

An analysis of tenure and promotion documents in SEM departments at KSU

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Discipline	% Women Ph.D.'s	% Women Assistant Profs.	% Women Associate Profs.	% Women Full Profs.	Gap between % Ph.D.'s and % Assistant Professors	Gap between % Ph.D.'s and % Full Professors
Mechanical Engineering	10.4	15.7	8.9	3.2	-5.3	7.2
Electrical Engineering	11.5	10.9	9.8	3.8	0.6	7.7
Physics	13.3	11.2	9.4	5.2	2.1	8.1
Astronomy	20.6	20.2	15.7	9.8	0.4	10.8
Computer Science	20.5	10.8	14.4	8.3	9.7	12.2
Civil Engineering	18.7	22.3	11.5	3.5	-3.6	15.2
Chemical Engineering	22.3	21.4	19.2	4.4	0.9	17.9
Economics	29.3	19	16.3	7.2	10.3	22.1
Math	27.2	19.6	13.2	4.6	7.6	22.6
Political Science	36.6	36.5	28.6	13.9	0.1	22.7
Chemistry	31.3	21.5	20.5	7.6	9.8	23.7
Biological Sciences	44.7	30.4	24.7	14.7	14.3	30.0
Sociology	58.9	52.3	42.7	24.3	6.6	34.6
Psychology	66.1	45.4	40.1	26.7	20.7	39.4

KSU rank and salary data, FY 2008.

	Total		Men		Women		% women at rank	Salary ratio - W/M
	Salary	N	Salary	N	Salary	N		
Full Professor	\$92,545	408	\$94,001	359	\$81,877	49	12.0%	\$ 0.87
Associate Professor	\$70,456	319	\$72,245	217	\$66,648	102	32.0%	\$ 0.92
Assistant Professor	\$58,521	354	\$59,023	215	\$57,745	139	39.3%	\$ 0.98
Instructor	\$42,769	183	\$45,810	74	\$40,705	109	59.6%	\$ 0.89
Average Salary/Total N	\$70,235	1,264	\$75,727	865	\$58,329	399	31.6%	\$ 0.77
% of category who are full		32%		42%		12%		

METHODS

For the purposes of this analysis, I examined twelve total tenure and promotion documents. These were collected from six departments, and consist of a baseline and a revised document from each.

The data file is composed of 115 pages (excluding appendices held on department websites) and 42,607 words.

The analysis was inductive and thematic – I read each document several times and coded sections for emergent themes.

Three general findings emerge from this analysis.

1) One of the most common patterns in the documents is omission and obfuscation. Either there are no statements at all about what is required to achieve promotion, and sometimes tenure, or there are statements that have been made deliberately unclear. This is one of the most blatant such examples among the documents:

For promotion to full professor:

Distinguished reputation in [discipline], such that he or she would be invited to join our faculty at the rank of Full Professor. (Department E, original).

The more usual pattern is one of making requirements deliberately unclear, in this case, for tenure:

There is no simple list of accomplishments that guarantee that a faculty member will obtain tenure. Instead, tenure is recommended based on the assessment of the tenured faculty that a candidate has made outstanding contributions in appropriate academic endeavors commensurate with current faculty. By granting tenure only to such individuals, the continued excellence of the University is ensured (Department A, revised).

This is a very common pattern in the documents:

Professional performance is exceptionally complex and cannot be evaluated adequately based on a single source of information. It is essential that faculty evaluation be based on multiple sources of data for each area evaluated in order to provide various perspectives and to avoid a concentration on narrow performance objectives (Department F, original).

And a similar statement from the same department's revised document:

No exact quotas or guidelines can exist and a combination of objective and subjective elements will enter into a final decision in the evaluation process. Decisions on acceptable performance levels must contain the individual judgments of the faculty and the administrators involved in the decision (Department F, revised).

Even where documents employ listings of requirements, these are often deliberately preceded by statements of uncertainty:

4. Criteria and Standards for Annual Merit Evaluation

All standards in the following tables are subjective. Levels of accomplishment are determined subjectively by the Head based on careful consideration of the standards for each criterion (Department A, revised).

2) The documents spend very little time explaining what the expectations are for either associate or (especially) full professors:

Promotion to Professor is based on attainment of sustained excellence in the assigned responsibilities of the faculty member and recognition of excellence by all appropriate constituencies (Department A, revised).

With regard to tenure and promotion to associate professor, the candidate will have achieved independence in scholarly pursuits and developed a scholarly program in research and/or instruction which has gained a degree of professional recognition, and shows high promise of sustained contributions. Expectations for promotion from associate professor to professor are considerably higher, including leadership in scholarly research and/or instructional activities, and strong professional recognition at the national and international levels (Department B, revised).

