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ADVANCE BU REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON BRADLEY UNIVERSITY TENURE AND PROMOTION GUIDELINES

The recommendations contained in this document have been generated by a team of faculty (from all five colleges and the library) after analysis of (1) campus-wide survey data, (2) meetings with all College Executive Committees, (3) the analysis of all available internal TPR documents, and (4) a review of the literature on equitable TPR practices. They should be understood not as a top-down initiative, but as a starting point for campus conversations about revisions to Bradley's TPR practices.

Introduction: Institutional Challenges

In 2018, Bradley's Faculty Gender Equity Taskforce found that faculty across campus had concerns about tenure, promotion and retention (TPR) practices at the University. Many faculty commented that TPR expectations at Bradley are unclear, inconsistently applied, or out of alignment with the *Faculty Handbook* (which prioritizes teaching over research). Women were almost twice as likely as men to indicate that their department lacked transparent mechanisms for evaluating research productivity, and women were five times more likely to indicate that their department did not equitably evaluate research productivity. Similarly, in a spring 2024 campus-wide faculty survey, only a minority of faculty (17% of men, 11% of women, 13% nonbinary/other) strongly agreed that TPR expectations are very clear at Bradley. Likewise, a minority of faculty (39% of men, 17% of women, 13% nonbinary/other) strongly agreed that teaching effectiveness is evaluated equitably in their departments. And a minority of faculty (32% of men, 17% of women, 20% nonbinary/other) strongly agreed that research and creative productivity is evaluated equitably in their departments.

Likewise, in Spring 2024 meetings with all college Executive Committees (Chairs, Deans, and Assistant and Associate Deans), representatives of several disciplines reported that the current TPR guidelines no longer accurately reflect the professional work that faculty do. In particular, Bradley has several disciplines where scholarly activities entail the application of knowledge in clinical or other external organizational settings or in client-serving projects. Additionally, in the current political and media climate in which higher education is increasingly challenged for being "elitist" and out-of-touch, many professional organizations are urging academics to engage in more "public scholarship" by providing disciplinary perspectives in more accessible and relevant forms to wider audiences. It is unclear in the existing guidelines where (or whether) such applied and/or public scholarship are "counted" in TPR decisions. Many universities have addressed this issue by adopting Boyer's (1990) expanded model of scholarship, which includes (1) the scholarship of discovery, (2) the scholarship of teaching and learning, (3) the scholarship of application, and (4) the scholarship of integration. (See Appendix 3 for an example of how one Bradley unit applies this to their discipline.)

The lack of clarity in TPR practices and their limited (and somewhat dated) conceptualizations of scholarship likely play a role in persistent gender gaps at Bradley. For instance, in 2023-24, while women made up 43% of all fulltime faculty at Bradley, they accounted for just 38% of Associate Professors (compared to 47% nationwide) and 25% of Full Professors (compared to 36% nationwide) and earned, on average 17% less than men (data from Office of Institutional Effectiveness; Palmer 2024).

As part of our effort to increase equity in the faculty ranks, ADVANCE BU undertook a comprehensive review of TPR guidelines across Bradley University to identify what, if any, aspects of our TPR practices could be strengthened for greater clarity, transparency, confidence in the process, and equity. We present our findings and our recommendations here.

ADVANCE BU Methodology

An ADVANCE BU team of faculty from all five colleges and the library first collected all TPR documents in use across the university. This was unexpectedly challenging because these documents are not presently archived in a central repository. Texts included: the relevant TPR passages of the *Faculty Handbook*; college and library TPR documents; and unit-level TPR documents for all academic units except four, which reported that they do not have any. There were 28 documents, totaling 418 pages. A subgroup of three faculty then coded the documents for 15 TPR elements that Ampaw et. al (2024) argue contribute to greater clarity, transparency, consistency, and equity in TPR processes.

The ADVANCE BU team followed standard coding protocols for qualitative data analysis, operationalizing all codes, conducting pilot coding, and further refining the codes (Hesse-Biber and Levy 2006, Corbin and Strauss 2007). Three faculty independently coded all documents and met frequently to discuss any ambiguous text. We achieved 98.4% intercoder reliability across the 551 codes entered. Broadly described, items were coded as 0 (absent), 1 (present but lacking detail or clarity), or 2 (present, detailed and clear). Fully operationalized codes are available in Appendix 1. We also gathered data on unit and document characteristics (such as length and date of adoption). The 15 elements, adapted from Ampaw et. al (2024) are listed in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Elements that Promote Clarity, Transparency, Consistency and Equity in TPR Guidelines

