

The Task Force On Instructors Rejected The Proposal of Tenure for Instructors

Jeffrey B. Mitton
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Uriel Nauenberg and Marki LeCompte recently contacted me for more information concerning the deliberations of the Task Force on Instructors. Because none of the recommendations address instructor tenure, some people are asserting that we did not consider the proposal for instructor tenure. In response to the requests for more information, and to respond to the assertions that we did not consider instructor tenure, I have prepared a list queries or topics (in italics) and responses.

None of the Task Force recommendations address tenure; does that mean that the Task Force did not consider tenure for instructors?

No. The Task Force prepared a list of positive recommendations that were both feasible and would improve the working conditions of Non Tenure Track Faculty (NTTF). We did not propose any changes in tenure. (We did include a recommendation that we knew was not feasible {an office for each NTTF}, because we thought that CU had been remiss in increasing the number of NTTF far beyond the supply of faculty offices, and we wanted planners and Flagship 2030 to address that deficit. While not immediately feasible, we thought that the inclusion of this recommendation would benefit students and faculty.)

Did the Task Force listen to instructors?

Yes. First, we invited Don Eron and Suzanne Hudson (September 26, 2007) to meet with us, and that meeting lasted 1.5 hours. In subsequent meetings during the fall, we invited prominent NTTF (e.g. Rolf Norgaard, Nancy Billica, Greg Young, Kathleen Burns, Adam Norris, Anita Halvorssen and others) to discuss their concerns. These meetings extended through the fall of 2007.

Did the Task Force read the proposal from the NTTF?

Yes, we read the AAUP Instructor Tenure Proposal and we also read the Instructor Bill of Rights, and discussed both of them before we met with Don Eron and Suzanne Hudson. The committee was fully aware of the request for instructor tenure, and we discussed it (see below).

Why did the Task Force not recommend tenure for NTTF?

Many of the members of the committee disagreed with many of the assumptions and the assertions in the AAUP Instructor Tenure Proposal (ITP). During our discussion of the ITP, we discussed the points listed below (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty (TTTF) have the right to choose their colleagues. The ITP, which proposed “instructors who have already exceeded the probationary period and thus established a record of commitment to undergraduate education at the University should be immediately tenured...” This proposal is unacceptable to TTTF, for it provides tenure by edict. Tenure track faculty have the responsibility to choose faculty from a national search followed by rigorous interviews, and then evaluate those faculty at the comprehensive review and at the promotion/tenure review.
- The intensities of scrutiny applied to NTTF and TTTF are not comparable. Tenure at a research university is granted after a candidate has been reappointed at the comprehensive review and then evaluated rigorously for tenure and promotion by the academic unit. The review for tenure and promotion requires letters from national and often international leaders in the candidate’s field of expertise. NTTF are not scrutinized with this degree of rigor.
- The processes of hiring TTTF and NTTF are not comparable. TTTF positions are posted in Science or The Chronicle of Higher Education as well as on electronic bulletin boards of the appropriate societies. These announcements are distributed across the nation and internationally. These searches often result in hundreds of applicants. In stark contrast, the search for a lecturer to teach a specific course is all too often an unannounced search for local candidate. Lecture positions are often offered to recent Ph D students (in the same department) who are not yet competitive on the job market, or who, for personal reasons, are not willing to consider employment outside the city limits of Boulder. Lecturers who perform satisfactorily often become instructors.
- The activities and evaluation criteria of NTTF and TTTF are not comparable. While both groups of faculty teach undergraduate classes, TTTF are also responsible for graduate courses and seminars and for the training of masters and doctoral students. Service for NTTF is typically at the departmental level and is related to teaching, but service for TTTF includes departmental, college or university, and national levels. Service at the national level includes work with learned societies, federal granting agencies, and journals. TTTF are expected to distinguish themselves with their scholarly work.
- It has been asserted that for NTTF, reappointment demonstrates excellence. The committee discussed this and concluded that at CU it is more the norm that satisfactory performance is rewarded with reappointment.
- The proposal that “instructors who have already exceeded the probationary period and thus established a record of commitment to undergraduate education at the University should be immediately tenured...” is a non sequitur. NTTF have contractual agreements lasting from one semester to four years. But completion of a contract means that the obligations of the University and the NTTF come to an end. Completion of a contract does not assure or justify another contract.

- TTTF do not want the standards of tenure diminished. The vast majority of TTTF earn tenure by distinguishing themselves with their research or scholarly work. They do not think it is appropriate that the same status be given to colleagues who were hired to teach and have little or no basic research associated work. Tenure at a research university is defined primarily by research and creative work. Most TTTF will not support a redefinition of the standards of tenure.

These were most of the points that were discussed and the conclusions arrived at led to the observation (not explicitly stated in the document because the committee wanted to focus on positive recommendations) that the concept of tenure for NTTF is not appropriate.