

September 22nd, 2014

College of Forestry Research Support Faculty meeting

(Lunch meeting for all RSF)

Present: Heather Roberts, Matt Konkler, Becky Fasth, Michelle Day, Gabriella Ritokova, Thom Whittier, Scott Kolpak, Keith Olsen, Andrew Bluhm, Jason O'Brien, Cathleen Ma, Matt Gregory, Milo Clauson, Doug Mainwaring

Agenda

- Present the Faculty Senate's response to recommendations for improvements for research faculty from the 2013 OSU-AAUP non-tenure-track faculty
- Discuss issues affecting RSF community to help the committee focus our efforts appropriately
- Request that participants fill out a forthcoming survey on RSF responsibilities to assist the committee with accomplishing several initiatives to improve working conditions and career advancement for RSF

Faculty Senate response to OSU-AAUP university-wide survey of Non-Tenure Track Faculty

In Spring of 2013, OSU-AAUP/Faculty Senate conducted a survey of over 1200 Non-Tenure-Track (Professional, Research and Instructional) Faculty. The results show a lack of job stability and opportunities for advancement as the main concerns of NTT faculty. A summary of recommendations for NTT research faculty can be found in the [April 14, 2014 RSF meeting notes](#).

Faculty Senate actions

- Faculty Status Committee and Faculty Economic Welfare and Retirement Committee will require a NTT faculty co-chair and be composed of ~50% NTT
- Faculty Economic Welfare and Retirement Committee will examine models for bridge funding to cover gaps
- P&T Committee will develop less burdensome promotion guidelines for FRAs and Instructors
- Provost office will provide an annual report regarding salaries (and increases) of research faculty
- Faculty Senate has encouraged the Research Office to rejuvenate a committee to address NTT issues (further discussions will take place this Fall)

The RSF committee will continue to track changes in response to the survey recommendations and explore possibilities for providing further input and collaboration.

Issues affecting RSF community

- Adding/changing job duties (working beyond PD or in excess of appointment)
- Short notice for reductions in FTE and nonrenewal of contract
- Job security (bridging funds, progressive career paths)
- Salary/benefits (parity, increases built into grants)
- Opportunities for advancement
- Support for professional development
- Work climate (respect from other faculty and admins, inclusion in decision making)

Discussion

- We discussed the obstacles to hiring from within and the need to have a mechanism to hire internally so PIs could search internally first and advertise externally only when needed. Such a mechanism would be beneficial not only to RSF, but also to PIs and it would reduce the burden on administrative personnel due to the cumbersome hiring process.
- There is not currently any way to hire someone from outside the university as a Senior FRA, regardless of their outside experience.
- There was a suggestion for stepwise increases for FRAs instead of just two promotion levels.
- Salary increases are tricky since some PIs can't or don't want to pay more so there's the possibility of an increase leading to non-renewal of contract.
- If we don't have a mechanism for professional training we can only work more hours to get the training we need to advance our careers.
- Several people mentioned that working outside of their PD is desirable as a form of job security, so it's not necessarily seen as negative. However, it can become negative when expanding job duties result in needing to work in excess of appointment in order to get everything done.

The committee appreciates the feedback we received during the discussion and we will keep these comments in mind as we work with administrators to address issues affecting RSF.

Survey (forthcoming) on RSF responsibilities

We will be sending out a short survey soon to gather information on RSF responsibilities. We will use the information to prepare a presentation to FEC on the depth and breadth of RSF responsibilities, to make sure all administrators are aware of how RSF contribute to the success of CoF. This information will also be useful to our committee as we develop a proposal for a professional development fund and work to expand our orientation and mentoring programs.

Addendum: Selected comments from 2013 NTT survey

The full survey results are available here:

<http://oregonstate.edu/senate/agen/2014/0313/NTT%20Survey.pdf>

Job security

I would create a talent pool where research faculty could land in between allocations of soft money, getting paid at their most recent pay rate for 3-6 months from a College-level fund. It would create a bridge increasing job security and an opportunity for similar faculty/programs to pick up talented locals rather than recruiting from outside the University system when they have openings. We lose talented people every year because they can't stand the job security situation. **A world-class research institution needs mid-level managers, mentors, and research coordinators who choose to make it their career.**

Professional advancement

Terms like "contingent" contribute to the myth that NTT faculty are temporary workers without long-term commitment to the institution. However, as Figure 18 shows, more than half of all NTT have been in their position over five years (that is the case for 63% of professional faculty, 54% of research faculty and 51% of instructors). significant numbers of all categories of NTT faculty have served a decade or more at OSU. **Thus, NTT faculty, while treated as part of a flexible workforce, in fact often have deeper ties with the institution built over years of service: while they are peripheral to OSU, OSU is at the center of their professional lives.**

1) Another promotion level for Faculty Research Assistants (currently there is only one step up [*note: now there are two steps*]). 2) Implementation of a campus-wide "FTE Marketplace" to alert PI's with short-term work needs to the availability of Research Faculty who are working less than full time. 3) A competitive funding pool for travel to conferences or professional development opportunities related to our professions.