<i>Teaching</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Detailed description of what “effective teaching” entails 2. Detailed explanation of evidence and process used to judge effective teaching 3. Detailed explanation of how student evaluations of teaching (SETs) will be used 4. Concrete expectations for teaching performance at each rank 5. Concrete expectations for quality advising
<i>Research & creative production (“scholarship”)</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Detailed explanation of research/creative production expectations 2. Concrete expectations for research/creative production by rank 3. Detailed explanation of how sole versus collaborative contributions are valued and weighted
<i>Service</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Concrete expectations for service by rank
<i>TPR process</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Detailed explanation of relative “weight” (or value) of teaching, research and service in TPR decisions 2. Detailed explanation of what materials to submit for TPR, how to organize them, and when, where, and how to submit them 3. Detailed explanation of membership of the TPR review committee (ie. criteria for inclusion and means of selection) 4. Detailed explanation of how votes are counted in TPR decisions 5. Detailed explanation of selecting external reviewers (when required) 6. Detailed information on (or links to) policies for accommodations, and pause in tenure clock

Findings

The first observation from this review was the tremendous variability not only in policies and procedures across the university, but also in the length and comprehensiveness of the documents themselves. For instance, while the average document length was 15 pages, they ranged from 3 to 48 pages. The documents also varied considerably on how recently they had been created or updated (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Age of Bradley’s TPR Guidelines

Within last 5 years	32%
6-10 years old	24%
11-15 years old	20%
15-20 years old	12%
More than 20 years old	12%

It is significant that 44% of our guidelines are more than 10 years old. This is problematic because faculty workloads and professional activities have changed considerably in the last ten years due to such things as reductions of tenure track (TT) positions (leading to a higher service load for TT faculty); recruitment and retention pressures creating increased expectations for time-consuming high-impact teaching practices, individualized pathways for students, and online teaching; growing expectations for more intensive student involvement (since COVID); and increased need to provide compensatory developmental instruction for students who entered university without certain fundamental skills and knowledge required to pass their classes. Likewise, in a series of cost-cutting efforts over the past five years, travel funding and internal grant funding have been cut multiple times, leaving faculty with fewer institutional supports for their research and creative production, even as expectations for scholarship (per the guidelines) have remained the same.

While no single document clearly articulated all 15 elements, 27 out of 28 documents included a clear articulation (coded as “2”) of at least one element, and nine documents clearly articulated five or more elements. All 28 documents scored a “0” (item absent) for two or more elements, with documents across the corpus scoring “0” on an average of six elements.

Ten out of the 15 elements received a median score of less than 1.0, indicating an insufficient articulation of those elements (Figure 3). For instance, only one document provided a clear explanation of how sole versus collaborative scholarship is valued and weighted, and the median score of 0.21 on this element reflects the fact in that most documents (23/28) this it is entirely absent (“0”). This is problematic because sole authorship/production is frequently an unwritten expectation for tenure and promotion. Particularly concerning in Figure 3 are the last three items (*Detailed explanation of relative “weight” or value of teaching, research and service in TPR decisions; Detailed description of what “effective teaching” entails; and Concrete expectations for research/creative production by rank*), all of which factor heavily in TPR decisions.

Figure 3: Elements with a Median Score of Less than 1.0 (from Lowest to Highest)

Element	Median Score	Number Documents with Clear Articulations of the Element
Detailed explanation of how sole versus collaborative contributions are valued and weighted	0.21	1
Detailed information (or links to) policies for accommodations, and pause in tenure clock	0.25	2

Detailed explanation of how votes are counted in TPR decisions	0.36	3
Concrete expectations for quality advising	0.36	1
Concrete expectations for service by rank	0.57	2
Concrete expectations for teaching performance at each rank	0.61	2
Detailed explanation of selecting external reviewers (when required)	0.71	10
Detailed explanation of relative “weight” (or value) of teaching, research and service in TPR decisions	0.75	4
Detailed description of what “effective teaching” entails	0.93	7
Concrete expectations for research/creative production by rank	0.93	5

Items with an average of more than 1.0 demonstrate at least some articulation of a desirable element in TPR guidelines (Figure 4). Five items received a median score greater than 1.0, but no items received a median score approaching 2.0, indicating that improvements are still needed. Two of the elements scoring greater than 1.0 are technical “process” items (*Detailed explanation of what materials to submit for TPR, how to organize them, and when/where/how to submit*; and *Detailed explanation of TPR membership of review committee, eg. criteria for inclusion, and means of selection*). Such details could be easily incorporated into TPR guidelines, and Appendix 2 provides examples of such language. Two of the elements are related to the evaluation of teaching (*Detailed explanation of how student evaluations of teaching will be used*; and *Detailed explanation of evidence and process used to judge effective teaching*), and the remaining element is related to expectations for research and creative production (*Detailed explanation of research/creative production expectations*). Because teaching and scholarship are the two most crucial elements in TPR decisions, lack of clarity on these elements could have a significant detrimental impact on the career trajectories of Bradley faculty.

