

Faculty Affairs Report on 2022-23 Analysis of P&T Inconsistencies (March 2023)

Principles and Procedures for Promotion and Tenure

As defined in the University of Missouri Collected Rules and Regulations ([CRR 310.010](#)), “tenure is the right to be free from dismissal without cause” and viewed by the Board of Curators as “indispensable to the success of an institution of higher education in fulfilling its obligations to the common good,” particularly through its role in helping to adhere to principles of academic freedom espoused by the Association of American Universities ([AAU](#)) and the American Association of University Professors ([AAUP](#)).

Tenure and promotion are also important endeavors of shared governance. According to the university’s collected rules and regulations, faculty have “primary and direct authority” with respect to the “formulation of criteria determining professional standing of faculty—including but not limited to such matters as tenure, promotion, termination, guidelines for responsibility, faculty standing with regard to graduate faculty membership and doctoral dissertation supervision,” and “advisory authority” with respect to “application of criteria affecting promotion, tenure and termination” ([CRR 300.010](#)).

Thus, the integrity of promotion and tenure rests on a rigorous process of peer review. That process is outlined in [CRR 320.035](#). Any application goes through 7 levels of review:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. department/division committee | 5. campus committee |
| 2. department/division chair | 6. provost |
| 3. college/school committee | 7. chancellor |
| 4. college/school dean/director | |

As stated in the provost [call letter](#), “candidates have the opportunity to request reconsideration of a negative recommendation at any of the possible seven levels of review,” for which a standard hearing procedure is prescribed. If they choose to, applicants may also withdraw an application for tenure or promotion at any point.

Context for This Report

As listed in Table 1, between the years 2005-2011, there had been a total of 5 applications for tenure and/or promotion withdrawn across all levels of review. Since Spring 2020, there have been 7 cases withdrawn in each of the 2020-21 and 2021-22 academic years, and already 11 withdrawn in the current year, all but one of which at the department level. With this report we do not make any claims of cause, but it is important to consider some context.

In March 2020, after Alexander Cartwright resigned as chancellor (to take a position as president of University of Central Florida), President Choi became the interim chancellor, in time to make that year’s decisions regarding promotion and tenure. He denied 7 applications. In nearly all of those cases, his decision contradicted the majority opinions across all previous votes in the levels of review. As the 2020-21 academic year began, it was revealed that President Choi had failed to read the written determination/recommendations produced by the Campus Promotion and Tenure

Advisory Committee (CPTAC) prior to making his spring 2020 decisions. President Choi acknowledged this fact in an Oct. 26, 2020 letter to Faculty Council. For this, President Choi was censured by the Faculty Council in October 2020.

Table 1

MU Tenure and Promotion Withdrawals, Denials, and Approvals

year	Dept. withdrawals	College withdrawals	Campus withdrawals	Provost withdrawals	Chancellor withdrawals	Total withdrawals	Denials	Approval
2005-06	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	1	3	73
2006-07	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	2	2	75
2007-08	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	0	1	53
2008-09	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	1	1	74
2009-10	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	0	1	59
2010-11	0	0	1	0	0	1	3	81
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2016-17	unknown	unknown	0	0	1	unknown	0	55
2017-18	unknown	unknown	1	0	1	unknown	4	56
2018-19	unknown	unknown	1	1	0	unknown	1	56
2019-20 ²	unknown	unknown	0	0	0	unknown	7	57
2020-21 ³	1	3	1	1	1 ⁴	7	0	37
2021-22	6	0	1	0	0	7	3	43
2022-23	10	1	0	0	tbd	tbd	tbd	tbd

¹Records from 2005-2011 are from an archived Faculty Affairs report. The provost's office has not yet provided information for 2011-2016.

²2019-20 academic year was the first that President Choi began making decisions about promotion and tenure. In fall 2020 he was censured by faculty council for failure to read the written determination/recommendations produced by the Campus PTAC.

