<div align="center">**MEMORANDUM**</div>

**TO:**          **Faculty participants from focus groups**


**FROM:**        Vivian Lewis and Catherine Cerulli

**DATE:**        March 1, 2016

**RE:**          2015 Focus Groups on Faculty Promotion


SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

A series of focus groups with faculty highlights the need for greater transparency and clarity in communication of the expectations for promotion - both the standards (threshold) and criteria (types of things that "count"). Consistency in communication of the expectations around tenure appears to have been successful - based on both the Collaborative On Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) survey, the focus groups, and the respondent verification group. We believe the same strategy used for tenure discussions and decisions will be helpful in terms of faculty advancement beyond tenure. Issues related to faculty diversity were present, as well – most strikingly in comments about faculty service responsibilities and work-life balance. Serious consideration of creating ways to recognize substantive service contributions in the promotion process could promote both overall engagement within the institution's missions and faculty diversity. These considerations could also result in an improvement in overall morale and campus culture, one which supports those faculty who show an ongoing commitment to fostering the development of students and colleagues through mentorship and committee work. The following proposals have been discussed with the Dean's Committee on Administrative Practices and the Faculty Senate Executive Committee.

*We need a process to create greater clarity and criteria to recognize a broader range of contributions.*

> **1. Promotion review should become standard for faculty beyond the rank of associate professor.** In contrast to the well-defined and consistent process leading to tenure, faculty expressed that they have no idea where they stand on the trajectory to full professor. Feedback given during the annual review processes, if they happen at all, is not always clear; especially in some small departments that could be disproportionately populated by associate professors. Standard post-tenure review occurs in some settings. A commitment by every school ensures that review will occur, creating a process for faculty to reflect on their accomplishments and get feedback on long-term plans and priorities. For those who did have such a review, they indicated it was helpful.

> **2. Greater transparency is needed about the weight given to research/scholarship, teaching and service at the school level.** The faculty handbook provides tremendous flexibility in the relative weight given to scholarship, research and teaching in judging candidates for promotion to full professor. Transparency could create a process and structure whereby changes in expectations and policy interpretation could be phased in,

allowing time to faculty to adapt. The Deans have committed to providing a set of principles to facilitate greater clarity in interpreting the faculty handbook.

**3. Schools should explore ways to credit significant service contributions (department chair position or leadership in national or international professional organizations) in the promotion process.** Local, national and international leadership and administrative roles are critical to the success of the research and teaching missions of the university, as well as promoting our university beyond our walls. Furthermore, there were a substantial number of faculty who perceived gender (especially) and racial inequities in service obligations, with underrepresented faculty being called on to provider greater service responsibilities. While every faculty member has some responsibility for service, there should be opportunities for recognition of faculty who excel in this realm. Faculty understand the need for academic productivity, but feel that credit should be given to especially demanding service obligations. Templates to request review letters can be created to include language describing the types of significant service that would be valued. Credit given for service contributions varies by school and will be part of the principles that guide promotion decisions articulated by the Deans.

*Work-life balance policies and recommendations can advance faculty diversity.*

**4. Recognizing that all faculty have a need for work-life balance, required service obligations should occur during regular work hours. Schools and the Office of Faculty Development and Diversity should encourage networking opportunities for groups that may feel marginalized.** Service obligations are a source of particular tension for women faculty. Faculty who are torn between childcare obligations and required service (such as departmental faculty meetings) feel guilty or marginalized about these conflicts.

**5. "Family friendly policies" for stopping the tenure clock and modified duties need to be gender-neutral in their impact.** Many women faculty commented that these policies are unintentionally benefiting men who use the additional year to catch up on writing, whereas women are more likely to need the time for family responsibilities. This issue defies an institutional policy remedy. However, we recommend that the Deans and department chairs consider discussion of the issue.

