Annual Report 2020-2021

Professional Standards Committee (PSC)

Submitted to the Faculty Senate & Office of the Provost

April 17, 2021 (minor corrections 6/10/21)

Members

Daisy Benson (UVM Libraries)
Carolyn Bonifield (Grossman School of Business)
Caroline Beers (College of Arts & Sciences) (July 2020 - January 2021)
Heather Darby (College of Agriculture & Life Sciences)
Evan Eyler (Larner College of Medicine)
Jason Garbarino (College of Nursing and Health Sciences)
Michael F. Giangreco, Chair (College of Education and Social Services)
Jeffrey Marshall (College of Engineering & Mathematical Sciences)
Cristina Mazzoni (College of Arts and Sciences) (February 2021 - June 2021)
Matthew Siket (Larner College of Medicine)
Alan Steinweis (College of Arts & Sciences)
Jason Stockwell (Rubenstein School of Environment & Natural Resources)

Summary of Primary Activities

Sabbatical Reviews

During the 2020-2021 academic term the PSC reviewed a total of 49 sabbatical applications.

Number of Sabbatical Applications Reviewed by Academic Unit:

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS), n=4

College of Arts & Sciences (CAS), n=29

College of Engineering and Mathematical Sciences (CEMS), n=2

College of Education & Social Services (CESS), n=4

College of Nursing and Health Sciences (CNHS), n=1

Grossman School of Business (GSB), n=4

Larner College of Medicine (LCOM), n=0

Rubenstein School of Environmental and Natural Resources (RSENR), n=4

UVM Libraries (LIB), n=1

Total Sabbaticals Reviewed, N=49

Reappointment, Tenure & Promotion Reviews (RPT)
During the 2020-2021 academic term the PSC conducted 86 RPT reviews: (a) 81 RPT full dossiers reviews, and (b) 5 *Expedited Tenure Reviews for Administrators* to date.

College/ School & N of Dossiers*	2nd Reappoint-ment @ Assistant Professor Tenure Track	Promotion Senior Lecturer	Promotion Associate Professor Non-Tenure Track *(e.g., **C**linical **R**esearch, **Ed**ucation, **L**ibraries, **Ext**ension)*	Promotion Associate Professor & Tenure *(includes tenure only at rank)*	Promotion Full Professor Non-Tenure Track *(e.g., **C**linical, **R**esearch, **Ed**ucation **L**ibraries, **Ext**ension)*	Promotion Full Professor Tenure Track *(includes tenure only at rank and tenure with promotion to full)*
CALS n=3	0	0	0	2	1 (Ext)	0
CAS n=13	0	6	0	3	0	4
CESS n=6	0	3	0	3	0	0
CEMS n=10	4	3	0	3	0	0
CNHS n=7	4	0	2 (C)	1	0	0
GSB n=0	0	0	0	0	0	0
LCOM n=39	4	0	21 (C) 2 (R) 2 (Ed)	3	4 (C)	3
LIB n=1	0	0	1 (L)	0	0	0
RSENR n=2	0	1	1 (Ext)	0	0	0
Totals N = 81	**12**	**13**	**29**	**15**	**5**	**7**

*The data in this table reflect the highest action taken on the dossier; in some cases, the PSC voted on more than one of the tabled categories above on the same person (e.g., second reappointment and promotion to Associate Professor with tenure).

The Faculty Senate's *Expedited Tenure Review* (pre-hire) process was used to review four cases:
CNHS (n=4) Dean Finalists; LCOM (n=1), Director of the Vermont Cancer Center & Chief of Oncology & Hematology

Review of PSC Operating Procedures

In April 2021 the PSC reviewed its operating procedures and made a series minor edits to the document (e.g., added language about meeting through videoconferencing). The most recent version submitted to the Faculty Senate remains posted on the PSC web page.

Summary of Persistent Issues Related to the Sabbatical and RPT Submissions

Given its role reviewing sabbatical and RPT (Reappointment, Promotion, Tenure) dossiers from across the university, the PSC is in a unique position to notice patterns, trends, and issues that may be helpful for faculty, Chairs, Deans, and the Provost to consider for future submissions. In this section of our report, we identify a series of issues we think would be helpful to address. Some of these issues are persistent and have been raised in previous annual reports.