³ Prior to 2021 and the adoption of new Review, Promotion, and Tenure (RPT) software, some information about withdrawals (at each level) may be less available.

⁴In Spring 2021, one withdrew after an in-person interview requested by President Choi (6 others interviewed were successfully promoted).

Since 2020, there have also been significant changes to promotion and tenure policies, including (a) two revisions to the provost's 2020-21 call (e.g., allowing "additional materials" at any level of review, specifying processes for requesting reconsideration of a negative recommendation or withdrawing); (b) a revision to the 2021-22 call (e.g., adding Academic Analytics data); and (c) September 2020 amendments to CRR 320.035 *Policy and Procedures for Promotion and Tenure*, including the stipulation that "additional information" can be solicited about any case.

As the 2022-23 academic year began, members of the Faculty Affairs Committee were notified of individuals being counseled by administrators to withdraw their application for tenure and/or promotion (and perhaps apply for a non-tenure-track position instead) because their case might not be strong enough to meet criteria for tenure or promotion at the chancellor level.

Method

In an effort to support faculty, the Faculty Affairs Committee decided to learn more about the nature and prevalence of such cases. Through Faculty Council representatives, we circulated an invitation for people who might have experienced or been involved in such situations to share

about their experience in one-on-one interviews. Participants were assured that anything they shared with the Faculty Affairs Committee representatives would be kept confidential and used only in aggregate reporting.

In total we interviewed 20 individuals from across 6 colleges. Of those, 15 reported on events occurring since 2020 in 4 colleges. The majority (70%) of interviewees were women. Of the 15 cases since 2020, 11 (73%) were reported by women.

After the interviews concluded, we categorized each with respect to the focus of the pressure the faculty member experienced (e.g., withdraw, delay, etc.); source of pressure (i.e., which administrators); and reasons or rationale provided for the pressure. We also looked for any other recurrent themes in the interviews.

We shared this report with all interview participants to invite them to identify inaccuracies or omissions and to solicit their perceptions of whether any of the details included in the report could potentially jeopardize their standing.

Results

Across all participants were reports of being pressured to (a) withdraw applications for tenure and/or promotion, (b) apply for non-tenure-track (NTT) positions instead of their current T/TT position, and (c) delay applying for promotion. Among the 15 post-2020 cases, 8 individuals reported being pressured to withdraw an application, with 4 also reporting pressure to instead apply for an NTT position; 3 others reported pressure to apply for an NTT position *before* applying for tenure; and 5 reported pressure to delay application for promotion.

The administrators who were identified as sources of pressure spanned a range of types of positions, including department chairs, deans (and associate deans), and provost (and associate provost), though department chairs were the most frequently identified.

Participants also reported on the stated reason(s) or rationale provided for the pressure provided by administrators. The most common (8 of the 15 post-2020 cases) was “insufficient external funding.” Three others said they were told explicitly that their case would not be strong enough at the chancellor level (with possible references to Academic Analytics data). A few felt their interest in applying for promotion was brushed aside (e.g., “maybe later”; “too much going on right now”) or were told that they were trying to go up “too early.”

Frequently, participants reported a lack of clarity with respect to criteria for tenure and promotion—either vague or absent language in departmental guidelines or the perception that criteria had changed since their being hired.

Discussion

Again, the intent of the Faculty Affairs Committee is not to make claims about what caused the recent increase in promotion and tenure applications being withdrawn, but we do wish to raise questions.

Why might faculty be pressured to withdraw their applications for promotion or tenure?

As reported above, a variety of explanations were offered by the interview participants, but the dominant issue was “external funding.” Unlike other, more qualitative judgments of impact—which typically require expertise from colleagues or members of one’s broader scholarly field—the number of external grant dollars a faculty member has secured is an easily measured criterion, although there were also inconsistencies reported in how expectations for external funding are being applied and measured.

