

## **Recommendations of the Provost's/Academic Senate Task Force on Research-track Faculty 04.28.2019 Final**

### **Preamble and Guiding Principles:**

Research-track Faculty members at USC contribute significantly to the scientific, educational, and service missions of the university in multiple ways. Some are principal investigators of research grants that vary from individual projects to large consortia. The majority collaborate with other faculty both within and outside of their discipline which, in turn, helps to secure extramural funding, and benefits USC research in general. Most provide mentorship to graduate students, post-doctoral scholars and research staff, and supervise undergraduate research learning and activities. Many also contribute significantly (up to 25% of their effort) to traditional classroom teaching and/or on-line courses. Several represent the University at national and international conferences, take leadership roles in scholarly associations, and act as editors for journals and referees for granting organizations.

Despite the important roles many Research-track Faculty members play in the academic life of USC, there are currently limited support mechanisms within the University for maintaining and advancing their careers. At the other end of the spectrum, there are some individuals with Research-track Faculty appointments who might better be employed as staff scientists. A variety of issues are hindering USC's ability to attract and retain the best Research Faculty and the Task Force considered and debated multiple options in attempting to make viable recommendations for meaningful advancement.

In approaching the responsibility of recommending improvements to the career opportunities for Research-track Faculty at USC, the Task Force has employed the following three guiding principles:

- Simplicity and clarity in conveying the commitments of Schools, Institutes, and Centers (e.g., avoiding complicated formulas, and avoiding excessive tracking and bureaucracy).
- Consistent commitment to the career development of meritorious research faculty members.
- Balancing financial commitments to faculty against the financial risk to the School, Institute, or Center in the event a faculty member is not successful in securing funding (i.e. mitigating risk by permitting reassignment of duties and termination only for non-performance or for-cause).

### **Minimum Rights of Research-track Faculty Members:**

The Task Force finds that Research-track Faculty members are appointed, retained, promoted, and evaluated in ways that differ widely from School to School, and even within schools. Therefore, we recommend that reasoned and reasonable standardization of the minimum rights and responsibilities of full-time Research-track Faculty be adopted as follows:

- Academic freedom.
- The right to dedicate the majority of effort, up to 95% time, conducting research or running a core facility or other research-related or data science-related service activity.
- The right to be a Principal Investigator or (named) Co-Investigator on external grants.
- The right to be a Principal Investigator or (named) Co-Investigator on Internal USC grants,
- The right to dedicate up to 25% FTE effort to teaching, where this also fits the academic needs

- of the home school, and where sufficient funds exist to support all or part of remaining salary.
- The right to mentor undergraduate and graduate students and post-doctoral fellows in research settings.
  - The right to serve on qualifying exam, thesis, and dissertation committees for Masters' and Doctoral students.
  - The right to serve as chair of thesis and dissertation committees for Masters' and Doctoral students.
  - The right to expect a promotional system from Assistant to Associate to Full Research Professor, depending on excellence in research, service, and teaching if applicable, along a similar timeline as (i.e., in parallel with) the promotion system employed for Tenure-track Faculty. In all instances, appointment and promotion decisions for Research-track Faculty should involve a vote of the faculty of the home school (or one of the School's Departments, Institutes, or Centers) including Research-track Faculty and Tenured Faculty of higher rank than the candidate. The guidelines, benchmarks, and criteria to be used in promotion decisions for Research-track Faculty should be contained in an RTPC Faculty Appointments & Promotion Manual which the USC administration and the Academic Senate are encouraged to develop. It would be helpful if Schools also developed their own RTPC Faculty Appointments & Promotion Manuals to guide faculty through the nuances particular to each School.

**Minimum Responsibilities of Research-track Faculty Members:**

- To participate actively in the life of the home school through an agreed minimum amount of expected service activities, including attendance and voting in accordance with University and School governance documents at faculty meetings and participation in school, department, institute, or center committees, including annual performance reviews, and appointment and promotion cases.
- To participate actively in the life of the University and its committees.
- To work diligently to secure external (e.g. grants, contracts, endowments, etc.) or internal (e.g. core facility, research service provider, data analysis facility, etc.) funding to support both salary and research activities in fulfillment of appointment expectations, with possible supplemental support from additional internal funding sources.