**6. The University should consider offering an emergency referral service for childcare and eldercare.** While the demand for operating or contracting a service to provide in-home childcare and eldercare services is unknown, faculty (primarily women) continue to struggle with this issue. After the 2006 task force report, it was concluded that such services were too expensive; however the current demand and price may be different. We recommend that Human Resources work with faculty to examine the feasibility of offering new options to provide this benefit. We also suggest partnering with other institutions who are in need of this service. Lastly, can we partner with pre-existing programs for child care coverage to offset costs associated for those not-for-profits.

*Organizational support for faculty development should be enhanced.*

**7. Create faculty development programs to facilitate communication about promotion policies and procedures.** A robust set of programs for junior faculty and new leaders have supported professional development for junior faculty and new leaders while neglecting the midcareer faculty. We recommend a sustainable plan of formal communications about promotion (and to a lesser extent) tenure as part of both central and school-based faculty development efforts. Such communications could take the form of formal workshops and town hall meetings. Networking groups can also help combat isolation and could include recently promoted faculty from different schools, as well as recent department chairs and professors interested in informal and peer mentoring.

**8. Schools should consider new mentoring programs to support tenured faculty, including mentoring mid-career faculty.** Associate professors typically have fewer needs for formal mentoring to further advance their careers, but several institutions have found that formal support for faculty at this level yield improvements in morale and productivity. We recommend that schools consider ways to support tenured faculty. The annual review process should include an offer of mentoring by other senior faculty within a department or school. The Vice Provost for Faculty Development and Diversity should also work with the Faculty Development Network to create peer mentoring circles of faculty who are post tenure and wanting to know more about the possibility of promotion.

The findings from 2012-2013 COACHE survey and the 2015 Faculty Focus groups combine to make a compelling argument for these eight recommendations. Through improved processes around communication about promotion, greater attention to work-life balance issues and enhanced organizational support for professional development, we can achieve greater faculty satisfaction with the promotion process. We thank the Provost, deans and faculty who contributed their expertise, time and thoughts that produced these recommendations. The following sets forth the rationale, methodology and results that informed our report.

## BACKGROUND
The 2012-2013 Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (*COACHE*) survey showed that while the tenure process was quite clear at our institution, many aspects of the process for promotion were unclear to our faculty, especially as it relates to their personal status. We were interested in learning more about faculty perceptions so that more substantive faculty support could be created to ensure the advancement and retention of a diverse faculty. For example, the COACHE survey indicated that one area of concern included a lack of clarity around process, criteria, standards, and time frame for promotion. The 2012 survey indicated this was not the case with tenure, but spoke to promotion after tenure as an area of concern. The COACHE survey also found some variance between our White and Non-White faculty, as well as some gender variances in the categories of tenure reasonableness and promotions.

### *Rationale*
One of the grayest areas in academia is the promotion and tenure process. Once an individual is hired within a school or a department, there is often a major learning curve of understanding how promotion and tenure impacts him or her individually; their relations with other faculty members; the overall University community and lastly, within society. These four arenas are not

disparate: they are integrally related. From the literature, we understand when faculty are asked about the tenure and promotion process, the responses are not homogeneous. In fact, faculty from many institutions are often unclear about tenure and promotion processes. While scholarship, teaching and service are the main evaluation elements for promotion and tenure, implicitly it seems that tradition relies heavily on research and scholarship because the "prestige...is the major currency and concern" (Exum, Menges, Watkins, & Berglund, 1984).

Tenure and promotion resonates differently with each individual faculty member. Generally, everyone is defined by their personal values; thus subconsciously those values are imposed in any environment. Chairs and department deans must be acutely aware of the values they inadvertently impose on junior faculty seeking tenure and faculty with tenure seeking promotion. Because there are varying interpretations of what "tenure" status equates, often governing authorities see the promotion and tenure process as a hindrance to being able to control the number of tenured faculty (Hutcheson, 1997).

## METHODS

### Participants
Participant invitations went to 282 faculty, thus 62 faculty who were able to accept the invitation, which allowed for a 22% participation rate. We divided the sample into 8 Focus Groups (FG) ranging from 5-12 people. We hosted the group discussions between the 18th of February and the 12th of March in the year of 2015. Focus group discussions ranged from 60 to 90 minutes.

