

Research, Teaching, Practitioner, & Clinical-Track Faculty Affairs Committee

2019-2020 Year-End Report

Ongoing Charge

The Committee on Research, Teaching, Practitioner, and Clinical-Track Faculty Affairs monitors and evaluates the working environment, terms and conditions of employment, job security, compensation, benefits eligibility, opportunities for participation in governance, opportunities for professional advancement, and participation in the academic life of the university provided for non-tenure-track faculty. It monitors compliance with the Faculty Handbook and with stated school policies of the schools or units as they relate to RTPC faculty. It makes recommendations to relevant Senate and University committees, and to the Academic Senate, concerning any policy issues that have an impact on non-tenure-track faculty.

Specific Charge for 2019-2020 Academic Year

The RTPC Faculty Affairs Committee was tasked with exploring two specific issues this year:

1. **Workload Profiles, Merit Review, and Promotions:** Do RTPC faculty have clearly-established workload profiles, and are merit reviews and promotions aligned with them? Are these policies clearly-articulated and clearly-implemented?
2. **Salary Benchmarking:** Continue the charge from last year of addressing the ongoing concern of compensation for RTPC faculty, which has significant equity and diversity implications.

The following sections provide an overview of the committee's activities relating to this charge.

Workload Profiles, Merit Review, and Promotions

This issue was the primary focus of the committee's efforts this year. We worked to collect documentation regarding workload profiles, as well as merit review and promotion processes, from schools across USC. We analyzed the collected documents to identify broad trends, significant outliers, and best practices regarding the substance, documentation, and communication of policies throughout USC. Our findings are presented below, beginning on page 4. Due to the disruption presented by COVID-19, we revised the scope of our report to address workload profiles and merit review, and left the formal review and reporting on promotion processes (including their relation to workload profiles and merit review) for next year.

Salary Benchmarking

This issue was the primary focus of the committee's efforts last year. This year, the committee's senior co-chair T.J. McCarthy served as an external advisor for a Dornsife pilot project for external salary benchmarking, and also supervised a team of graduate students to develop a data scraper capable of automating collection of external faculty salary data.

The development of the initial data scraper, confined in scope to collecting salary data for the University of California system as an initial proof of concept, has been completed. This project is now moving forward in coordination with the office of Associate Vice Provost Ginger Clark, with whom the committee's co-chairs have collaborated since Spring 2019 in relation to the advancement of salary benchmarking at USC.

Priorities for Future Consideration

The committee proposes the following as topics of particular interest for the upcoming year:

- *Salary benchmarking:* A great deal of forward movement has taken place through the committee's [2019 White Paper on Faculty Salary Benchmarking](#) and contributions in the past year to ongoing efforts to facilitate salary benchmarking. The committee can continue to play a useful role by actively monitoring, and advocating for, progress in this area at the university level and within individual schools.
- *Workload Profiles and Merit Review:* Building on this year's initial review, we would like to gather data from every school for a more comprehensive review, offering a "higher-resolution" understanding of relevant policy details.
- *Promotion Criteria:* Concerns have been raised about RTPC promotion criteria throughout the university, including the transparency of criteria and of the promotion review process more generally. Another issue, linked to this year's efforts, is concern about misalignment of promotion criteria with workload profiles at the previous rank.
- *Roles of RTPC faculty:* Given significant, ongoing changes in the traditional structure of higher education, many have expressed a desire for a more intentional discussion of the role of RTPC faculty in USC's long-term strategy in a changing world. Though important at any time, these issues have become especially critical given the unprecedented challenges that USC faces in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2019-20 RTPC Faculty Affairs Committee

Co-chairs

T.J. McCarthy, Price School of Public Policy

Amy Cannon, Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences

Committee Members

Brent Blair (*Senate Executive Board Liaison*), School of Dramatic Arts

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Analysis of Workload Profiles and Merit Review

At the request of the USC Academic Senate, the Research, Teaching, Practitioner, and Clinical (RTPC) Faculty Affairs Committee conducted a year-long analysis of official documents relating to workload profiles and merit review procedures at USC. Our aim was to provide a series of “best practices” as a means to move toward improved quality and consistency of policies, as well as greater clarity and accessibility of information about these policies, across schools and programs. We want to emphasize that the results represented throughout this report are based entirely on information derived from schools’ official documents; to the extent that current practice in any given school is not fully captured by the relevant documents, our report does not reflect these undocumented practices. With that said, we assert that the existence of even exemplary practices within a school is insufficient if these practices are not officially codified and transparently communicated to faculty.