The conditions research faculty work under at OSU vary. If research associates are to be treated as postdocs or on a track towards a research professor position career development must be considered by the university much more seriously. If they are to be treated as technicians, then a mechanism for them to be moved to more permanent positions with more consistent salary scales is necessary.

Salary

- Research faculty compensation needs to be reviewed across departments/units. There is a huge disparity in salary from one research faculty to another. Research faculty serve an important role in the success of their tenure-tracked supervisors via support for publication and instruction. Compensation needs to better reflect this dependency
- I would allow research faculty to give themselves salary raises as their grants allow.
- Make step increases in salary for qualified employees routine.
- Provide institutional support to cover gaps between grants.

Work climate: collegiality/inclusiveness

In open-ended comments, NTT research faculty and instructors often express a sense of disenfranchisement, feeling "invited, but not really welcome"

Respect

Change the dominant culture of tenure-track that relegates us to second class citizenship. I do not feel a part of the OSU community at all. As soon as funding for our research program is lost, I am gone, regardless of years of service for OSU, the department, and the PI, or of the amount of money and/or recognition my work contributed to the same. I do not feel that the administration cares one bit for employees of my status.

University policies

Institute best practice policies for nontenure track faculty consistently across departments and units to ensure yearly performance appraisals, to recognize and reward excellence in nontenure track faculty and to remind search committees for tenure track positions not to discriminate against people with nonlinear career trajectories. To ensure consistent access of nontenure track faculty in all departments to career advancement opportunities. To institute multiyear contracts for long-term employees with high levels of expertise.

Conclusions

It is clear that NTT faculty members are proud of their contributions to OSU and value their association with the university. They generally report good relationships based on respect and collegiality with their co-workers and supervisors. They enjoy the work that they do as teachers, researchers, and support staff. The dissatisfaction expressed in this survey stems primarily, and to varying degrees, from the feeling shared by many NTT faculty that they are not fully appreciated at OSU, a university that they value and to which they have committed themselves. The data indicates a number of issues that are common to substantial numbers of NTT faculty in all three subgroups. These are either systemic, or at least so widespread as to warrant immediate attention:

- A substantial proportion of NTT faculty members are concerned about job security. Standard one-year contracts offer little assurance of long-term employment and funding uncertainties for research faculty and fluctuating enrollments for courses taught by instructors compound this problem.
- NTT faculty often find themselves in economically vulnerable situations due to a combination of relatively low salaries, fixed-term contracts, and general inability to negotiate the terms of their employment; instructors and research faculty appear to be particularly affected.
- There are apparently few university-wide standards and little internal coherence regarding expectations and compensation. This, along with a general lack of transparency, fosters a sense of inequity among many NTT faculty.
- Prospects for professional growth are limited. Support for professional development is unevenly distributed and funding is often inadequate or unavailable.
- Advancement within the university is difficult as years of service are rarely taken into account in determining salaries and appointments. Promotion, while formally available, often remains out of reach due to a lack of funding and established paths to promotion at the unit level. This seems to be especially true for instructors.
- Many NTT faculty members do not participate in decision-making at the unit level and in faculty governance.

Recent initiatives such as the expansion of the rank system for NTT instructional and research faculty, changes to the salary structure for professional faculty, and increased attention in some units to NTT promotion are all encouraging signs of a growing awareness of and commitment to social justice at OSU.

Our conclusions and the following recommendations are thus in line with OSU's core values of respect and social responsibility, stating that "we contribute to society's intellectual, cultural, spiritual, and economic progress and well-being to the maximum possible extent." Our conclusions and recommendations also echo statements made in the recently circulated draft of the OSU Strategic Plan, Phase III, which will guide university policy until 2018:

At Oregon State, we are grounded in an academic community characterized by respect for the dignity of each person; innovation and creativity; integrated and transformative learning environments; equitable and inclusive practices; passion for our world and a commitment to improve its condition; and a collaborative environment where partnerships are nurtured and cherished.

Besides identifying issues affecting NTT faculty, this survey also revealed the deep commitment of NTT faculty to the core missions of providing quality education, research, and administrative support services to OSU and the larger community. OSU must uphold its side of the bargain and commit to retaining NTT faculty members who have demonstrated competence in their position, and take steps to ensure a climate of respect, inclusiveness, and equity within this institution.

Develop a progressive career path for NTT faculty members, with faculty mentoring, access to professional development funds, and access to advancement opportunities. Supporting NTT faculty members' intellectual and academic engagement is not only vital to the instructional mission of OSU, it also directly contributes to our goal of creating healthier communities by providing opportunities for professionally fulfilling and economically stable lives.