

# UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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## MEMORANDUM

December 10, 1998

To: Carol Carrier  
Vice President for Human Resources

From: Deans, Academic Health Center  
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Subject: Report: "Putting the House in Order: A Report of the Joint Committee on Academic Appointments"

The report calls attention to several issues, issues that deserve careful consideration, reflection, and discussion across a broad community of faculty, staff, and administration at the University. The Deans Council of the Academic Health Center has discussed these and other issues related to faculty composition. Each college faces a unique set of needs and constraints in the make-up of its academic staff, and an improved ability to appoint academic staff to faculty positions (whether tenure tract or not) would be desirable. These decisions, however, are best retained at the collegiate level.

The University is a diverse community of scholars, with different cultures and missions, reflecting an adaptation to very different roles and conditions. Necessarily, the composition of the faculty reflects a similar diversity of roles, responsibilities and rewards. A centralized policy and procedure shaping a college's faculty composition may be ill endowed to respond to the forces that define a particular college's mission and needs. Similarly, a centralized system for decision making regarding the types of academic staff in a college may be shaped by forces separate from the college's needs and not accountable to the effects on the college's mission.

- ❖ The first issue raised is whether certain P&A staff ought to be classified as faculty. It makes sense that people performing essentially the same work should be generally afforded the same job title, status, compensation, and benefits. This makes employment policies at the University more clear and consistent and provides a fair basis for compensation and job review. In addition, a consistent system simplifies developing, accounting for and managing human resources, and provides a more reliable source of data for evaluation of trends and long term planning. Taking this step also avoids the difficult lesser status and "second class citizenship" for a variety of non-faculty academic personnel. Faculty status for all with similar academic roles would assure consistent recognition for both education and research/scholarly efforts and equality of roles in the mission of the University.
- ❖ The report suggests that employees that serve at least 25% in a teaching capacity should be appointed as faculty. While the percentage might be argued, the principle of tying faculty status to a measure of their activity is sound. It is perhaps more reasonable to assert that designation as a faculty member should require that a majority of one's efforts be "faculty-like", i.e., teaching in

any form (undergraduate, graduate, professional, outreach, clinical, etc.) or research or other scholarly efforts. If the aggregate of these efforts were 50% time or greater for a person with an appropriate education and experience, then the person should be designated as a faculty member within the University. As the report notes, this would require a significant population of university academic personnel to be reclassified. Faculty status should confer all of the rights and benefits that accrue to faculty, including promotion and performance review, and participation in curriculum design and collegiate strategic planning, faculty governance, and promotion decisions.

- ❖ The recommendations of the committee would make sweeping changes in employee categories and therefore in the structure of benefits and compensation and other costs of faculty. For example, the faculty have access to benefits not available to P&A staff, and vice versa. It is important to consider the financial effects of such broad scale reclassification as recommended by the report. These effects extend beyond simply salary to issues of benefits, sabbatical or semester leaves, research support and space, teaching loads, and graduate faculty support, among others.
- ❖ Separate from the issue of faculty status, there is the question of whether the faculty position should be tenure track or not. Decisions about whether a position should be a tenure track position impact on issues that extend beyond simple job class. A decision by a college to create a tenure track position has several long-term considerations for a college and its ability to achieve its mission.
  1. Whether a position is tenure track may have significant implications on the college's ability to attract or retain a certain type of faculty member to the position. While this effect is self-evident when trying to attract a scholar of international repute in both education and research (a tenure track position is desirable), there are certainly times when tenure track designation may deflect applications from exactly the sort of people one wishes to recruit. The pressures of competing on a tenure track may discourage candidates from applying for positions for which they are well suited. For example, there may be positions where the principle need is for a person committed to necessarily repetitive, entry level, or survey level teaching, or a role that requires a mix of education and administration (program directors, etc.). The position might be principally committed to clinical service and education (health professionals, etc.), or research/ technology development professionals who are well suited for laboratory or field scholarship but ill inclined to accept large teaching loads. Forcing an inappropriate dictum that positions must be tenure track might effectively exclude the contributions these talented people can make to the University. The programs of the various colleges are too complex to expect one size to fit all, and each college is in the best position to understand its own needs.
  2. In the decision to hire faculty, each college must weigh its ability to assure the funding for the position. Colleges vary remarkably in the sources they use to sustain the base of faculty. In some colleges, the principal sustaining base is state allocated dollars. In others, tuition plays a critical role. For many, the base of faculty salary support rests significantly on research grants or clinical income. Tenured positions carry with them a significant fiscal commitment. The college must be prudently assured it can sustain the salary of the position

