Report of the Senate Committee on Faculty and the Academic Mission
(SCOF)

General Committee Charge

The Committee oversees and advises the Senate Executive Committee (SEC) on matters relating to the University's policies and procedures concerning the academic mission, including the structure of the academic staff, the tenure system, faculty appointments and promotions, faculty research, and faculty governance. In general, the Committee deals with the matters covered by the following sections of the University's Handbook for Faculty and Academic Administrators: I.E.-F., H.2., II.A.-D.

2019-2020 Specific Charges and
Steps Taken to Address Them

1. Identify the issues of central faculty concern surrounding the role and disposition of Academic Support Staff and Associated Faculty.

Last year, the committee commissioned a focus group with lecturers across the Schools. The top concern identified by the focus group was job stability. Other salient issues were broadly related to participation and inclusion: fair treatment, respect, and participation in department decision-making. The latter class of concerns are relevant to our third charge this year and make for an important discussion issue next year, across all tracks and ranks.

This year, the committee planned to carry out two additional focus groups with specialized lecturers: Lecturers in Foreign Languages (LFLs) and Lecturers in Critical Writing. At a Fall 2019 University Council meeting, the representative for Lecturers expressed concerns related to fair treatment, respect, and participation, similar to the issues identified during SCOF's focus group last year. *(See https://radix.www.upenn.edu/secretary/secure/UC-Materials-20191204.pdf#page=7, PennKey authentication required.)*

The planned focused groups, planned for March, were cancelled because of the campus closure . Given the uncertainty for the Fall semester, the focus groups may not be able to take place soon but should be conducted whenever that becomes practical.

More broadly Schools should develop standard exit surveys to be administered to departing lecturers and senior lecturers, which can offer a more complete picture of problems that may exist within these tracks. Schools should use exit surveys collect information related to the length of service for Associated Faculty and Academic Support Staff. In the long term, doing so will help School leadership to identify people who have made careers out of their roles, despite the underlying doubts among those outside of the track that doing so is possible. Overall, Schools should develop career advancement plans for lecturers and senior lecturers whenever possible. The health Schools (i.e., Dental, Veterinary, Nursing, and PSOM) can offer examples of how they have approached this task, given the large number of Associated Faculty in these Schools.

2. Collaborate with the Senate Committee on Faculty and the Administration (SCOA) to identify the issues of central faculty concern related to online learning at Penn.

SCOF conducted a brief survey with the deans of all 12 Penn Schools and invited two guests to discuss with SCOF incentives for developing online courses and promoting effective of online teaching.

Only two of the eight Schools that responded to our questionnaire reported having clear guidelines, incentives, and support for faculty who wish to develop online courses. For Schools that have moved to develop online courses, the central identified objectives were to enhance their revenue and prestige by reaching a wider student population. SCOF members were surprised to learn that improving on-campus learning via the content developed for online teaching did not appear to be a guiding objective.

SCOF requested a list of online courses from each School. Five Schools provided the requested information (i.e., Design, Law, PSOM, SP2, and Vet). From these, SP2 and PSOM are the Schools with considerable online presence at this time. Should SCOF continue their analysis of online learning, identifying best practices through dialogues with the online program directors at these Schools may be the most informative in terms of figuring out what works and what does not.

There was considerable variation among Schools in who teaches online, with some having only Standing Faculty develop and teach these courses and others having all (introductory) courses taught by Associated Faculty and Academic Support Staff.

SCOF welcomed two members of SCOA to learn from their investigations. Ryan Baker, Associate Professor of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership in the Graduate School of Education, shared with SCOF his findings about the effectiveness of online programs: do students learn equally well in person and online? SCOF learned that such studies of teaching effectiveness are difficult to carry out, little evidence on whether online instruction is superior or inferior to in-class instruction yet exists. Some universities heavily invest in data analytics to track student progress and provide support whenever students require it. To SCOF's knowledge, Penn does not yet engage in such initiatives, neither for on-campus nor for online instruction. Leaders of the online learning at Wharton are interested in developing these analytics for their online courses, however. SCOF believes that small interventions, such as having staff who regularly reach out to students to check on their progress can make big differences in outcomes. Anecdotally, professors who have developed online courses shared with SCOF that the preparation and experience gained from the development process has directly resulted in improvement to their in-person teaching quality. Given the lack of analytics, this finding is impossible to confirm beyond the anecdote.