**What Differentiates Research-track Faculty Members from Staff Scientists?**

Research-track Faculty members contribute to the life of the University in multiple ways. Some function as fully independent researchers supported through external funding from grants or contracts or with funds from gifts and endowments. In many instances such individuals may initially be hired with substantial or full salary support from a School, Institute, or Center with the understanding that they must seek external funding within an agreed time frame.

A second group of Research-track Faculty members run important core facilities or other research-related or data science-related service activities, that are of benefit to the USC research enterprise and that fund the faculty member's salary.

Many in both these groups also teach courses or classes, and/or mentor students and post-docs in

research environments. Ideally, Research-track Faculty should flexibly participate in teaching, mentoring, academic service and committees, and institution building, beyond their research roles and responsibilities.

The word 'Professor' comes to us from Latin, through French, and is inextricably associated (both etymologically and historically) with teaching. Both T/TT and Teaching-track RTPC Faculty share this major teaching role throughout the University. Similarly, many Research-track Faculty teach formal classes (up to 25% of their profile) and/or extensively mentor undergraduate and graduate students, and post-doctoral fellows. One differentiating characteristic between Research-Track Faculty members and staff scientists, therefore, can be the expectation for Faculty members to contribute to the educational experiences of USC students and post-doctoral fellows through traditional in-class or on-line teaching and/or mentoring in small group or one-on-one situations.

A third group of Research-track Faculty members are far less independent and rely on funding from other faculty for their support. Moving forward, it is recommended that individuals who will not apply for independent funding, or run a self-sustaining service or data science facility, be appointed to research staff positions (Research Associate, Senior Research Associate, Research Scientist) rather than as Research-track Faculty members. As with Tenure-track Faculty members, not everyone who attempts to become self-supporting, or to sustain a self-supporting program, is successful. For example, some academic units recommend a promotional up-or-out deadline (typically on a six- or seven-year timeline) for Research-track Faculty at the junior rank. In general, there is an expectation that Faculty-level appointees (on any track) will attain a higher level of scholarly and academic accomplishment, and a greater degree of fiscal support for their research and salaries than is the norm for staff members. In some instances, therefore, it may also be appropriate for Research-track Faculty who are unable to be self-supporting to switch to a research staff position. A streamlined path for this transition from faculty to staff should be provided by USC policy.

**Uniqueness of the Research-track and Involvement in University Life:**

There still seems to be significant variation between schools in how they handle performance evaluation and promotion of Research-track Faculty. We recommend that all units adhere to the "parallel tracks" philosophy for promotion. Additionally, it became quite clear in discussions that not all schools at USC are adhering to the mandate for inclusion of RTPC Faculty in all aspects of academic life. In particular, the Task Force is concerned that RTPC Faculty are not always included or represented in faculty meetings and committees, in faculty votes (as permitted and appropriate), and in annual performance reviews. Ideally, Research-track Faculty should flexibly participate in teaching, mentoring, academic service and committees, and institution building, beyond their research roles and responsibilities.

The Task Force was also concerned that there may be an impression that the research faculty track is a testing ground for the tenure-track. We feel it is important for Schools and the University to clearly inform incoming Research-track Faculty that there is no 'transition' from one track to the other. On the other hand, if a tenure-track position becomes available any Research-track Faculty member should be able to freely apply in an open competition, without being penalized or downgraded in any way because of their existing position.

**Problems with Research-track Faculty Contracts, Funding, and Security & Potential Solutions:**

The Task Force finds that the current rules governing Research-track Faculty members fail to provide an appropriate level of job security and financial stability. Many (maybe most) Research-track Faculty are dependent on external funding (mostly grants and some contracts and endowments) for up to 95% of their remuneration. When such funding is lost, University rules allow for as little as a 30 - 90 day notice of reduction of salary coverage, or termination period for the affected faculty member. The Task Force members unanimously concurred that this is an undesirable situation that exposed Research-track Faculty to undue stress and anxiety, and is counterproductive to professional growth and development.

The Task Force therefore suggests that Schools make longer and more meaningful minimal financial commitments to all Research-track Faculty members (see detailed Task Force Recommendations below) using contracts that, nevertheless, should include a non-performance clause to protect the institution. Contracts should be signed by the relevant school dean, with dismissal allowed only for cause.