This work was motivated by a sense that current practices may not reliably ensure supportive and equitable treatment of USC faculty, and as a result may detrimentally impact their professional growth and general well-being. In recent years, a number of RTPC faculty have reported inconsistency in workloads among full-time faculty, both within and across schools, as well as a lack of clear documentation of workload expectations, and even fluctuation in workloads without commensurate compensation. RTPC faculty have also raised a number of concerns about the transparency, robustness, and consistency of the merit review and promotion processes: these concerns include misalignment between workload profiles and merit/promotion criteria, as well as an absence of substantive feedback and direction for improvement following merit review.

This project is especially timely given the broad economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although all USC faculty have been deeply affected by the crisis, it cannot be denied that RTPC and part-time faculty experience greater economic precarity even in the best of times, given the nature of RTPC and part-time employment contracts. At a time when so much of what draws students to USC has been put on hold, the university has repeatedly affirmed the value of continuing to offer a world-class education—as well as groundbreaking research, clinical work, and practice—to which RTPC faculty are essential. This population, making up more than three-quarters of all USC faculty as of 2019,¹ is now facing unprecedented uncertainty. Many are anxious about whether or not their appointments will be renewed; many will be disproportionately impacted by the halt of merit increases.

Even as we face significant social and economic disruption, we believe that USC has the potential to serve as a stabilizing and unifying force among faculty. We are heartened that President Folt has articulated that she and the university are “mindful of equity differences” for faculty amid these challenges, and we share the hope she expressed that we can close this gap, rather than let the COVID-19 crisis deepen the rift between the most and least secure faculty at

¹ <https://academicsenate.usc.edu/faculty-composition-who-we-are-who-we-want-to-be/>

the university. In providing consistent guidelines for workload profiles, merit review, and promotion, USC can continue its ongoing efforts to strengthen and renew our culture by supporting the professional development of its RTPC faculty—who shape so much of our students’ college experience, whether on campus or at home.

Workload Profiles

The RTPC Faculty Affairs Committee reviewed the official documents relating to workload profiles across the 13 schools from which we received responses.²

Regarding accessibility of documentation, which we consider to be a noteworthy practice in its own right, we found that workload profile documentation is freely available to faculty in ten of the 13 schools (e.g., posted on a website that faculty can access at will), though this means of access is not available to adjunct faculty in some schools. In the other three schools, documentation is only available by request to an administrator.

Ten of the 13 schools provide a standardized breakdown for their RTPC faculty profiles; the other schools’ profiles vary at the level of the individual, and the process for establishing these profiles is not always clear. Only six schools’ documents note the possibility of, and process for, profile adjustments; such opportunities may exist in the remaining schools, but are not communicated in the policy documents.

Nine schools provide definitions of teaching, research, service, and practice, and eight describe expectations for levels of effort in each area. There is some inconsistency throughout the university in the classification of professional activities; for example, publications are categorized as “research” in some units and “service” in others. Even among those schools whose documents provide definitions for each category, important faculty activities such as student advising and mentoring may not be clearly assigned to any particular category.

Recommendations

1. Faculty of all tracks, including adjuncts and part-time faculty, should have on-demand access to workload profile documentation (e.g., via a secure web portal).
2. Instructions for accessing workload profile documentation should be provided in the faculty handbook for each school and during new faculty orientations, as should procedures for negotiating or adjusting a workload profile.

² Separate policy documents were obtained for the following schools (including all schools represented by members of the RTPC committee): Annenberg School of Communication; Annenberg School of Journalism; Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences; Kaufman School of Dance; Keck School of Medicine; Marshall School of Business (including Leventhal School of Accounting); Ostrow School of Dentistry; Price School of Public Policy; Rossier School of Education; School of Cinematic Arts; School of Pharmacy; Thornton School of Music; Viterbi School of Engineering.