As MU’s administration has informed the campus, research expenditures are one of the key metrics by which a university’s standing in the Association of American Universities (AAU) is determined. It is possible that rising concern about MU’s AAU membership has led to changes in tenure and promotion expectations regarding external funding.

Are departmental expectations and guidelines for promotion and tenure being honored?

Many of our participants expressed frustration about the perception that tenure and promotion expectations changed since the beginning of their appointment—and that such changes have resulted from unilateral decisions at “the top” rather than from shared criteria established by departments. In many instances faculty felt they had met or exceeded stated expectations for successful promotion or tenure. This raises questions about the extent to which MU administrators are honoring departmental criteria for promotion and tenure.

Since at least 2011, *CRR 320.035 Policy and Procedures for Promotion and Tenure* has stated that “satisfaction of minimum criteria at the college, school, or department levels is not sufficient to insure promotion or continuous appointment.” But the same policy stipulates that it is not solely the chancellor’s role to assess the adequacy of an applicant’s departmental criteria. Indeed, the campus committee is to advise the chancellor on “the adequacy of the criteria used at the department, school, and college level.”

Are each unit’s criteria for tenure and promotion sufficiently clear?

CRR 320.035 states that “each unit shall define and publish its promotion and tenure criteria and ensure that faculty are advised on the criteria on a regular basis.” As described previously, many of our interview participants reported a lack of clarity in the criteria and insufficient advisement during the years leading up to their applications.

Is the promotion and tenure process being circumvented?

Based on the available data, the average number of denials of promotion or tenure applications between 2005 and 2019 was fewer than 2 per year. In 2020, the number of denials spiked to 7. Since then, there have been fewer denials (0 in 2021 and 3 in 2022), but a spike in withdrawals. And in this year and last, there have been dramatic increases in withdrawals at the earliest stage

of the process, the department level. As policy dictates, the final decisions regarding promotion and tenure are made by the chancellor. But, as established previously, peer review—both internal and external—should play a crucial role in informing the chancellor’s decisions. There are established procedures for ensuring the promotion and tenure process is both rigorous and fair, with clear guidelines for appeals and hearings at any stage at which there might be a negative decision that the applicant wishes to challenge.

The findings of this report lead us to question whether this established process is being circumvented. If applicants are being pressured to withdraw their applications, this does at least three things: (a) it shields upper administration—and the chancellor in particular—from having to deny applications; (b) it precludes faculty from enacting their “advisory authority” ([CRR 300.010](#)) in their professional responsibility of peer review, especially if applications are withdrawn (or not even submitted) at the department level, before the peer review process has even begun; and (c) it strips individual faculty of any recourse for appealing the decision, especially if they have withdrawn their applications “voluntarily.”

Who is contributing to this phenomenon?

A common story from our participants was that their department chair or dean alerted them that their application for promotion or tenure would likely not be approved by the chancellor because they were lacking in some specific area, typically external funding. Different conjectures were raised about these administrators’ motivation. For example, some participants thought their chair or dean was being transparent and trying to save the applicant from a frustrating eventuality. Others suggested their chair or dean did not want to advance an application because of fear of upper administration. Whatever the reasons, our findings suggest that department and college administrators are perhaps being enlisted—willingly or otherwise—in changing how established policies for promotion and tenure are enacted at MU.

Are women being disproportionately pressured to withdraw or delay applications for tenure or promotion?

A limitation of this study is that we did not interview all individuals who have withdrawn an application for tenure or promotion since 2020. We also likely did not interview all individuals who have felt pressure to delay applying for promotion. Our sample included only those who were willing to speak with us. It is likely that at least some of the others did not feel sufficiently safe to share their stories.

Of those we did interview, however, as reported above, the majority were women, with nearly three-quarters of those describing events since 2020 being women. It is possible that the proportion of all those who have experienced such inconsistencies in promotion and tenure processes who are women is different than that of our sample (it could be lower or higher), but the disparity in our results is great enough to warrant further investigation.