Sabbatical Issues

Persistent issues:
1. **Completeness & Quality of Submissions**
   The completeness and quality of submissions vary substantially
   a. We encourage faculty and their colleges/schools to double-check applications for technical accuracy and completeness (e.g., cover page accuracy and completeness, URL links, missing bookmarks, missing letters, missing votes, missing signatures, word count limits) prior to submission. Each year, some applications are returned to units for correction or to acquire missing elements; this can delay the review process. Other applications, not returned, are easier or more difficult for reviewers to navigate based on factors such as whether the dossier pdf file is bookmarked.

   b. Faculty Standards Committee (FSC) and Dean letters should all include dates -- some were undated. When presented out of context, or in varying sequences, it can be confusing to tell if they are current or past letters.

   c. If a sabbatical application includes collaboration with partner institutions or organizations, including letters of invitation is essential. The letters verify access and anticipated collaboration to confirm the proposed activities can be pursued and can reasonably be completed. Some sabbaticals continue to include plans for such collaboration without verifying letters or emails. If the plan includes travel to a foreign country, it is helpful for applicants to establish their language access (e.g., fluent in the dominant language, availability of translators), if required.

   d. Sabbaticals that include data collection, including from human subjects, should acknowledge the need for protections of human subjects/Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and report on the status of the IRB approval (e.g., plan/date for submission). An explicit IRB item may need to be added in the sabbatical form.

e. Since sabbaticals are reviewed by people outside the applicant's own field or sub-field, it is helpful to limit excessive disciplinary-specific language and acronyms likely to be unknown by reviewers. When technical language is deemed essential, a short explanation in lay language is appreciated and the first occurrence of acronyms should be accompanied with the full corresponding text.

2. **Specificity of Activities, Timelines, & Extension Beyond Standard Workload**
   a. The PSC continues to note substantial variability among sabbatical submissions, especially pertaining to the level of specificity with which activities to be completed during the sabbatical are described. Some sabbatical applications include a strong rationale, yet sometimes lack the level of specificity that would allow the reader to clearly understand what the faculty member actually will be doing during the sabbatical period. With some regularity, we encounter the activity described in a broad way, such as, *"I plan to write a book"*. In order to assess the sabbatical plan, it is helpful to understand the entry point (i.e., work already been completed, table of contents), proposed activities (e.g., archival research, other data collection, document analysis, reading related sources, outlining chapters, number of draft chapters expected per month, editing, dissemination plan), and the corresponding timeline for reaching that ultimate goal (e.g., full or partial draft of a book). The PSC considers the timeline requirement inadequate when it states something like: *"Work described above will be completed by the end of the sabbatical leave"*. A timeline that lists activities to be completed during each month of the sabbatical period may be a reasonable time interval to describe activities. As outlined in the sabbatical elements listed in the CBA (Collective Bargaining Agreement), the sabbatical application needs to include specific activities with projected timelines.

   b. The PSC encourages sabbatical applicants to be as explicit as possible about how their sabbatical plan extends beyond what they might typically be expected to complete on their standard workload devoted to scholarship and/or creative activity. For example, if someone indicates they plan to complete an article they have been working on and write one additional paper, one might reasonably wonder why these activities necessitate a sabbatical. It is most helpful when applicants explain how the sabbatical time allows them a unique opportunity to engage in activities that would otherwise not be available to them given a typical slate of duties (e.g., teaching, advising, committee work).