We organized the groups: pre-tenure and post-tenure to confirm the journey to tenure was understood. Thus, we clearly learned about how tenure is achieved, and examined areas of improvement in the promotion process after tenure. In selecting faculty for our focus groups, we were conscientious to have representation of women and faculty of color to ensure we could further investigate these variances in concerns expressed in the COACHE survey.

We invited this group because we believed that their lived experiences at this institution would allow them to provide information helpful in deepening our understanding of the experiences faculty have as they move through our tenure and promotion processes. Overall, our focus groups included 27 associate professors and 35 assistant professors. The faculty came from each of the 5 schools that participated in COACHE, and their fields' range from economics, finance, and engineering, to nursing and music and education.

### Data Collection
Focus group facilitators prepared list of prompts to elicit faculties' experiences with promotion and tenure, but encouraged the participants to discuss anything they believed relevant.

The prompts for the Assistant Professors included, but were not limited to:
   A. Describe the process for going through tenure in your department or school.
   B. How would you describe the clarity of tenure criteria in your department or school?
   C. How were the expectations of tenure made clear to you and did you find them to be reasonable?

The prompts for the Associate Professors included:
- How would you describe the departmental culture around the promotion process in your department/school?
- How would you describe the clarity and reasonableness of the expectations for promotion to full professor?
- How do you receive feedback about the possibility of promotion?

In each of our focus groups, Vivian Lewis, Catherine Cerulli, or Carol Shuherk served as the main moderators; who probed for more information; asked for clarifications; and encouraged participant interaction. We audiotaped the focus group discussions and transcribed them verbatim. Each focus group also included a university staff member taking detailed notes.

We analyzed the transcripts using Pope's framework analysis (Pope, Ziebland, & Mays, 2000). The framework used was the Socio-ecological Model, adapted for purposes of faculty nested within the context of their private lives, personal relationships, and place on a university campus (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Following Pope's framework analysis, the team modified the model for academic environments and read and coded the transcripts using this framework. When analyzing our findings with this framework, it became apparent that the four domains of the Socio-Ecological Model, when applied to the promotion and tenure process, was a fit as faculty members have: personal characteristics and dynamics they bring to their career from their personal lived experience; their interpersonal relationships; the local campus and departmental environments, as well as the discipline specific benchmarks and universal principles of academia, including funding. We also held a respondent verification session where 20 of the participating faculty responded to preliminary findings and draft recommendations.

## FINDINGS

**Finding 1: Overall process of achieving tenure**
A. Most faculty who participated in the focus groups were satisfied with their tenure experiences. Generally, faculty understood the criteria. Faculty participants were clear about the standards and thresholds, and they found communication of expectations to be clear.  Generally, faculty also found their experience with the tenure process to be fair.

B. However, participants expressed that discipline and department requirements are sometimes elusive. In particular, the way in which teaching is assessed, and the value placed on one's efforts towards teaching and service was unclear.  (See recommendation 2 and 3)

> **Participant Quote** – *"My experience of the process for going up for tenure there was a lot of discussion around it, there were even group meetings to kind of lay out the process and opportunities to ask questions. We initially had those ... once a semester.  Certainly after a couple of years, once a year.... Usually it was part of a group again fairly consistently for those first three years." (FG3)*

**Finding 2: Overall process of promotion to full professor**

All faculty need to actually *know* what is expected of them, the role that they themselves play in achieving their success, and how leadership can guide and inform their journeys to full professor. (See recommendations 1, 2 and 7)

> **Participant Quote –** *"So the process for tenure is pretty clear. After that not so much. You kind of fall into a big black hole." (FG1)*

> **Participant Quote –** *"So from the direction with the senior faculty in my department I understand that I should devote 90% of my effort into research and then devote 90% of the rest of the effort (laughter) into teaching and then the rest of that 1% into service." (FG4)*

