

Jim Goodrich

I am Chair of the Department of Biochemistry and have comments and an idea about one of the concrete first steps in the Draft Report of the Academic Futures Committee. Specifically, I will address the recommendation to “Grant the tenured and tenure-track faculty control over every fourth course they teach in order to invest it in team-teaching, interdisciplinary programs or any other endeavor they wish to join.”

I agree that interdisciplinary teaching is highly valuable to students and faculty and that the fourth course recommendation would lead to an increase in interdisciplinary courses offered at CU Boulder. I am, however, deeply concerned about the practical aspects of implementing this as a concrete first step. Speaking as Chair of a Department that does not have excess TTT teaching capacity, it is likely this recommendation will have the unintended consequence of negatively impacting the manner in which we teach our undergraduate Biochemistry majors and our Biochemistry graduate students.

Our Department currently strives to have TTT faculty (~14 who are not on leave in a given year) teach the majority of sections of courses required of our undergraduate Biochemistry majors (~450 students) and all sections of courses required of graduate students in our Biochemistry PhD program (~70 students). In fact, nearly all TTT faculty teaching in our Department is dedicated to covering courses required of our undergraduate majors and graduate students. The recommendation that “the campus adopts the rule that every fourth course belongs to a tenured or tenure track faculty member” could reduce our TTT faculty teaching capacity in our regularly taught Departmental courses by 25%. This would require that the Department either combine sections of upper division courses taken by our majors, or hire lecturers to cover some of these sections. I do not think either of these options is in the best interest of our majors. Biochemistry has strived to limit the number of students per section to facilitate a more engaging and active learning environment in courses taken by our majors; merging sections would be counter to this goal and impede learning in particularly difficult courses that truly benefit from reduced class size. Moreover, to the greatest extent possible, our TTT faculty teach the sections of courses required for our majors; hiring lecturers would take us away from this practice and introduce a degree of separation between our majors and Departmental faculty.

To mitigate the potential negative impacts outlined above, I propose the following be considered when implementing the recommended fourth course policy. Presumably, the initial implementation of this policy would be staggered such that in a given semester a quarter of the faculty in each

Department would become eligible to request teaching a course under the policy. I propose that faculty members coming up for their fourth course would submit a request for the course they would like to teach to the Chair. The Chair would then consider all such requests in the context of the required courses that will need to be covered for their undergraduate majors and graduate students. The Chair would then decide which of the requests to approve and which to deny in order to limit the impact on the ability of the Department to cover sections of required courses for undergraduate majors and graduate students with TTT faculty. This would be done with the understanding that each faculty member that had a denied request would be able to make a new request the next time they are scheduled to teach a course. Faculty requests would in general be approved in the order in which they came in, thereby providing all Departmental TTT faculty with an equal number of approved requests, over time.

Thank you for considering my comments. I would be happy to discuss my concerns and ideas about this issue with the Academic Futures Committee at any time.