3. **Relationship between Funding Cycles and Sabbatical Submissions**
   Due to the nature of funding cycles and notification dates, some faculty members who are pursuing external funding for sabbatical related activities (e.g., foreign or domestic travel) do not know the status of potential funding before submitting the sabbatical application. Since the plan may be dependent on the funding, faculty members often include a Plan A (a grand plan based on receipt of desired funding) and a Plan B (a scaled-back or completely different plan if funding is not forthcoming). This poses a challenge in the review process because some sabbatical applications almost universally are built around Plan A, with Plan B often offered as a brief afterthought (e.g., *"I have an extensive plan to travel overseas to do X, Y, Z, and*

if I don't get funded, I plan to stay home and write a couple of articles."). We suggest that the Plans for A and B be reversed. By this we mean that the sabbatical application's primary **Plan A should be what the faculty member can commit to doing at the time of submission** and the Plan B should be considered value-added (e.g., *"... and if I receive the funding for which I applied or am applying, I will be able to do these additional or different activities..."*). If accurate, it can be helpful when an applicant states something like: *"work is not dependent on the external funding"*. If presented this way the proposal can be evaluated on the known, rather than the unknown or aspirational.

4. **Mentoring**
It is unclear to the PSC whether some applicants are receiving sufficient mentoring, guidance, and feedback prior to submission, especially first-time applicants. When deficiencies are perceived during the review process, they are most frequently issues that could have been reasonably addressed had the applicant received feedback earlier, such as from the Chair. Sometimes faculty members get caught in Chair transitions that result in gaps in mentoring or support. Given the timing for faculty submissions of sabbaticals at the beginning of September, it seems desirable for substantive sabbatical planning to be well underway during the previous spring, since summer can be a challenging time for faculty and Chairs to connect given both off-contract times and mismatch in timing of summer plans.

Reappointment, Promotion, Tenure (RTP) Issues

1. **Overall Organization**
The PSC encourages all units to continue to self-assess and improve their consistent organization and bookmarking of dossiers to make them easier to navigate (e.g., all supporting materials after basic dossier entries; external reviewer CVs positioned in sequence after all letters rather than after each letter; use accessible/searchable pdf options by using the OCR-optical character recognition feature in Abode Acrobat; check all links to ensure they work).

We also encourage all faculty to adhere to the suggested word limits in the various sections and use their writing skills to make their strongest case most succinctly. Some dossiers reviewed were in excess of 500 pages. Granted some of that length is due to unavoidable components (e.g., long CVs of multiple external reviewers). We suggest that when soliciting external letters with a corresponding CV that Chairs explicitly request a short-version CV (e.g., 4 pages, akin to an NIH-style bio sketch) that clearly establishes the reviewer as a credible external reviewer.

At this point in time, it appears all units, with the exception of LCOM, now are using the same 5-point Likert-scale with the same anchoring/directionality (i.e., 5 is the most favorable option) when collecting course evaluation data from students. We encourage LCOM to consider adopting the same scale, with the understanding that the content of the evaluation statements can be individualized by department.

2. **Common Definitions**
The PSC encourages the development of university-wide common definitions of workload categories (e.g., teaching/advising, scholarship, service, administration, clinical). Among the most common areas of confusion are the overlapping and different use of the terms: service, clinical, and administration.

The PSC also encourages the development of university-wide common definitions for recording RPT voting (i.e., Yes, No, Absent, Recuse, Abstain). A common inconsistency leading to potential confusion relates to the differences between terms: abstain, recuse and conflict. The PSC has offered proposed definitions of these terms in our operating procedures.

At all voting levels (i.e., department, FSC, PSC) it is essential for there to be a brief rationale for votes recorded as no, abstain, or recuse, so they are interpretable. Especially, pertaining to "No" votes, the PSC routinely puts little to no weight on such votes unless they are accompanied by some credible rationale.

3. **Work Load Distribution by Chair**
The PSC finds boiler plate language about workload from some Chairs (e.g., 40:40:20), without specifics about how many courses are actually taught along with other duties. The PSC recognizes workload distributions may differ from year to year during the review period. While we understand the workload percentages are rough estimates, and so are not seeking excessive detail, it is helpful to have as accurate an estimate as possible of an individual's workload distribution in order to assess aspects such as scholarship output. For example, one might expect different output for someone who is teaching five courses per year rather than two, or how taking on significant administrative roles (e.g., Department Chair) might impact time for scholarship.