A. Written policies are vague and departmental lore is rich. Participants noted that there is a need for greater communication around promotion at the school level:

> **Participant Quote –** *"I don't think there is a timeline probably in most faculty handbooks. I know in ours there is a very strict timeline about promotion without tenure and then tenure but nothing for after five years after tenure then you should go up for review or anything" (FG6)*

> **Participant Quote –** *"I see more the problem ... with inconsistency...people have been saying that there's a lot of improvising ... making the rules along the way and different people get different advice from the top, from the very top on Mondays then they get on Thursdays for no good reason." (FG3)*

B. The role of outside offers was also a theme, and participants believe seeking and vetting jobs they may have no intent on taking seemed inappropriate – a waste of resources and time for themselves as well as the universities and colleges they were meeting with. This creates a culture of "we can't judge our own" and lack of clarity around the details of individual's career stories. (See recommendations 2 and 7)

> **Participant Quote –** *"So in the fall I'm gonna submit my stuff ... But the thing is so where to start? What does it start with? Do I have to get all this tons of stuff like I did for my tenure or is something more streamlined? ... I just wanted to find out but then the handbook and stuff does not clearly indicate what are the things. We need all the documents like surveys and research and teaching and all that stuff. ...But I really want this to be a little bit more streamlined because if they know me they don't already got all of the external letters for my tenure and all this stuff so why do we have to kind of replicate it that wasting time doing all this stuff. ... but still I haven't received the clear directions in terms of where to start." (FG2)*

> **Participant Quote –** *"... To me it looks kind of like a vague hassle that I gotta put this together it's all vague and I really don't want to put myself out there. I have to put myself out there in so many other places. I'm tired...." (FG3)*

**Finding 3: Criteria for promotion lack transparency**.
A. There is a balance between juggling the criteria and expectations, with transparency and enough flexibility to understand each person's road to promotion varies.

B. Relationships result in how much, and what information, one knows going up for full professor. Unfortunately, sometimes the information is conflicting. (See recommendations 7 and 8 and Finding 2A)

> **Participant Quote** – *"So that always sort of stays a mystery to some degree and I think it's supposed to be our chair and our dean who fill us in along the way, and I felt like I was filled in as on my way to tenure. But I haven't had one conversation yet about full yet and I have had questions… like okay this isn't jibing with my understanding of what I my conversations with other institutions, my colleagues from other universities, like okay why is this person getting. That doesn't meet a mark that I would've assumed had to be made."* (FG6)

**Finding 4: The benefits of promotion are not always clear**
A. Some participants who are uncertain about seeking promotion and believe that it should carry explicit benefits, such as more money, protected time, etc. (See recommendations 7 and 8)

> **Participant Quote** – *"...there [used to be] this framework that once you got tenure moving up to full was really just a choice. Right, so if you desired it then you figured out what you needed to do in order to present materials for that role, for that purpose. Now... I'm more curious about what's required whether I choose to do it or not I would like to know what's expected in order to make that decision about the timing.... I've known people who went through their entire careers as associates and were quite happy with it, they spent more time with their family, they vacation, you know they had a good old time."* (FG3)

> **Participant Quote** – *"I'm not sure what the benefits are [of promotion] for people really not progressing through but for me when I moved to tenure associate professor my service load just went boom and it was over. Anything that's not funded is taken out."* (FG3)

B. Gender-based differences in the promotion process are not institutionally sanctioned or endorsed, but are the result of gender schema that faculty walked in the door with – part of their lived experience. (See recommendations 4, 5, and 6 and Finding 2B)

> **Participant Quote** – *"So if the university is saying … all three of them are important for tenure: service, teaching and research. And women tend to be more service oriented and more coded as teachers culturally…. But men hear the same message and think I need to do my research, I know research is the only thing that counts. So already there is a gender difference …if … nothing else counts you should tell that to faculty directly and women faculty should hear it even more. Because men and women are going to integrate those messages differently."* (FG2)