Appointment as Professor is based on the candidate's national and/or international recognition for a distinguished career exemplifying scholarship, excellence and productivity in successful teaching, research, and outstanding directed service. Such criteria must be fulfilled to high orders of expectations. Professors take leadership roles within the Department and College, serve as mentors for younger or less-experienced faculty members, and are recognized as a national resource in their disciplines or areas of expertise (Department D, original).

One might expect the time dimension to matter. Yet this is not in evidence in the documents. One document grew significantly longer, but in the process added even more unclear language about requirements and expectations. Still another document, from changed almost imperceptibly. It is seven pages long in both versions; the later document adds only text describing the recently instituted Professorial Performance award.

There is one exception. This document specifies expectations for faculty at all levels very clearly. For example:

Publications - One manuscript accepted for publication per year (averaged over the last three years) in a nationally or internationally recognized refereed journal is standard in this subcategory. . . . One or more of the publications during a three year period should be first-authored publications. Length and quality of the publication(s) and quality of the journal will be considered (journals would rank from highest quality to lower something like this: *Nature* or *Science*, society journals, peer-reviewed trade journals, regional journals, state or federal peer-reviewed publications, open-file reports and guidebooks). Book writing or editing will be evaluated based on written documentation that substantial progress toward publication is being made.

Research Proposals - Every year, each faculty member should submit at least one proposal for external funding (standard). Whenever possible, proposals should include provisions to support graduate students or help support other fundamental needs in the department. Joint proposals, on and off campus are especially encouraged, but the benefits to the Department, especially with regard to SRO, will be considered (Department E, revised).

3) The third thing that is striking about these documents is the use of subjective language to specify requirements in the teaching and research sections. These are usually emotion-linked terms, like “enthusiasm,” “caring,” and “cooperation.” As above, descriptions of research responsibilities are generally free of this language. But descriptions of teaching and service are not.

This is from the one department’s previous document:

Is your teaching done enthusiastically? Do the students catch the excitement in geology from your contacts with them?

Do your students know that you care about their learning?

Do your graduate students perform enthusiastically? (Department E, original).

And an example from a section on service:

Profession-based service and recognition: Leadership, collegiality, cooperation, initiative and enthusiasm - Chairing committees; providing help when asked; participating as a team player to benefit the department; participation in departmental seminars, faculty meetings, field days, and other departmental activities. (Department A, revised).

And then the classic statement of collegiality:

D. Collegiality

Faculty are expected to be cooperative and active Departmental Citizens. They are members in the community of scholars and endorse the KSU Principles of Community . . . As a member in the community, they should feel a sense of responsibility for the welfare of the group. They will refrain from actions that harm an individual or the reputations of members of the group or of the group as a whole. Furthermore, faculty are expected to work for the good of the community and toward the achievement of its mission and goals.

As Departmental Citizens, faculty are expected to:

Actively participate on committees and in Departmental meetings (Regularly participate in meetings; Provide contributions to assignments or committee tasks; Provide leadership as active chairs on committees)

Extend professional courtesy to others and show respect for their opinions (Maintain civility in meetings; Cooperate in meetings and on committees)

Contribute to the “health” and mission of the Department by: Maintaining a commitment to the quality of their duties in teaching, research, extension, or service activities; Participating and contributing to departmental functions and activities . . . Helping to maintain a friendly, student-focused atmosphere. (Department F, revised).

There are a number of possible solutions to consider:

First, the documents themselves should be revised to be more transparent, to specify the requirements for positive evaluations, for tenure, and for promotion. Reviews should be periodic, and criteria should be clear. Subjective language and free floating expectations (e.g., “providing help when asked”) should be minimized as much as possible.

Failing this (or perhaps in addition to this), there are other solutions that might be considered – both from the side of the evaluated and the evaluators. If access to informal information networks is part of the problem, then junior faculty need mentors who can help them access the informal criteria that translate into tenure and promotion. This means that the mentors themselves must be well integrated into these networks.

From the side of evaluators, training is essential. Many ADVANCE schools have instituted compulsory training for hiring and evaluation committees, and there are very good materials already available that deal with bias at each of these levels. For a particularly good training tool, see Georgia Tech’s ADEPT project [link: <http://www.adept.gatech.edu/>]

Training and mentorship, by themselves, do not address the issue of recourse however. Without clear policy language, those who are denied tenure or promotion currently have no way to defend themselves against these decisions. Nor does the university have firm criteria to support its own decisions. Without fundamental changes in the university’s culture – as evidenced here by the key documents governing faculty advancement – it is likely that barriers will remain to the full participation of women in the university community.