Robert Ghrist, SCOA Chair and the Andrea Mitchell University Professor of Mathematics and Systems Engineering, and also joined us to discuss SCOA's recent findings with respect to online learning. (SCOA's 2018-19 report discusses these findings in depth: *https://provost.upenn.edu/sites/default/files/users/user131/SCOA%20Report%2018-19.pdf*) SCOF believes that properly incentivizing faculty is important for the development of high-quality content. Further, student evaluations in the context of online learning are more challenging to interpret because of the lack of standards for comparison and the unclear expectations for student outcomes.

SCOF recommends to Schools the engaging in online learning programs: (1) Develop and adhere to guidelines for payment, support, and intellectual property related to online courses; (2) Given the known effectiveness of blended classrooms, provide information and opportunities for instructors who may wish to develop and record short modules for their on-campus instruction; (3) Consider mechanisms that would provide the necessary time and support for faculty to update and improve their currently taught classes; and (4) Set up analytics to track teaching effectiveness and student learning.

3. Review voting privileges of the Practice Faculty (pursuant to Faculty Handbook Section II.B.3.7.), giving special consideration as to whether active Practice Faculty should be permitted to vote on matters related to the appointment or promotion of other Practice Faculty.

The Faculty Handbook explicitly prohibits Practice Faculty from voting on appointments and promotions. However, SCOF questions the justification for this prohibition. In many cases, faculty within the track have the best understanding of the expected contributions to School activities that should be made by their peers in the track, so it makes sense that they should be invited to provide input and to vote on track-related appointment and promotion matters.

Anecdotally, SCOF finds that some School and departmental practices already veer from the policy. We also point out that in 2016, the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences changed their definitions for Practice Professors in an attempt to create a longer term career option for people who would otherwise be hired into the Lecturer track. This change creates possible misunderstandings for cross-School discussions of the Practice Professor track and should be kept in mind as Schools consider future plans for growth and changes of the track.

SCOF members discussed more broadly the mechanisms for faculty decision-making processes within Schools and departments. Its concern was that allowing voting in principle does not guarantee meaningful participation in decision-making. SCOF distributed a survey to deans inquiring about hiring and promotion processes.

In a number of responding Schools, the hiring committee makes hiring decisions exclusively as opposed to the faculty as a whole, so a sim-

ple recommendation to allow Associated Faculty and Academic Support Staff to participate in decisions would not be meaningful if the protocol for assembling the hiring committee is not re-examined. Moreover, some Schools have relatively few faculty on non-tenure tracks, so it would be burdensome to those few who would always be always called upon to participate on hiring committees.

Several Schools also reported that voting on hiring and promotion decisions is not anonymous. This approach makes it very difficult for junior faculty and non-tenure-track faculty to express their opinions without fear of negative consequences. SCOF expresses serious concern about the practice of non-anonymous voting. Range voting may be an especially beneficial alternative for hiring decisions. (See https://www.rangevoting.org/WarrenSmithPages/homepage/rangevote.pdf.)

SCOF offers the following recommendations: (1) Deans together with the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty (OVPF) should revisit the Handbook's policy, especially as it pertains to prohibition of voting by Practice Professors on hiring and promotion decisions for other Practice Professors; (2) Deans together with OVPF should consider whether non-Standing Faculty should participate in the hiring and promotion of non-Standing Faculty with equal or lower rank; (3) SCOF should connect with the faculty governing bodies in Schools to discuss how those bodies might collect and share best practices for hiring and promotion across all Schools.

4. Consider any matters affecting faculty size, appointments, and tracks brought to the committee by individual Schools.

SCOF expects to receive one proposal of this nature during Summer 2020 and will consider it during the next academic year. Schools are reminded that proposals should be accompanied with data about the current state of the School and an outline of a strategic plan for development that justifies the proposed change.

Proposed charges for SCOF in 2020-2021:

1. Consider recommendations about how broader impacts connecting scholarship with society can be integrated and rewarded in promotion criteria. More broadly, collect best practices for setting up guidelines for evaluating faculty activities.

2. Given the absence of teaching analytics, investigate how teaching effectiveness and contributions are measured in different Schools to ensure the quality of programs and to identify differences in criteria across faculty tracks.

3. Develop best practices for decision making across Schools, including for hiring and promotion, with emphasis on inclusivity across ranks and tracks.

4. Establish connection with the faculty councils across Schools to coordinate the identification of pertinent pan-University issues and to collect reliable information.

SCOF Membership 2019-2020
William Beltran, Vet School
Eric Feldman, Law School
Lea Ann Matura, Nursing School
Ani Nenkova, SEAS/CIS, *Chair*
Susan Sauvé Meyer, SAS/Philosophy
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