**Participant Quote** – *"So [our] faculty meetings are from 4:30 to 6:00.... Do I go to my chair and say sorry this faculty meeting that you've had running for the last 20 years, would you just mind moving it for me? Or do I suck it up and find a babysitter who can pick my kid up from daycare and take him home because I can't do it before 4:30, but ... I shouldn't even have to think about it. They should not have non-family friendly anything in place.... I have no idea what to do. I'm probably just gonna suck it up and figure [it] out and pay some extra money and have a huge nightmare because I don't want to be the one who is drawing attention to myself." (FG2)*

**Finding 5: Work-life balance**
A. Age, gender and career are often discussed in the context of relationships and parenting duties, participants indicated there is less discussion about what it means to be a faculty member who may be single and childless during an important stage in their career. They are disproportionally given responsibilities that might include teaching courses later in the day; attending meetings or events after faculty with family have left for the day, etc. (See recommendations 4 and 6)

> ***Participant Quote** – "... I'm like oh, okay well but I do have a life and it's a complicated one. Just complicated in different ways but the process just doesn't seem set up to recognize that versus if you have a kid." (FG4)*

B. Faculty of color expressed struggles with a sense of isolation; not only in the workplace, but also outside of work. (See recommendations 4 and 7).

> **Participant Quote** – *"There just seems to be a deafening silence around the unique stresses experienced by people who are single with no children who moved to this isolated space with no supports or social networks.... And there just doesn't seem to be any consideration around that experience. " (FG4)*

**Finding 6: Mentoring for mid-career faculty is lacking**
There was consensus that a good mentor or sponsor will help a candidate understand what is expected, when certain milestones need to be met, and how the process for outside evaluators works. (See recommendations 7 and 8)

> **Participant Quote** – *"I think in my department because the department is quite small if we have any concern we can just talk to people, the department chair, all my senior colleagues and then maybe I can get some answers there. But I think just because the department is small, people are friendly to each other." (FG3)*

> **Participant Quote** – *"Every May and [they] invite a conversation if you want. And I think it's a little more heavy handed invitation when you're on the other side of the bar because sure s/he wants you to be successful and s/he wants to [get tenured] so I think there is good mentorship to associate. I'm a little clueless about what it takes to feel like full. I get most of my information from other colleagues. At least I think the most shaping ideas I have about what it takes to be full come from other institutions." (FG6)*

**Finding 7: Impact of leadership**
Participants shared that having changes in leadership effects promotion given different leadership styles, personalities and relationships. (See recommendation 2)

> **Participant Quote –** *"Deans might change, chairs change and so I'm looking for what are the institutional expectations and what are those within the field as well. And so I actually will ask colleagues in my field outside of the university as well as just sort of checking in with those within the university in terms of what they understand the expectations to be." (FG3)*

**Finding 8: Societal context and technological advances**
Participants acknowledged that changing national landscapes impact promotion processes. The current national funding climate for research has an impact at the communal level on how institutions that have traditionally relied on grant funding as a metric of success now need to reexamine this. Technological advances have meant for rapid dissemination of research findings, which effects disciplinary academic stature.

> **Participant Quote –** *"So I can say something about the factors that I feel have made it difficult for me. I think there are factors that are external to the university which are dependent on changes in the publishing world that have happened… changes with technology and that's kind of affected the way we work with the publication system which our reputations depend on." (FG1)*

**Conclusion**
Achieving greater transparency and clarity in communication around promotion is a culture change and a process. We have presented these findings and recommendations to the *Dean's Committee on Administrative Practice,* and with support from the President and Provost, will begin to partner with Deans, Faculty Senate, and Human Resources to begin to implement these recommendations in 2016. The University's participation in the *Diversity Engagement Survey* will also allow us to continue to monitor progress on campus climate and engagement, and acquire information from our broader population about our capacity for diversity and inclusion and other areas we might have opportunities for improvement.

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