Faculty Council Fixed-Term Faculty Committee

2/19/2010 Minutes

Members Present: Binnotti, Coble, DeSaix, Irons, Gilliland, Melamut, Toews, Whisnant
Members Absent: Bickford, Renner
Others Present: Steve Norton (Daily Tar Heel)

Guidelines for Appointment of Senior Lecturers (New Policy Directive from Dean Gil in the College)

The committee discussed at length the new guidelines (and a related template) issued by Dean Karen Gil on February 16, 2010 for promotion from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer in the College. Not everyone had seen this, so copies were circulated and later placed on the Fixed-Term Faculty Committee website (http://www.unc.edu/faculty/faccoun/committees/FXTMain.shtml). Dossiers for applicants who desire promotion this year (7/1/2010) are due by March 15th. There was some confusion, however, about who will review applications for promotion to Senior Lecturer now (will it be the existing campuswide APT committee, as some understood, or the Dean and an “a College ad-hoc committee on the promotion of lecturers,” as was stated in the document?). Coble agreed to check on this.

Coble noted that Gil’s document doesn’t yet address what will happen to people who, by their qualifications, should be Senior Lecturers, but currently have other titles than “Lecturer” (e.g. “Adjunct Associate Professor”; “Research Associate Professors” who primarily teach). Additional steps will be required to define the processes for these faculty members to convert, and it was noted that not everyone with these titles will want to convert, and there may need to be a grace period where there are overlapping titles. Coble did note that there is a desire in the College to get away from the term “adjunct” for anyone who really is a permanent employee of the university. “Adjuncts” in other schools around campus, it was noted, have a variety of duties, and about 600 new “adjuncts” are soon to be added in the School of Medicine (outside professionals who are not paid by the university but have supervisory roles here).

While everyone recognized that clarification and re-ignition of the path from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer was a major step forward in making the “Senior Lecturer” designation (which has been on the books for many years) available again in practice as well as in theory, a lengthy discussion of the relationship of this policy pronouncement to the larger process of developing a comprehensive policy on fixed-term faculty in the College ensued.

Coble explained that working proposal for this larger policy (emerging initially from the “Lysle Committee” and more recently from the “Andrews Committee” on fixed-term faculty in the College) is built on a detailed three-tier system of Lecturer-Senior Lecturer-University Lecturer. Recommendations on this basis have progressed from the Andrews Committee (now disbanded) through Bill Andrews (now the fixed-term faculty “czar” in the College) to Dean Gil and Provost Carney. Coble continues to work closely with Gil and Carney about this and recognizes that Dean Gil and Provost Carney may not agree to everything the Andrews Committee recommended (for example, on salary sources).

There ensued a lengthy discussion of titling for fixed-term faculty in the College. The process of collecting policies from the other schools has made it clear to many on the committee that units outside the College are generally moving to using various prefixes in front of the title “professor” to designate their fixed-term faculty. That is, they designate “clinical,” or “research” professors and are developing career ladders using these titles with the additional, traditional prefixes of “assistant,” “associate,” and “full.”
The discussion made it clear that the symbolic and practical importance of the term “professor” rather than “lecturer” continues to be very important to many, and it appears to some that the College’s proposal may be out of step with trends in other areas. Gilliland pointed out that in many circles, “lecturer” implies someone who does not have the expected terminal degree and advocated a more consistent system employing variations on the title “professor” across the entire university for anyone with the terminal degree. Irons agreed that “lecturer” often carries a negative connotation to outside constituencies. DeSaix expressed her long-held concern that letters of recommendation from a “lecturer” are seen as less authoritative. Concern was raised that if the title “lecturer” also comes to be used for temporary faculty who teach one course at a time, it will further degrade that title. It was unclear if this might be part of the plan. [Note from chair: Apparently this was a misunderstanding and there is no suggestion that part-time faculty be called lecturer.]

Coble said that the College committee had investigated other universities where the “lecturer” track was successful; it’s a much more common title in European universities, while few American universities have a clear system. Coble noted that the College’s committee had sought to infuse “lecturer” with dignity and respect for the role these teaching-oriented faculty members play and hoped UNC could, by this action, help to redirect the national discourse about “lecturers.” She said changing to a three-tiered system would give hope to faculty trapped in fixed-term ranks. She feared that entering a larger reconsideration of these titles might reverse the considerable progress already made in the College towards developing a comprehensive, humane, transparent policy. Yet she also encouraged the FTF Committee to read carefully and raise any and all questions they may have about the evolving College policy.

Next Meeting

The March meeting will need to be moved because DeSaix will be out of town. We will look, perhaps, to review the pending College policies and discuss them. It was noted that inviting Dean Gil or Senior Associate Dean Andrews to attend might also be helpful. The committee is to report to Faculty Council at the April 23 meeting.

Fixed-Term Faculty Association

DeSaix noted that on the Academic Affairs side of campus, a Fixed-Term Faculty Association has formed, and some of its members acted recently to call attention to language in a College grant announcement that limited eligibility to those of “professorial rank,” thus excluding “lecturers.” When a member of the FTFA asked for clarification, the language was changed to include lecturers and the application deadline was extended. DeSaix said the FTFA would be holding another general meeting before the end of the semester to highlight opportunities available to fixed-term faculty.

Future Structure of Fixed-Term Faculty Committee (Closed Session)

The committee went into closed session to discuss its future membership and structure. DeSaix described Ferrell’s overview of the history of this committee’s structure. This committee, she said, would like to help write a proposal to become a Chancellor-appointed committee. Coble pointed out that it would be possible to have a combination of members appointed by the Chair of the Faculty and the Chancellor. She emphasized the need to clearly delineate the committee’s mission and role. What would an appropriate role for a campuswide committee on fixed-term faculty be? Would it become, for instance, a parallel committee to APT that would review fixed-term promotion applications? Might it serve as a watchdog to find policies and practices that continue to unfairly exclude fixed-term faculty or that do not align with duly approved Faculty Council resolutions on fixed-term faculty issues.