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Use of years of credit for prior service in tenure applications

Submitted by: John Nauright

10/24/2006

Question:

What is the policy of Georgia Southern University with regards to faculty use of years of credit awarded on appointment in tenure applications? Is this policy in line with the intent of the Board of Regents policy? Finally, are new faculty hires informed of policies about the use of years of credit when hired at Georgia Southern?

Rationale:

This issue is of concern to all faculty appointed at associate or full professor level or at assistant professor level with prior service in tenure track positions. According to information circulating among faculty least two colleges on campus appear to have a policy of awarded no applicants "early" tenure and view the application of years of credit by Associate and full Professors appointed at Georgia Southern after holding tenured positions elsewhere as an application for "early" or "elective" tenure. It appears that these applications are not judged on the same standards as "required" tenure applications and therefore makes a mockery of the awarding of years of credit upon appointment. The university needs a consistent policy on whether years of credit really mean anything to incoming faculty members and incoming faculty need to be made aware of any policies that may mitigate against "early" tenure within the University at the time of appointment. In addition, any policy or general practice against the awarding of "early" tenure appear to be out of line with the intent of awarding years of credit for those who have previously held tenured or senior positions as outlined in the Board of Regents policy. This should not be viewed as "early" tenure but as a tenure application submitted at the appropriate time because of previous academic standing held by faculty for which they are awarded credit upon appointment.

SEC Response:

The following was provided by Fred Whitt, Dean of CHHS:

The CHHS Guidelines are consistent with those of the University and BOR. When we award 2 years probationary credit toward tenure, the faculty member may come up in the 4th, 5th, or 6th year of service. The sixth year is a "required tenure review" (as it is the up or out year); coming up in the 4th or 5th year would be an "elective tenure review", since the faculty member would still have another shot if the results were not in support of tenure.

John received two years' probationary credit toward tenure and is coming up in his 4th year for a tenure review. The review process is underway and will reach my level soon. I have not yet reviewed any of his materials, so it would not be appropriate for me to respond relative to his review. I am happy, however, to discuss the process followed in the College of Health and Human Sciences.

To my knowledge, there have been no discussions within our College discouraging faculty from using their probationary credit. In fact, we have recently had several faculty receive and use probationary credit who have been successful. Our College discussions do focus on the faculty member's performance in teaching, scholarship and service. An elected faculty committee within CHHS developed our Guidelines and procedures back in 1993 (over 12 years ago), and since that time I do not recall a faculty member having a question or concern about our process.

To help facilitate clear communication, it is my practice to meet with the new faculty to go over the process during their first semester on campus, and we outline a timetable for each new faculty member. I then hold an orientation session with faculty in the Spring prior to their review year to go over the process and guidelines. In addition, when I meet with candidates during the interview phase, I also walk them through the promotion and tenure process. Finally, I also meet with the College P and T Committee each year before they review any applicants to make sure we are all on the same page regarding the review process and guidelines.

Again, I am more than happy to discuss our process and procedures in general, and would always welcome that opportunity; I think we have a good system. But, as you know, I am not able to discuss a particular faculty member's review."

The SEC believes that a clarification is needed for what constitutes a difference in early/elective/normal tenure review. If a faculty member is granted credit towards tenure and uses it, an "early" tenure review should not be viewed as "early" but rather "on time."

--Pat Humphrey, Senate Moderator.

Senate Response:

From John Nauright a request for information on the policy of faculty using credit awarded at appointment in tenure applications. Fred Whitt, the Dean of CHHS, had responded: It seems that using credit years, which is at the discretion of the applicant, is viewed as an elective tenure application. The individual would still have another chance to apply for tenure.

Humphrey (COST) Senate Moderator reported that what is not clear, at least to the SEC, is whether standards for an elective tenure application are consistent with those for the "normal" application. The university does have a clear statement about early promotion applications: "Early promotions are rare requiring clearly outstanding performance in all three areas of evaluation." However, it is not clear whether those same kinds of standards are held for elective tenure or if the standards are the same as for "normal" tenure. The SEC recommends that a statement regarding elective tenure be made as well and will draft a motion for the February meeting. Nauright has agreed to participate in that drafting.