Joint Report of the Renewable–term Professorial Rank Task Force and the College of Agricultural Sciences Fixed Term Faculty Issue Group

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Charge and Process
The Renewable-term Professorial Rank Task Force was charged 17 May 2005 by Interim Dean and Director of Extension, Kelvin Koong, to develop policy guidelines for Extension/Outreach renewable-term professorial rank faculty positions. Specifically, they were asked to develop guidelines for appointment, evaluation and criteria for promotion and to guide the processes through adoption by the University. Dr. Koong charged the task force because during his visits to county offices some faculty had questioned the benefits or value of a tenure-track system for county agents. Secondly, during conversations with President Ray and Provost Randhawa the issue of tenure and promotion for Extension faculty had been discussed. The basic issue raised was whether Extension appointments were fundamentally different from teaching/research appointments, especially for off-campus faculty. The task force charge was reaffirmed by Dean and Director, Scott Reed on 1 September 2005.

Concurrent with the Task Force an Issue Group within the College of Agricultural Sciences was developing a proposal describing changes in appointing faculty that would enable the College to better address both needs and opportunities. Changes included rolling contracts, use of state or federal funds for certain types of non-tenure track appointments, and clearly defining additional options available with certain types of faculty appointments.

The task force met with Becky Johnson, Vice-Provost for Academic Affairs and International Programs to solicit input from OSU administration. Task Force Chair, Edge met with the Executive Committee of Faculty Senate to discuss the task force’s work and to solicit input. The Task Force reviewed OSU Extension’s Strategic Plan and the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP) of the National Association of
State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges’ (NASULGC ) Vision document (The Extension System: A Vision for the 21st Century). The Task Force also communicated with colleagues at other Land Grant universities around the country to benchmark the nature of appointments at their respective institutions. The College of Agricultural Sciences Issue Group solicited input from the CAS Administrative Team and discussed the proposal with Becky Johnson during a CAS Administrators’ Workshop. Based on similarities between the Task Force’s draft report and the CAS Issue Group proposal the Faculty Senate Executive Committee requested that the two be combined into a single report.

A Commitment to Tenure and Academic Freedom

During multiple conversations while developing this report both the committee and issue group heard concerns regarding the erosion of tenure and loss of academic freedom that these recommendations may cause. According to the OSU Faculty Handbook, “Tenure ensures the academic freedom that is essential to an atmosphere conducive to the free search for truth and the attainment of excellence in the University. But in addition, tenure also reflects and recognizes a candidate's potential long-term value to the institution, as evidenced by professional performance and growth. Tenure sets universities apart from other institutions. Faculty are not merely employed by the University but are the educational and research programs of the University; tenured faculty are the community of educators who create institutional stability and an ongoing commitment to excellence.” Tenure and tenure-track positions, therefore must remain a core commitment to OSU faculty, and is the reason we have proposed limits to the adoption of renewable-term positions in support of teaching, research and extension at OSU.

Recommendations and Rational

Recommendation 1

Establish a new series of Renewable-term, Professorial Faculty Ranks:
Assistant Professor, Associate Professor and Professor to accommodate Extension needs

Extension personnel serve a unique role at OSU in developing and delivering research-based educational programs to the general public and to specific clientele groups. This role requires professorial rank faculty with excellent educational and outreach skills and the ability to develop scholarly products. Traditionally, these have been tenure-track appointments with academic homes in departments representing the faculty members’ area of expertise.

Over the past decade state and federal support for the OSU Extension Service has declined and Extension has adapted by funding programs with a mixture of state and federal funds, non-recurring federal funds, grants and contracts, donations and service fees. Some Extension faculty are funded entirely on grants and contracts. At the same
time, many of the issues facing Oregon, which would benefit from Extension programming, are ephemeral in nature with educational programming horizons of three to ten years. The changing nature of Extension/Outreach programming issues requires an organization that is flexible and responsive with respect to staffing. OSU Extension’s strategic plan (A Framework for Engaging Oregonians, 2004, page 15) calls for no more than 70% of state and federal general funds (including salaries, OPE, travel, and supplies and services) to be used to fund tenure-track faculty appointments. In addition, ECOP’s Vision document also recognized the dynamic nature of Extension issues and suggested that state Extension services maintain flexibility by allocating no more than 70% of their regular state and federal funds (including salaries, OPE, travel, and supplies and services) to permanently funded positions (NASULGC 2002, The Extension System: A Vision for the 21st Century, page 7). Finally, Extension faculty at many Land Grant Universities around the country are not on tenure-track appointments; annual renewal contracts are the norm.

The current renewable-term faculty ranks do not fit Extension faculty positions. Currently, some renewable-term Extension faculty are hired using the ranks of Instructor, Professional Faculty, or Research Assistant Professor. Sometimes these ranks are not well suited to Extension roles. For example, the Instructor rank may not always be appropriate because many Extension faculty have scholarship expectations (15% or greater) consistent with professorial ranks, and do much more than present educational programs. The Instructor rank would be utilized when the scholarship requirement is less than 15% in the position description. Professorial ranks are important for faculty recognition both within and outside OSU. We believe that clientele and faculty perceive differences between Instructor and Professor ranks that creates a two-tiered system. Administrators in departments and county Extension offices have suggested that a rank of Assistant Professor would be a more attractive appointment, allowing units to recruit and retain higher quality faculty than may be recruited at Instructor ranks. The Research faculty ranks are not appropriate because even though Extension faculty conduct applied research, most of their duties involve translating research to a variety of audiences.

