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TO: Department and Program Chairs

SUBJECT: Tenure and Promotion Expectations

In Fall 2005, I discussed with members of the Academic Council how to implement the May 2005 Presidential Statement on the Conferral of Tenure and on Promotion to Full Professor when considering actual cases. As a result of those discussions, and with input from members of Advisory, I have clarified some of the issues and would like now to share my expectations with you. Please add this note to your Handbook for Department and Program Chairs so that future chairs will be able to consult it when necessary. In early February, Judith Brown will meet with tenure-track faculty, as she does every spring, and during those meetings she will distribute this letter and discuss it with them.

At all levels of decision-making, including my own, tenure and promotion decisions depend on the university’s judgments about the quality, quantity, and pace of accomplishments, as well as on assessments of the impact of the candidate’s scholarship, and the likelihood that he or she will continue to make significant scholarly contributions in the future. The candidate’s record must show clearly that he or she is a participant in the important scholarly conversations in the field. A significant body of high quality scholarship, published or accepted for publication, strengthens our confidence that a scholar is beginning to gain recognition and will continue to do so in the future. As the Academic Council By-Laws (Section 502b) state, “published, performed, and executed works, important as a contribution to knowledge and understanding, are also the clearest measure of their author’s scholarship.” Such a record also insures that knowledge presented in the classroom is at the edge of scholarly research and has entered the critical arena of scholarly discourse.

I am frequently asked whether in fields where books are the primary scholarly output, I will expect an accepted book manuscript in all cases. My answer is, not always. But because an evaluation of the scholarly impact that a candidate has and is likely to have is an important component of the tenure evaluation, I will expect in nearly all cases to see an accepted book manuscript by the time of the tenure review. I will also expect to see additional articles, some accepted and some published. Ideally, some of the accepted articles, conference presentations, or successful fellowship applications would be in areas pointing to the candidate’s next major project.

Occasionally, even in fields where a book is the primary scholarly output, a candidate’s work may best be expressed in the form of a substantial body of accepted and published articles that together make an important argument that is a significant addition to a field. This is one of the reasons why I use the term “expectations” rather than “standards” or “requirements.” Occasionally, cases present themselves differently for good scholarly reasons, and I want to be able to affirm such cases.
The above expectations regarding accepted or published scholarly works do not detract from the university's institutional right and responsibility to arrive at an independent judgment of the quality, quantity, and pace of a candidate's scholarship. The acceptance of scholarship by publishers informs our judgments but does not determine them. Additional information is provided by the letters of outside reviewers who are qualified authorities from outside the Wesleyan faculty as well as the letters of qualified authorities from within our faculty. Together, all of these sources of information enrich and strengthen the quality of our evaluations, but the final outcome is based on the institution's independent evaluations.

There cannot be a concrete formula applicable to every tenure case, but the university has always expected a clear record of first-rate scholarly accomplishment and promise. The great majority of the current tenured faculty have met these expectations. They are not a change from past practice but an effort to record what I have observed as practice in the last ten years. They are reasonable because our tenure-track faculty, in addition to being talented and hardworking, are supported by an environment that aids research and teaching, a generous sabbatical policy, a superb library, laboratories and computer resources, grants in support of scholarship, reasonable teaching loads, and excellent students.

I have focused on expectations regarding published scholarship because this topic tends to elicit the most discussion. I will expect comparable quality, visibility, and impact in fields such as the performing arts, where publication is not necessarily the primary scholarly output.

I will also expect excellence in teaching and colleagueship in all fields. The presidential statement I issued in May 2005 states that a candidate's accomplishments must show evidence of distinction in all three areas: that the candidate is among the best scholars in the field at a comparable career stage, that the teaching reveals excellence and the promise of continued high quality, and that colleagueship shows constructive participation and accomplishments in the collegial life of the university.

Because each tenure case has unique features and depends on qualitative judgments, we know from the outset that some of these concepts will become clearer as we apply them. I urge departments and programs to clarify their expectations so that they reflect the highest aspirations of their disciplines and to continue to inform newly appointed tenure-track faculty about the university-wide and departmental and program expectations. I also encourage departments and programs to develop their expectations in consultation with the Vice President for Academic Affairs. This has produced excellent results in the departments and programs that have done so. Such collaboration ensures that their expectations align with those of the university, and that candidates will face expectations that are rigorous as well as consistent, fair, and attainable by the great majority of tenure-track faculty we appoint at Wesleyan.

Thanks so much for your input on these issues during the Academic Council meetings. Please distribute this letter to the tenured faculty in your department or program and feel free to discuss it with them. As mentioned earlier, Judith Brown will distribute the letter to tenure-track faculty and discuss it with them very shortly as part of her spring semester lunch meetings with them.