To achieve this goal, a wide majority of the Task Force supported the implementation of two-year rolling contracts that would be renewed annually. It was suggested that the two-year rolling contracts could be provided to all Research-track Faculty on a university-wide basis, with inclusion of a non-performance termination clause, and a termination 'for-cause' clause, to protect the institution. It would be expected that new funding would be obtained during this period for further contract extensions to be considered. Effectively, this proposal would ensure that all Research-track faculty members would have two years of protected salary at time of renewal.

A second mechanism considered by the Task Force would ensure that faculty who lose grant funding in any contract period, or whose core facility or other service-based activities fail to cover salary costs, would still have a guarantee for up to one-year additional salary or more within the appointment period, during which time it would be expected that new funding would be obtained. It should be understood that Schools would not be obligated to extend the guarantee of full salary support beyond this time in any appointment period, although they would certainly be free to do so. Termination for non-performance or 'for cause' would also apply.

A third proposal discussed by the Task Force involved a rewards structure in which Research-track Faculty members could accumulate credits toward future salary based on prior funding. In this scenario, a faculty member might, for example, be able to accumulate one month of future salary for every year of previous funding received. The accumulated credit could be used to support the faculty member's salary when other sources are not available. A 'cap' of one year's salary credit or more was felt reasonable. Termination for non-performance or 'for cause' would also apply. Again, it would be expected that new funding would be obtained during this period for further contract extensions to be considered.

A fourth option discussed involved various hybrids of the above three scenarios, with the additional possibility that individual Schools, Institutes, or Centers might apply 'individualized' solutions, with appropriate approvals, that better suit their special needs or responsibilities. Again, termination for non-performance or 'for cause' would also apply.

In all four cases above there would be the possibility of increasing the length of faculty contracts with increasing years of service, thus further improving the employment and financial security of Research-track faculty.

In the event that full or partial funding is lost, and the school must make up the shortfall, Research-track Faculty members could be assigned other administrative, teaching, or service responsibilities of value to the school. In some cases, this may require permission from the Provost's office for a profile of activities that exceeds the normal and accepted teaching/administration/service limits for the Research-track Faculty. Alternatively, the administration, working with the Academic Senate, could sanction a blanket permission for all cases that meet certain minimal criteria. All Research-track Faculty Contracts should also include a statement that any service effort to the school, institute, center or university must be compensated from unrestricted funds.

In any of the scenarios above, the need for any form of 'Gap Funding' for salary coverage would be obviated either by the two-year rolling contracts, or the one- or two-year guaranteed employment 'extension,' or by the ability of Research-track Faculty to 'accumulate' credits towards one year of future salary funding. It was felt that most forms of actual gap-funding would be much more difficult to standardize and to implement. Salary commitments tied to indirect cost recoveries were also discussed but were felt to involve unnecessarily complex formulae or calculations and could possibly contravene funding agencies' regulations.

**Task Force Recommendations:**

- We recommend that the USC administration and the Academic Senate should develop a new Appointments and Promotion Manual for the Research-track Faculty, clearly detailing their rights and responsibilities, and containing explicit guidelines, benchmarks, and criteria for hiring and promotion which should operate in parallel with the practices and procedures governing Tenured and Tenure-track Faculty. Schools should also develop their own RTPC Faculty Appointments & Promotion Manuals to guide faculty through the nuances particular to each School. In fact, we strongly recommend that such a manual be developed for all RTPC Faculty since Teaching-track, Practice-track, and Clinical-track Faculty should be governed by parallel principles to those outlined for Research-track Faculty in this report.
- We recommend that Research-track Faculty members should flexibly participate in teaching, mentoring, academic service and committees, and institution building beyond their research roles and responsibilities.
- We recommend that USC should fully implement a university-wide appointment and promotional system for the Research-track Faculty, from Assistant to Associate to Full Research Professor, depending on excellence in research, service, and teaching if applicable, along a similar timeline as (i.e., in parallel with) the promotion system employed for Tenure-track Faculty. In all instances, appointments and promotion decisions for Research-track Faculty should involve a vote of the faculty of the home school, institute, or department, involving RTPC Faculty of higher rank than the candidate.
- We recommend that a decision for promotion of Research Assistant Professors to Research Associate Professors should be taken within a six- to seven-year period following appointment.

