

TENURE, POST-TENURE REVIEW, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Tenure is the foundation of the modern academy, the bedrock upon which academic freedom has been built

There are few places in this country where the importance of academic freedom – the ability to speak truth to power – is as well understood as it is at Auburn.

And I do not mean only by our faculty; many administrators at AU also have come to appreciate the protections afforded by tenure to free expression of viewpoints that conflict with those in positions of authority.

It is appropriate to start any discussion on PTR with a clear understanding of the importance of tenure, what it provides, and what it does not provide

As it relates to matters of tenure, our Faculty Handbook is based on principles established by AAUP's 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure

Tenure is about the freedom of expression in teaching and research, it is not about job security.

We all know that there are mechanisms in place whereby a faculty member can be dismissed, and that there are due-process safeguards in place to ensure that dismissals take place only for cause.

We also know that there are annual performance evaluations, evaluations of teaching, and external evaluations that are made every time a manuscript is presented at a conference or submitted for publication, or a grant proposal is submitted

We know that many of our academic programs are evaluated by external accrediting agencies, who evaluate faculty performance

And we know that SACS, our accrediting agency, evaluated our academic programs and found them above reproach

Why, then, are we pursuing post-tenure review at AU?

The short answer is because Dr Richardson says we must do so, and he defends this position on the basis of conversations with political leaders in Alabama who are concerned that highly paid faculty work only a few hours a week.

Those in this room know how far from the truth is the image of indolent faculty.

And for those who need further evidence on the matter, I would urge they read the report on uncompensated work contributed by 9-month faculty presented by Dr David King and the Faculty Welfare Committee presented at the October Senate meeting. This report is available on the Senate webpage.

Nonetheless, Interim President Richardson, supported by the BoT, has made it clear that a PTR process will be put in place, and that if the faculty don't do it, he will tell the Provost to put such a process in place.

Post-tenure review processes are in place in many fine universities.

Rarely is the initiative to establish PTR internally generated

Rather PTR usually is introduced in response to external political pressures, or in anticipation of external political pressures.

Such has been the case here at Auburn.

Anytime a fundamental freedom is brought into question, great care must be taken in crafting a reply.

I do not, and I am sure nobody in this room wants to give the public the impression that faculty are not accountable. Our legislators who vote on budgets, those who pay tuition, and those who provide funding for research, extension, and outreach efforts deserve to know that tenured faculty are dedicated professionals whose work is constantly scrutinized and evaluated.

I see no failure of accountability among our faculty or our academic leadership.

That said, the Faculty leadership (myself and the other officers) were faced with a choice.

We could have told Dr Richardson that establishing a PTR system in the current climate would be ill-advised. We did so, and we did so also to the BoT.

We could have followed those words with a refusal to develop draft plans for open discussion by the faculty.

We did not do this. Instead, working with the Senate Steering Committee, faculty officers determined that it is in the faculty's best interests to be engaged in the process, and to bring to you two possible models derived from a review of PTR policies at other universities. We have benefited from the involvement of Steve McFarland and John Heilman, and also from John Aho of AUM.

The Senate [Steering Committee](#) has discussed the pros and cons of various PTR models at bi-weekly meetings over the last two months. A record of all these discussions can be reviewed through reading minutes of Steering, available on the web.

My understanding of the process from here is as follows:

- a. We will discuss and debate the merits of PTR generally and, in particular, two models which I will present shortly; no vote will be taken today.
- b. We will follow today's discussion with another discussion at the University Senate meeting on November 8th.
- c. I would not anticipate asking for a vote from the University Senate on this matter, which is properly the domain of faculty.
- d. I would anticipate calling a special meeting of the University Faculty either at the end of Fall semester or early in Spring semester, the timing to be determined by the nature and content of our debates today and during the November Senate meeting.
- e. At this special called meeting, I would anticipate a resolution will be presented recommending adoption of a specific PTR policy to be used on a two year pilot basis to identify problems.
- f. Depending on the outcome, I can imagine a pilot PTR policy being given its initial trial during Spring 2006, with a small number of faculty (probably chosen among volunteers) being evaluated.
- g. I should also report that at the November 17-18 meeting of the BoT, John Heilman will make a brief report to the BoT, focusing on criteria and timeline for adopting a pilot PTR policy

Before I describe the two general models let me point out some important principles that are part of PTR policies in virtually every university whose policies we have reviewed.

