, to evaluate teaching, we count the number of student credit-hours taught and scan the numerical averages extracted from review forms filled out by students. To evaluate research, we count the number of refereed articles in first- or second-tier journals, possibly augmenting the assessment with a tally of external funding.

Such data are important; but they're incomplete. When we assess teaching and research with such strict blinders on, much of the rest of our colleagues' work has no natural place to get counted except in the service ledger. And then it's no wonder that service seems to take so much time.

In reality, a professor whose only teaching contribution is to hold the appropriate number of contact hours, with an appropriate number of students and with satisfactory approval statistics, has a cramped and miserly teaching career. Solid classroom performance is a necessary condition for excellence in teaching, but outstanding teachers do much more. They participate in the arduous conversations

needed to maintain current and coherent curricula; they serve as mentors to younger colleagues; they train and supervise graduate teaching assistants; they help articulate the department's courses with those in other disciplines and institutions; they help assess student learning; and they collaborate to refine their own courses and teaching techniques.

Similarly, a faculty member whose only research contributions are refereed journal articles is relying on disciplinary colleagues to take care of the many household chores needed to sustain a community of scholars. Most of us know these 'service' chores firsthand: reviewing manuscripts, editing journals, organizing conferences, serving in professional societies, managing grants, guiding younger colleagues, serving as an external referee for tenure and promotion cases, participating in national review panels. A full accounting of teaching and research includes not only the marquee accomplishments, but also the wide array of other activities that help make these accomplishments meaningful.

**The dark side of service.** Not all activities classified as service deserve positive recognition. Like most large, complex organizations, every university harbors some committees and projects whose work amounts to little more than irritating churn, either because the people are ineffective or, worse, because the work simply doesn't need to be done. The important question is how to identify such behavior and how to redirect it. The full accounting advocated in the last paragraph suggests a guideline for gauging the activities commonly classified as service: if the activity contributes tangibly to the university's teaching and research missions, either locally or more broadly, and either directly or by promoting the smooth governance of the institution or of the discipline, it is legitimate service. If not, then there may be some other reason to pursue the activity, but the case for recognition as service must be made. This guideline lends support to the practice of counting service as no more than 10 percent in many job descriptions: it is a reminder that teaching and research are better touchstones for assessing much of our work.

Indeed, service has a dark side. It can be a self-inflicted distraction from the most rewarding — and often most intimidating — challenges of a faculty member's career. The distraction can be deliberate or subliminal. Being a truly inspiring classroom teacher and making internationally recognized advances to one's discipline require genuinely hard work, and for many of us the greatest anxiety is that hard work won't be enough. Some people find it easier to muddle along at a level that is merely acceptable (or sometimes worse), devoting too much time to service-related activities as a way of avoiding more ambitious but psychologically riskier endeavors. In the short run, this dynamic feeds the sense that a faculty member's service contributions earn too little respect. On longer time scales, it leads to failed tenure cases, poor prospects for promotion, and mid-career burnout. To keep matters on track, faculty leaders owe it to their colleagues to set clear expectations for service, to provide guidance when service activities appear out of proportion or misdirected, and to reward the often frustrating and uncertain efforts required to meet higher aspirations.

If there is one central notion that captures all of these observations, it is that service is not a distinct category of work, disjoint from teaching and research; instead it is an integral part of the work of the academy. Ignoring this work in favor of more quantifiable activities, such as publishing and covering one's assigned classes to a satisfactory level of student approval, leads to an impoverished professional life. On the other hand, a retreat into service-like activities to duck the profession's greatest intellectual

challenges is a recipe for mediocrity and disappointment. Successful faculty careers are characterized by triumphs in the most demanding realms of teaching and scholarship, seasoned with thoughtful and balanced contributions to the milieu in which these activities take place. Our evaluation and reward systems — including tenure and promotion — ought to cultivate careers of this caliber.

## **Appendix**

The following text is from Auburn's Faculty Policies and Procedures, cited in the main text above

### **9. TENURE CRITERIA AND CONSIDERATIONS**

Auburn University nurtures and defends the concept of academic tenure which assures each faculty member freedom, without jeopardy at the department, college or school, or University level, to criticize and advocate changes in existing theories, beliefs, programs, policies, and institutions and guarantees faculty members the right to support, without jeopardy, any colleague whose academic freedom is threatened. Tenure establishes an environment in which truth can be sought and expressed in one's teaching, research/creative work, outreach work, and service. Decisions on tenure are different in kind from those on promotion. Tenure, in fact, is more exacting. In addition to demonstrating quality in the areas of 1) teaching, 2) research/creative work, 3) outreach and 4) service as described above under Promotion Criteria, the candidate for tenure must also demonstrate professional collegiality.

#### **COLLEGIALITY**

In appraising a candidate's collegiality, department members should keep in mind that the successful candidate for tenure will assume what may be an appointment of 30 years or more in the department. Collegiality should not be confused with sociability or likability. Collegiality is a professional, not personal, criterion relating to the performance of a faculty member's duties within a department. The requirement that a candidate demonstrate collegiality does not license tenured faculty to expect conformity to their views. Concerns relevant to collegiality include the following: Are the candidate's professional abilities and relationships with colleagues compatible with the departmental mission and with its long-term goals? Has the candidate exhibited an ability and willingness to engage in shared academic and administrative tasks that a departmental group must often perform and to participate with some measure of reason and knowledge in discussions germane to departmental policies and programs? Does the candidate maintain high standards of professional integrity?

Collegiality can best be evaluated at the departmental level. Concerns respecting collegiality should be shared with the candidate as soon as they arise; they should certainly be addressed in the yearly review and the third year review. Faculty members should recognize that their judgment of a candidate's collegiality will carry weight with the Promotion and Tenure Committee.