- We unanimously recommend implementation of increased employment and salary security for Research-Track Faculty members (and also suggest that the security of all RTPC Faculty should be enhanced). During extensive discussions, it became clear that there could be more than one mechanism by which this goal could be achieved. The potential options that received most support were as follows: Multi-year, rolling contracts that would be renewed annually; Regular contracts (of variable length) that offer a guarantee for up to one year additional salary or more; The ability to accumulate credits toward future salary based on prior funding, with a 'cap' of one year's salary credit or more; Combinations of two or more of these options above, or the ability for Schools, Institutes, or Centers (with appropriate approval) to adopt options that best suit their needs; The possibility of increasing the length of faculty contracts with increasing years of service.
- Despite recognizing advantages to each of the above options, the Task Force felt it important to make a recommendation to the provost and the Academic Senate of one preferred mechanism for employment/salary security. **Therefore, by a large majority, the Task Force recommends that Schools, Institutes, and Centers at USC institute Multi-year, rolling contracts for Research-track Faculty members that would be renewed annually. This mechanism would provide a minimum two-year security to all Research-track Faculty members.** Individual schools would, of course, be at liberty to offer longer-term salary support should they so desire, but would not be obligated to do so.
- We recommend that contracts for all Research-track Faculty members should include a non-performance clause to protect the institution that should be signed by the relevant deans, with dismissal otherwise allowed only for cause
- We recommend that effort profiles (sometimes called Profiles of Activity) should accurately reflect the percentage of a Research-track faculty member's actual effort in research, teaching, proposal preparation, administration, and service. In some cases, the traditional 5% time allocated to teaching, proposal preparation, administration, and service may not be sufficient, and the Task Force strongly suggests that all Schools carefully review the effort profiles of existing faculty to ensure that they are both accurate and reasonable.
- We recommend that for Research-track Faculty members whose support (either external or internal) has lapsed, the USC administration and the Academic Senate should permit greater latitude for schools to modify standard effort profiles to make up missing research financial support from additional administrative, teaching, or service activities for limited periods of time consistent with the extension of salary support.
- We recommend that Research-track Faculty positions should be advertised and competed for on an open basis, as specified by University policy, and should not be considered a guaranteed 'promotional path' for existing postdoctoral fellows or staff scientists, except for previously approved exceptions. On the other hand, existing post-doctoral fellows and staff scientists should be allowed to compete for such positions, as and when they become available, on an open and equal basis.

**Consequences of the Task Force's Recommendations:**

- Specifying that a Research-track Faculty position cannot be a guaranteed 'promotional path' for existing postdoctoral fellows or staff scientists will help elevate the status of the Research-track Faculty and reduce the pressure for internal appointments. Ensuring that existing post-

doctoral fellows and staff scientists are allowed to compete for such positions, when they become available, on an open and equal basis, will increase equity and transparency.

- The Task Force is fully aware that the requirement for schools to make longer commitments to prospective Research-track Faculty members may result in increased denial of appointments. It is hoped, and expected, that the requirement for increased commitment by schools will prompt greater scrutiny and more careful evaluation of the career prospects of each Research-track Faculty member. In fact, the potential for increased financial subvention should also help insure that promotional issues are scrutinized more carefully than is sometimes the case. Such attention to excellence will also serve to increase and improve the standing of our Research faculty within the wider academic community.
- Ensuring openness, fairness, and transparency in the hiring and promotion process, with full faculty participation in decision making, can only improve the academic environment and the *esprit de corps* at USC.
- If accepted, the recommendations of this Task Force will require the USC administration and the Academic Senate to develop a new Appointments & Promotion Manual for Research-track Faculty, clearly detailing their rights and responsibilities, and with explicit guidelines for hiring and promotion. In fact, we strongly recommend that such a manual be developed for all RTPC Faculty. Although beyond the purview of this Task Force, we recommend that Teaching-track, Clinical-track, and Practice-track Faculty be governed by parallel principles to those outlined for Research-track Faculty in this report.
- Although the increased minimal employment terms recommended in this report would provide much greater employment and financial security for Research-track (and potentially all RTPC) Faculty, it is understood that the changes in effort profile that schools (or their departments, institutes and centers) may have to impose in order to deal with financial realities may not be an ideal solution for every faculty member. For example, it may be somewhat counter-productive for a Research-track Faculty member who has lost funding but is working to obtain new external support to have to spend a greater percent of their time performing administrative tasks or teaching. Nevertheless, the Task Force members feel that the additional job and financial security offered by our proposals represent a significant advance on current practices.

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