3. Each school should clearly articulate which activities belong to each workload profile category for its faculty, with an effort made to provide greater consistency across the university to the extent feasible. In the case that there is reason for these classifications to vary within a given school, they should be set at the relevant sub-school level (e.g., department).
4. In the case of faculty whose service activities substantially exceed the standard expectations associated with their workload profile, opportunities should be provided to apply for an adjusted profile and/or course releases commensurate with their additional service.

Exemplary Practices

1. The Price School of Public Policy specifies teaching loads and gives additional credit (1.5 times regular unit value) for large classes (over 50 students) and for new course development.
2. The Annenberg School of Journalism and the Price School provide course relief for RTPC faculty who hold administrative appointments.
3. Several schools provide flexibility in setting profiles for RTPC faculty. Examples include the Ostrow School of Dentistry, in which profiles are set annually, and the Price School, which allows teaching faculty to voluntarily allocate up to 10% of effort to research activities.

Merit Review

The committee analyzed official documents pertaining to merit review across the 13 schools from whom we received responses. These documents are readily available to faculty in seven of the 13 schools, but the other six schools only provide this information by request or via email at the start of the annual merit review process.

In most schools, RTPC faculty are reviewed on an annual basis, but in a few schools an RTPC faculty member will only receive a full review every two or three years. Nearly all schools' documents provide timelines for submission of review materials. In most cases, intermediate steps in the evaluation process (e.g., input from the department chair or review committee) are also provided. However, few schools share a timeline for communicating the results to faculty.

Our discussion of merit review policies is divided into two sections: *(i)* materials evaluated and the criteria for that evaluation, and *(ii)* evaluation process and feedback provided to faculty.

I. Materials Evaluated and Criteria

The materials submitted for review of USC's RTPC faculty vary significantly across schools. Only six of the 13 schools whose policies were evaluated use a standardized merit review form. No materials are utilized by all or nearly all schools, though several elements are incorporated by a small majority—namely, submission of a CV, student evaluations of teaching, and activity reports written by the faculty member. A number of elements are used by a minority of schools,

including teaching statements, course syllabi, and self-evaluations in which faculty assess achievement of past goals and establish goals for the next year.

Ten of the 13 schools determine a numerical score as the final metric for each faculty member's review results, and the remaining three schools' policy documents do not specify how the results are codified. Seven of the ten schools using numerical scores first assign a numerical score for each workload profile category (teaching, research, etc.) and then weight these category-level scores by the associated effort percentages; the other three do not specify how scores are computed.

Most schools provide little or no substantial guidance on how the materials submitted are to be translated into final evaluation scores or rankings by the reviewers responsible for this task. Only four schools reference a detailed rubric for how final scores are created, and two of these schools make the rubric available only to reviewers rather than to the faculty overall. The remaining schools typically specify a range but do not include any substantial instructions for assigning scores, e.g., "Ratings are between 1 (poor) and 5 (excellent)."

Recommendations

1. Merit should be assessed separately for each component of the workload profile. These results should then be weighted by the associated profile percentages to produce the overall merit score.
2. Clear guidelines should be established for the assignment of merit ratings, and this information should be made available to all faculty members.
3. Though the specific materials submitted for merit review will necessarily vary across schools, they should include (at minimum) the following: an up-to-date CV, a standardized activity report, and teaching evaluations (if applicable).
4. The merit review process should involve the establishment and attainment of annual goals. Goals should be determined by the faculty member in consultation with the department chair or other supervising administrator.

Exemplary Practices

1. The Marshall School of Business, Ostrow School of Dentistry, and Rossier School of Education have websites for submission of each element of their detailed and standardized activity reports.
2. The Ostrow School offers a positive model for making policy documents easily-accessible in practice rather than simply available in principle. Ostrow makes detailed documentation readily available via a secure, easy-to-locate intranet that can be accessed directly from the school's main web page.
3. The Annenberg Schools of Communication and Journalism, School of Pharmacy, Price School of Public Policy, and Thornton School of Music provide detailed Word documents as templates for the annual activity report.

4. The Ostrow School and the School of Cinematic Arts have detailed scoring rubrics that provide clear guidance about how varying levels of performance correlate to numerical scores, and make these rubrics available to all faculty.

II. Evaluation Process and Feedback

Committee members noted that most schools provide clear documentation describing the steps involved in the merit review process by making merit review documents available to faculty members via a website, a shared drive, or by request. When provided, descriptions of the merit review process, criteria for merit scores, and information on decision-making, workload profiles, timelines, participation, and the appeals process are fairly clear.