- a. All are designed to be developmental and constructive rather than punitive
- b. By this I mean that the intent is not to create a mechanism for firing faculty, but rather a mechanism to provide support for faculty to achieve the promise their colleagues recognized when they were first hired

- and subsequently granted tenure
- c. PTR in no way should weaken or undermine the principles of academic freedom spelled out in our Faculty Handbook which is modeled on policies developed by the AAUP
- d. PTRs generally are based on formal annual performance evaluations which are supposed to be conducted by department heads and chairs.
 - 1). In a survey of faculty conducted as part of our most recent SACS Self-Study, approximately 15% of all respondents said that such annual performance evaluations were not done, reflecting a fundamental problem that needs to be addressed.
 - 2). Moreover, nearly 30% indicated that criteria for annual faculty evaluations were not clearly stated, and almost half of all faculty who responded to the survey said that their department merit raise program did not follow clearly stated criteria.
 - 3). Apparent weaknesses in our annual performance evaluation process require attention even if we were not developing a PTR policy
 - 4). There is little reason to believe an credible PTR policy could be established on the basis of the current administrative track-record as related to annual performance evaluations.

The problems of annual performance evaluations can and should be resolved. And it is important that this is done for an effective PTR process. Let me tell you why: both models which I will briefly discuss, and which hopefully you've had a chance to review, are based on such annual evaluations, as you will see.

The first model depends on annual performance evaluations to trigger PTR. If a faculty member receives two evaluations below a certain threshold in a six year period (e.g., below 2.0 on a 5.0 scale), the PTR process would kick in.

- a. This approach has the advantage that very few faculty would ever have to undergo a PTR, and so is the most efficient model in terms of faculty time and time of any committee involved in the PTR process.
- b. Appeal procedures would be developed to protect a faculty member from a dept chair or head who unfairly assigns low evaluations
- c. If a PTR goes forward, a committee of faculty outside the department would conduct the review. The findings of this committee could be appealed to a university committee. Among the findings could be that the original evaluations were mistaken, or that certain steps need to be taken for the faculty member to address shortcomings. Typically a period of one or more years is necessary to document progress or lack thereof.
- d. If the professional improvement efforts are to no avail, there are a number of possible sanctions that are available that do not involve termination. These include:
 - 1) reassignment of duties
 - 2) loss of eligibility for travel funds or sabbaticals
 - 3) salary freeze or reduction
 - 4) demotion in rank
- e. Continued unsatisfactory performance could trigger dismissal proceedings laid out in the Faculty Handbook.

The second model requires that all tenured faculty undergo a PTR process. Like the first model, the second model builds on annual performance evaluations. The idea is that every so many years (typically 5-7) every tenured faculty member would put together a packet of annual reports, a copy of a curriculum vitae, and any explanatory material the faculty member deemed necessary for a fair and honest review. The department chair or head would provide copies of annual performance evaluations, summarizing scores for each of the years. A committee of faculty at the college or school level would then review these packets.

The clear disadvantage of this process is that it would take some time (but not a lot) from each faculty member, and the review committee would have much more material to look through. The advantage is that the committee would see all performance evaluations and be able to compare evaluation scores to annual reports of a wider

range of faculty, providing some measure of oversight on the annual performance evaluations themselves (are they done uniformly and fairly).

I just have a couple more comments to make before opening the floor for discussion.

Both models point out that the PTR process can be used not only to provide professional support for faculty who may need such support, but that also faculty who are considered “outstanding” might also be given an award and a pay increase roughly equivalent to the increase that comes with promotion from associate professor to professor.

Also, both models could affect everyone who holds tenure, including department chairs, heads, deans, assistant & associate deans. It may also include vice presidents, the provost, and the president. There are many practical issues that would need to be sorted out, including annual performance evaluations of such administrators, which I suspect is an area with even greater problems than are found with faculty evaluations.

For that matter there are a lot of details to be sorted out before any PTR process is put in place.