

January 11, 2024

Dear Auburn University Senators,

We are writing to express our support for the Teaching Professor Title Series, discussed at the Auburn University Senate meeting of November 14, 2023. We strongly support creating this Title Series in order to recruit and retain outstanding faculty with a career focus primarily on instruction, a critical element of an elevated student experience. The establishment of Teaching Professorships also aligns with COSAM's expanding research enterprise, providing faculty the flexibility to pursue extramural funding. This flexibility is vital for fostering an environment where instructional excellence and research innovation coexist, further enhancing Auburn's reputation and appeal as an R1 research institution.

In the College of Sciences and Mathematics (COSAM), we currently have 32 Lecturers who are vital to Auburn University's educational mission. These COSAM faculty generate a large number of student credit hours (SCH) and provide excellent instruction to our students, particularly in the introductory science and mathematics courses. Importantly, many of our Lecturers are also on the leading edge of implementing new pedagogical strategies at Auburn University. This commitment to excellence and innovation is due in large part to our Lecturers' passion for and focus on teaching. Currently, COSAM leads the university in the number of SCH taught to students outside our college, primarily through these dedicated instructional faculty. In short, instructional faculty are a critical element of our mission.

One of the key challenges we face as Auburn University continues to gain national prominence is recruiting and retaining excellent faculty. This challenge extends to those who want to focus primarily or entirely on instruction. Unlike tenure-track faculty, whose roles generally encompass the full spectrum of the University's mission - teaching, research, service, and outreach - these instructional faculty members specialize in teaching. For example, while the Promotion and Tenure process for tenure-track faculty evaluates contributions across all mission areas, there is a need for a parallel system recognizing the focus and expertise of instructional faculty in teaching, in a manner that is broadly consistent with the roles of research professor and clinical professor tracks.

The current Lecturer system lacks an explicit infrastructure for professional development and is limited to just one level of promotion in rank to Senior Lecturer. We have ameliorated this to some extent in COSAM by providing our Lecturers with resources and time for professional development. However, our instructional faculty are still limited to a single promotional opportunity and the recognition associated with a professorial title.

We believe that, as other peer institutions have done, implementation of a Teaching Professor Title Series will improve this situation considerably. We envision this Title Series to be fully in parallel with the existing Research Title Series currently in place at the University. Part of the description of the Research Title series in the faculty handbook reads, *"In its role as a comprehensive research institution, Auburn University has a need to continuously expand its pool of scientists, engineers, specially trained investigators, and other highly qualified personnel who are not part of the tenure-track system to meet responsibilities in research, especially those responsibilities related to projects that the institution operates under contracts, grants or other designated funds. To fulfill these requirements more effectively and to be more competitive in attracting and retaining needed professional personnel, a research title series for appointments and promotions without tenure is established as hereafter defined and described."* In a similar vein, the Teaching Professor Title Series would address the critical need for dedicated, innovative educators who can enhance Auburn University's instructional capabilities, particularly in an era where teaching excellence is paramount for both student success and institutional prestige.

COSAM has over two decades of history with excellent faculty in the Research Professor Line. We currently have research faculty at each of the three ranks: Assistant Research Professor, Associate Research Professor, and Full Research Professor. These faculty focus primarily or entirely on research. Those of appropriate rank do indeed vote on promotions of other professorial faculty including tenure-track faculty. They do not vote on tenure. This has never been an issue, as they are respected colleagues that take their responsibilities as participating faculty seriously.

In closing, the leadership of the College of Sciences and Mathematics urges the Auburn University Senate (and appropriate committees) to make any necessary clarifying edits to the question of voting in the proposed Teaching Professor Title Series. We advocate for the swift adoption of this faculty line, which will not only enhance our educational offerings but also significantly aid in recruiting and retaining top-notch instructional faculty. The implementation of this series would mark a significant step in aligning our faculty structure with the evolving needs of a modern, research-intensive institution like Auburn University.

Sincerely,

Leadership of the College of Sciences and Mathematics

Allen Landers, Chair of Physics

Doug Goodwin, Chair of Chemistry and Biochemistry

Ash Abebe, Chair of Mathematics and Statistics

Paul Cobine, Chair of Biological Sciences

Ming-Kuo Lee, Chair of Geosciences

Kimberly Mulligan, Senior Assistant Dean of Strategic Initiatives and Programs

Mark Liles, Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies

Maggie Han, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs

Edward Thomas, Dean