The reason we request understanding the average number of courses taught with the estimates of workload percentages is because how courses are counted varies across the university. For example, in some colleges 40% for teaching equals five courses, in others it equals four courses -- this is further obscured when boiler plate language reflecting the default starting point is used because it doesn't offer information about releases or shifted roles. So, two faculty in the same department can be listed as having 40% devoted to teaching, where one person is teaching five classes a year and the other is teaching two classes a year. For the individual with fewer courses, understanding how that time has been redistributed is important to reviewing the dossier fairly (e.g., junior faculty releases with no additional responsibilities are different than a shift to externally-funded research activities or added administrative duties).

Since we reference faculty performance to workload, the percentage amounts of matter. For example, if a clinical faculty member has 5% of their workload devoted to scholarship the expectations for scholarship production are correspondingly modest. Whereas, a clinical faculty with 35-40% of their workload directed to

scholarship may be expected to have a more substantial output comparable to a tenure-track faculty member with a similar 35-40% workload directed to scholarship. If that percentage for the clinical faculty member is substantially inaccurate (overestimated) is could have an adverse impact of their review.

During this year of COVID-19, many faculty members were engaged in duties that may not have aligned as closely with their stated workload as might have been the case during more typical years. When a faculty member and/or Chair recognizes that a faculty member's actual duties are not aligned with their recorded workload percentages, changes in the workload should be documented so they are in alignment. For example, if during this pandemic year an LCOM faculty member on the Clinical pathway had 30% designated for scholarship, but in reality, was asked to use that time for clinical service because of the unforeseen community health needs, minimally this should be noted in the dossier and/or the workload adjusted accordingly. The accurate alignment between estimated workload percentages and expected duties should be always be pursued, regardless of circumstances.

In the recent past the PSC had requested that LCOM departments consider putting accurate estimates of workload percentages on the first page of all dossiers with estimates of percent of effort by category: (a) Clinical (e.g., serving patients), (b) Teaching and Advising, (c) Scholarship (e.g., publications, grants, presentations), (d) Service (e.g., committee work at various levels within the university, service to the profession), and (e) administration (e.g., Directing a Center or Clinic, Chairing a Department, Coordinating a Program). We have noted and appreciated substantial responsiveness to this suggestion in dossiers submitted in 2021. That said, there continues to substantial variability across departments.

4. **External Letters**
   The PSC notes continued issues pertaining to "arm's length" external letters for tenure and promotion consideration. While we have noted improvement over time, some are still coming through that are clearly not at arm's length or they flirt with the appearance of favorable bias. Ensuring arm's length letters is a shared responsibility between the faculty member and the Chair. The PSC encourages departments to review their processes used to ensure arm's length external letters.

   Some received letters, while they may technically be at arm's length, flirt with the appearance of favorable bias. Past submissions have included statements such as, "I am a friend of his mentor", or "We are from the same academic lineage, but not overlapping". Soliciting letter writers who are closely connected in such ways may present the appearance of selection for benefit based on the writer's loyalties to mentors or the faculty member's graduate program. Given the availability of potential reviewers, the PSC would discourage solicitation of letters from people with academic kinship relationships. We understand that there are small, highly specialized, fields of research in which it may be difficult to avoid soliciting letters from evaluators who have not previously intersected professionally with the candidate, or who do not belong to the same academic network.

Credibility of arm's length letters are enhanced when the letters come from reviewers who: (a) work at an institution of higher education at least comparable to UVM (R1, R2) or other relevant organization, (b) have attained the rank or a higher rank as the promotion being sought, (c) have submitted a CV that reflects a substantial body of work that establishes them as an appropriate reviewer for a specific candidate, and (d) have no real or perceived bias related to the applicant.

Some dossiers include laudatory letters from UVM colleagues where the purpose is unclear and may be unnecessary. While some UVM-internal letters from colleagues, such as letters documenting a teaching observation or from the Chair of department where a faculty holds a joint appointment are relevant, simply adding testimonial letters is of questionable value. We encourage Chairs to work with faculty to scrutinize whether any letters from UVM colleagues should be included and to limit inclusion of only those letters that a have specific and clear purpose.