Figure 4: Elements with a Median Score of Greater than 1.0 (from Lowest to Highest)

Element	Median Score	Number Documents with Clear Articulations of the Element
Detailed explanation of how student evaluations of teaching (SETs) will be used	1.07	5
Detailed explanation of what materials to submit for TPR, how to organize them, and when/where/how to submit	1.18	8
Detailed explanation of TPR membership of review committee (eg. criteria for inclusion, and means of selection)	1.29	17
Detailed explanation of evidence and process used to judge effective teaching	1.36	12
Detailed explanation of research/creative production expectations	1.46	13

Discussion

All of Bradley’s TPR guidelines provide detailed guidance to faculty about at least some aspects of professional performance and the methods used to evaluate performance. However, the analysis above demonstrates that there are also significant gaps in our guidelines (including the lack of any written guidelines at all in several units). We argue that this lack of clarity is problematic for several reasons.

Fair play: We can conceptualize TPR guidelines as the “rules of the game.” If we asked someone to play a game of soccer without sharing the rules with them, or we changed the values of a goal midway through a match, or awarded one team more points for a goal, most of us would see that as violating notions of fair play. In the professoriate, as in the realm of sports, people must be apprised of the rules of the game and those rules must be consistently applied to have a fair chance of succeeding.

Unit and institutional costs: Both the University and academic departments have a vested interest in hiring and retaining top talent in the professorial ranks. Lack of clear TPR guidelines may contribute to higher faculty turnover as people are denied tenure or promotion. This comes at great cost not only for the individual faculty member, but for the University and the unit (Reynolds 2021). There are the financial costs of hiring (search costs, relocation costs, start-up costs). There are substantial costs in terms of the person-hours involved in a faculty search. And once the new faculty member is in place, they will likely not be fully involved in duties such as advising, curriculum development, and other crucial service for a period of time, which increases workloads for other TT faculty. Additionally, units often experience protracted conflict in such situations, which harms morale and job satisfaction (and potentially job performance) for remaining faculty.

Opening the door to bias: Ample scholarship demonstrates that bias is magnified when evaluation criteria are unclear (Culpepper et al 2023; O’Meara et al., 2020; Posselt et al., 2020; White-Lewis, 2020). Without clear guidelines, those making TPR decisions often rely on “gut” instincts (“I know it when I see it”) and unwritten “rules of thumb” when deciding, for instance, what counts as a “quality” publication, a “substantial” body of work, or a “satisfactory” number of publications. This may lead to inconsistent decisions that favor certain groups or individuals. While this bias may not be intentional (or even conscious), lack of objective criteria require that decision-makers fill in the blanks with subjective perceptions, which increases opportunities for biased outcomes—or at the very least, the appearance of bias. Indeed, Bradley’s Gender Equity Task Force revealed perceptions that certain groups are held to higher standards than others on our campus. Such perceptions of inequity were reflected in the percentage of Associate Professors at Bradley who said in a 2024 survey that they plan to apply for Full Professor within five years—two thirds of men, but only half of women.

ADVANCE BU Recommendations

1. That all units develop TPR guidelines that incorporate clear articulations of the 15 elements discussed here. (Example language from varied units at Bradley is presented in Appendix 2 of the full report.)
2. That all units ensure that no one gets a “double vote” and that tie votes are treated as such.
3. That all college and unit TPR guidelines be reviewed and revised (and ratified by vote) no less frequently than every five years, and centrally archived.
4. That all units develop a Tenure and Promotion Roadmap for both pre-tenure and post-tenure candidates to help guide their professional activities toward continued advancement. (Example in Appendix 4.)
5. That university, college, and unit TPR guidelines be updated to reflect the growing range of professional activities that faculty engage in, using Boyer’s (1990) expanded model of scholarship: the scholarship of discovery; the scholarship of teaching and learning; the scholarship of application; and the scholarship of integration. Each unit may decide the appropriate “weighting” of these different types of scholarship. (See Appendix 3.)

6. That the Senate clarify *Handbook* language regarding the relative “weight” of teaching and research/creative production. It currently gives “highest priority” to teaching, but in practice, research/creative production is often the most important factor, particularly for promotion to Full Professor. See example language whereby faculty applying for promotion to Associate or Full Professor must document satisfactory performance in both areas (teaching and research/creative production) AND a record of excellence in at least one area. (Appendix 2).

Key Questions for Campus Discussion

1. Should any of the six recommendations be changed?
2. Should any of the 15 recommended elements be changed?
3. Should any additional elements be included in all Bradley TPR guidelines?
4. Should we adopt university-wide standard practices for unit-level votes on TPR?
5. What is an appropriate timeline for revision of unit-level TPR guidelines?
6. How can we better align TPR guidelines and actual practices with *Handbook* language on the relative importance of teaching and research/creative production?
7. What “sunset” provisions should be made to ensure that no faculty are disadvantaged by the adoption of updated guidelines?
8. How do we build in accountability for those who vote on TPR cases to ensure that stated expectations are applied consistently and without bias or favor?

Further Resources

The attached Appendices include information to help provide specificity to campus conversations about TPR revision.

- Appendix 1: Operationalized Coding Categories for Bradley TPR Documents;
- Appendix 2: Exemplars from Bradley TPR Documents;
- Appendix 3: One Bradley Unit’s Application of Boyer’s Expanded Model of Scholarship;
- Appendix 4: Example Tenure and Promotion Roadmap

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