Renewable-term, professorial faculty ranks currently exist at OSU. OSU has clinical faculty associated with the colleges of Veterinary Medicine and Pharmacy who are on renewable-term contracts. The OSU Faculty Handbook has guidelines that define and differentiate clinical track faculty appointments from the traditional academic (tenure track) appointments. Our recommendation is to establish Extension faculty ranks with similar guidelines that detail appointment and promotion for such positions.

If continuing such a position beyond ten years was necessary for program function, the position would be re-announced and recruited as a tenure track position. A waiver of search could be requested but would not be automatically approved. Another option to continue beyond the ten-year limit could be the use of multi-year rolling contracts.

Criteria for Using New Ranks
Use of the new ranks would be appropriate under the following situations:

1. Position description includes at least 15% scholarship; positions with less than 15% scholarship could be recruited as an instructor rank.
2. Funding for the position is entirely or partially state or federal funds;
3. If state/federal funds are used, the programming need is of limited duration (2-10 years); and
4. Up to a maximum of 30% of an Extension program’s state and federal funds are allocated to renewable-term positions. Here we define program to mean the major Extension program areas (4-H, Agriculture, Family and Community Development, Forestry, Sea Grant).

Recommendation 2

Allow hiring of non-tenure track professorial faculty on state/federal funds or a combination of funding.

Fulfilling OSU’s 3-fold mission of teaching, research, and extension has become more complex in large part because of changes in the character of the state OSU serves, the programs that stakeholders request and expect, and the budget resources that are available to support these programs. The state has become more diverse, socially and economically. Oregon’s economy has diversified and become more entrepreneurial and dynamic. Funding sources can no longer be categorized or predicted as being “hard” or “soft”; instead, funding often is made available from any of a variety of sources to address particular needs during a specified period of time. Additionally, highly qualified individuals are more accustomed moving from job to job and are available and willing to accept positions of finite duration, rather than expecting career-long appointments.

Currently, non-tenure track, renewable-term professorial positions are restricted to clinical faculty or research faculty on grants and contracts. However, some of these current positions are initiated with state funding such as in the case of spousal accommodations, and many of these positions are partially supported with state funds as teaching responsibilities are added to the position description over time. Thus, our recommendation is to eliminate the “research” descriptor for non-tenure track, renewable-term professorial rank faculty, and explicitly allow use of state/federal funds to hire non-tenure track faculty.

Criteria for Using Non-tenure Track Professorial Faculty

Use of non-tenure track professorial ranks would be appropriate under the following situations:

1. Position description includes at least 15% scholarship; positions with less than 15% scholarship could be recruited as an instructor or some other appropriate rank.
2. Funding for the position is entirely or partially on state or federal funds;
3. If state/federal funds are used, the need for the position is of limited duration (2-10 years); and
4. Up to a maximum of 30% of a unit’s state/federal funds are allocated to renewable-term positions including Instructor rank faculty.

Recommendation 3

Permit multiple-year, rolling contracts for renewable-term professorial and instructor rank faculty after a 3-year probationary period.

Where funding is stable and job performance has been outstanding, multiple year (2 or 3 year) rolling contracts are appropriate. Multiple-year rolling contracts would provide an increased level of job security for outstanding renewable-term faculty following a probationary period. Rolling contracts of 2 years would provide an employee security of 1 year’s notice of non-renewal of his or her appointment beyond the current appointment year. A 3-year contract would provide 2 years of security. Faculty in these non-tenure track positions would be evaluated annually and contracts would be renewed annually. The OSU Faculty Handbook currently has a provision for 2-year contracts with administration approval, but this provision is rarely used. Furthermore, Chancellor Pernsteiner recently issued a memorandum allowing each of the OUS universities to offer multiple-year contracts for up to 3 years with the Presidents’ authorization. Multiple year contracts are used at other universities including Cornell, University of Maryland, and Washington State University. Recruiting and retaining the highest quality faculty would be enhanced by offering extended contracts. The 3-year probationary period is similar to a normal mid-term review for a tenure-track faculty member. A longer probationary period would not seem to be appropriate because these positions would generally be either grant funded or of limited (< 10 years) duration. However, additional multi-year contracts could be continued as needed for a total duration of ten years or the rolling contracts could be continued without this ten-year limitation. In all cases, the unit administrator proposing a multi-year contract would identify and assure funding for the contract period.

Recommendation 4

Provide comparable compensation for renewable-term and tenure/tenure-track professorial rank faculty.

Renewable-term professorial rank faculty will fill functions and hold responsibilities that vary little from those of tenured or tenure-track professorial rank faculty. As such it is anticipated that, regardless of position type (renewable-term vs. tenure), the highest caliber applicants will be sought and the most qualified individuals recruited. Compensation for renewable-term positions should, therefore, be comparable to tenure-track positions, except where limited by the funding source.

Recommendation 5
Monitor Salaries and Renewal Term Options.

We recommend that the Dean of each College be responsible for monitoring equity of salaries between renewable-term and tenure-track positions of similar ranks. Also, the Dean’s office would be responsible for monitoring the percentage of renewable term and tenure track positions that are paid for by state/federal funds, with the goal of not exceeding 30% renewable term positions. These reports would be completed and available to OSU Administration and Faculty Senate no less than every 5 years.