5. **Nature of Contributions to Scholarship**
Many dossiers continue to omit the applicant's specific contribution to co-authored scholarship, especially when they are farther down the list of multiple authors. It is helpful to know the approximate percentage of contribution and the nature of the contribution. Given differences among disciplines, there needs to be clarity on the role as first author. When does the last author simply reflect the smallest contribution, and when does last author represent a prominent position (e.g., in LCOM sometimes the last author is the leader of the lab, the individual who conceptualized the study or it is their original line of research)? The PSC seeks to understand the approximate percent of contribution and nature of contribution. Namely, what did the faculty member actually do with regard to a particular publication (e.g., conceptualize the study, develop the research plan, collect data, analyze data, write all or part of the initial draft, edit)?

Colleges/Schools, Departments, and Chairs are encouraged to continue to refine the clarity of expectations for scholarship depending on both the percentage of workload devoted to scholarship as well as the pathway. For example, is the volume and type of acceptable scholarship the same or different for a Clinical or Extension faculty member compared to someone on the Research or Tenure track?

6. **Tenure Review for Incoming Administrators with Faculty Appointments**
As a relatively new policy (passed by the Faculty Senate in November 2018), the *Tenure Review for Incoming Administrators with Faculty Appointments*, seemingly is not always on the radar of the search committees, especially in terms of the timing of the process. This expedited review is meant to be conducted pre-hire, typically initiated at the point when an individual has been identified as a finalist and completed before a final decision is made to hire an individual. This is often a short window of time, and so requires pre-planning with highly ranked candidates to provide them with advance notice that if they are selected as a finalist, they will need to undergo this process if they are seeking tenure with their appointment. This

small time window also is why the expedited process has a five workday turnaround that occurs simultaneously with concurrent tenure (only) review and voting by the proposed home department, corresponding college/school Faculty Standards Committee, and the Faculty Senate's Professional Standards Committee. Since the submission is purposely designed to be less time consuming and burdensome for prospective candidates, it does not follow the full "green sheets" paperwork, but rather relies on: (a) a memo written by the search Chair summarizing eligibility for an expedited review and credentials/qualifications for tenure, (b) a candidate's CV, (c) evidence of teaching effectiveness, and (d) reference letters (if already available as part of the search process) or chair summary of information from referees pertaining to suitability for tenured position. During the semester-long discussion leading to the vote to approve this new policy, one of the most keenly debated components was evidence of teaching effectiveness, as faculty in home department expressed concerns about a hired applicants' potentially relinquishing their administrative roles at some future time and joining the departmental faculty -- they sought evidence of teaching credentials. Search committees are encouraged to make highly ranked candidates aware of the expedited process and especially the requirement for evidence of teaching effectiveness as this is not always clearly discernable with the CV. A statement of teaching effectiveness might be a page or two describing: (a) the candidate's teaching history (e.g., number and types of classes taught over time), (b) teaching formats (e.g., in-person, hybrid, online, large enrollment, field supervision), (c) a summary of course evaluation data (e.g., course summary metrics with scale included), (d) teaching awards, or (e) other evidence that the candidate has been a successful teacher at a tenurable level. While including a brief statement about teaching philosophy is welcome, the emphasis here should be on what the individual has taught and teaching effectiveness. For some administrative positions, external search firms are utilized. In such cases, it is essential that the primary UVM liaison make the search firm aware of these expedited tenure review requirements at appropriate times in the search process so as to allow the search/hire process to proceed smoothly while maintaining the integrity of the expedited tenure process (pre-hire, not a post-hire rubber stamp) as envisioned by the Faculty Senate.

Gratitude for the Work

Being on the PSC involves a significant investment of time and effort. One of the most common sentiments expressed by PSC members to each other is that the time and effort are worthwhile. Individually and collectively we experience gratitude for the opportunity to review the breadth and depth of work being produced at UVM. Members of the PSC approach each dossier with great respect for the work of our UVM colleagues and take pride in carefully and independently reviewing each dossier. During the entire 2020-2021 academic term this meant meeting virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Being a PSC member offers a unique opportunity to glimpse into fields of study we would typically not encounter otherwise. It is a constant learning experience and contributes to our sense that UVM is a special place, with so many talented people doing so much amazing work!