without cannibalizing its long-term ability to serve its mission. Some colleges, to their credit, have grown the strength and impact of their programs well beyond the limits of their base of state funds and tuition income for faculty salary support. They have done so by leveraging the efforts of their academic staff to attract other external support for salaries, grants in all forms being a common vehicle. These colleges must make a calculated decision about what level of fiscal risk they can take in establishing which position will be tenure track and which will not. That risk is not static, it may ebb and flow with federal policy and other factors beyond the college's control. If a significant portion of current non-tenured academic positions were required to be tenured, then prudent leaders would have to reduce the size of the faculty to assure an adequate base of support. Such an action, while prudently necessary, would inevitably degrade the very base of activity that sustains the program and could create a spiral downward toward mediocrity. Ironically, the very action proposed by the report to sustain faculty quality (limiting the use of non-tenured faculty lines) could lead to a diminution of faculty numbers, loss of critical mass in a discipline, and the loss of national stature.

3. In a rapidly changing environment, the University is called on to be a leader in innovation in education and scholarly efforts. In doing so, there will be times that a college may choose to initiate a new program with no assurance that it will attract students, external support, or national preeminence. The very nature of progressive change at a premier University requires it to conduct these "experiments" in its efforts to grow, adapt, and excel. If each experiment is constrained to staffing its start-up with tenure track faculty, then inevitably the "failures" will leave behind a trail of faculty inappropriate to the college's mission. A college can not afford such effects, and innovation will suffer in the face of such risk.

All these considerations argue forcefully against a centrally controlled quota or cap system that dictates the make-up or terms of the academic staff of a college.

#### **Recommendation:**

The idea of providing consistent job classes for similar jobs makes good sense. Dictating the composition of the academic staff from a central vantage is unlikely to work to the benefit of an individual college's mission or the University's long term need for innovation, diversity of programs, and adaptation to external opportunities. There is no aspect of a college's make-up that more directly defines its mission than the composition of its academic staff. To dictate that composition from a central policy is inconsistent with the need for flexibility and adaptation by an individual college. The report states that exceptions could be made by a centralized authority requiring the approval of central administration and two university-wide faculty committees. At a time of decentralized decision making and the accountability of mission fulfillment at the college level, such a centralized system for a decision regarding an individual school seems **excessively** limiting to the school and its faculty. The compact process would likely provide a more individualized and efficient system while providing sufficient oversight from an institutional perspective.

From a University frame, several important questions need better answers before a global policy about the relative allocation of tenured positions could be considered.

- Given the resources used to support faculty, what model should be used to decide what fiscal risk at an institutional level is acceptable? How far beyond a given level of "hard money" support can the institution prudently grow without jeopardizing its core values and functions?
- By what mechanism might the above model be monitored in application? What criteria would define the acceptable risk for what sort of benefit to programs or mission?
- How might such a model and mechanisms be translated to a particular college's existing and likely future funding structure?
- Beyond the issue of fiscal responsibility, how can a college, program, or the institution as a whole assure that the solution has really enhanced the quality of its programs and performance?

Because of these issues, the appropriate course would seem to be to carefully study the effects of reclassification of certain P&A academic staff to faculty positions, separate from the issue of tenure status. Such considerations must proceed on a college by college basis, as close to the actual working level as possible to assure the vitality of programs and missions and their optimum growth and function in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

CC: President Mark Yudof  
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