Throughout USC, merit raises are ultimately recommended by deans and approved by the provost, but faculty-provided input to the dean as a part of this process differs substantially across schools. 11 of 13 schools incorporate faculty review committees, though policies governing the committees' membership are frequently ambiguous. Two schools rely on a faculty vote to select committee members, four have committees appointed by an administrator, and the remainder do not specify how committee members are selected.

Representation of RTPC faculty on these committees is generally not explicitly addressed; in the three cases in which a policy is stated, two require RTPC representation and the third restricts membership to tenure-track faculty. Most schools either include a recommendation from the department chair to the dean as a part of the review process, or allow chairs an opportunity to register a dissenting opinion after reviewing a faculty committee's recommendations. One school's review process involves no regular faculty, with scores assigned instead at the sole discretion of a single administrator.

The feedback provided to faculty about their merit review results varies significantly across schools. This information is typically minimal, often limited to the individual's overall numerical score, possibly alongside summary information regarding the distribution of scores within the school or department. A few schools provide written comments. A few others either offer or require a meeting in which verbal feedback is provided by a department chair or dean of faculty. In a small number of schools, faculty receive no feedback beyond that implied by any change in their annual salary; they receive neither a numerical score nor written comments.

Schools' merit review process documents typically do not specify a timeline for communicating merit review results to faculty. By supplementing this limited information with the actual dates of receipt of merit review results in recent years, we determined that faculty in different schools receive merit review results at widely divergent times. The median timing for the release of merit review results to faculty is roughly March or April; however, some schools do not share merit review results with faculty until their new contracts are issued in the summer, leaving no opportunity for discussion or appeal prior to the setting of the next year's salary.

Eight of 13 schools note the existence of appeal processes for faculty who are dissatisfied with the outcome of their merit review. Appeals are generally initiated by a written submission from the faculty member within two weeks of receipt of review results, and in all cases are resolved by the dean. Deans are typically described as having the option to consult with a review committee at their discretion, but are rarely required to do so.

Recommendations

1. The merit review feedback provided in writing to each faculty member should include numerical scores (if applicable), both overall and separately by workload profile category, as well as narrative feedback that includes suggestions for improvement.
2. The relationship between merit review scores and merit-based salary increases should be explicitly addressed.
3. The timeline for the entire merit review process, from initial solicitation of materials to communication of the results, should be clearly stated. In addition to being specified in communications as part of the annual merit review process, this timeline should also be available to faculty on demand (e.g., via a document on school intranet).
4. A process and timeline for faculty to appeal merit review results should be clearly stated, both in the school's policy document and accompanying the review results.
5. Committees tasked with evaluating merit review materials should include faculty representation, particularly RTPC faculty. The process for selecting committee members should be clearly stated.
6. Faculty should receive their merit review results in a timely manner. At minimum, results should be provided sufficiently early to ensure that any appeal can be filed and resolved in time to be reflected in the new contract for the subsequent year.
7. All faculty should be explicitly invited to meet with their department chair, dean, or other relevant administrator to discuss the results of their merit review and obtain direction for improvement.

Exemplary Practices

1. Prior to the completion of the annual salary process, faculty in the School of Cinematic Arts are given written feedback from their chair and the merit score assigned by the evaluation committee. The faculty member is invited to provide a written response, which will then be reviewed by the dean as part of the standard salary process along with the evaluations provided by the chair and committee.
2. The Annenberg Schools of Communication and Journalism and Thornton School of Music each have annually-rotating merit review committees for RTPC faculty that are composed of RTPC faculty.

3. Both the Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences and Price School of Public Policy note that, in addition to merit review, their annual salary-setting process includes a review to identify and correct any inequities in salary.
4. In place of the review committee approach utilized by most schools, the Price School's merit review process involves universal faculty participation, with all faculty reviewing the activity reports of each of their peers³ and subsequently assigning merit scores for each profile category. Each faculty member's final merit review score is then calculated as the profile-weighted average of these peer evaluations.

³ The two "peer groups" relevant to RTPC faculty at Price are (i) teaching and practitioner faculty and (ii) research faculty (who are reviewed by tenure-track faculty in addition to other research faculty).