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Observations Related to Early Tenure and Promotion by Exception

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Office of the Provost

TO: Unit A Tenured/Tenure Track Faculty, Division/Department Chairs, Directors, and Deans

FROM: Paul R. Keys, Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs

RE: Observations Related to Early Tenure and Promotion by Exception

DATE: March 29, 2006

During the past year I have received several questions from faculty and administrators related to faculty's application for early tenure by exception and with the implementation of the Faculty Rank system in AY05-06 there have been additional questions regarding the early application for promotion. The questions seem to center around issues such as:

- If I meet the standards for tenure and/or promotion one or two years prior to the specified timeline and I apply for early tenure and/or promotion is it likely it will be awarded?
- Are there any reasons a faculty member should not apply for early tenure and/or promotion?
- If a faculty member has to exceed the specified standards for tenure and/or promotion to receive early tenure/promotion by exception what beyond the standards must the faculty member have accomplished?
- Does the faculty member have to exceed the standards in all three areas of evaluation - Teaching/Primary Duties, Research/Creative Activities, and Service?
- Are some evaluation areas given more emphasis than others when reviewing applications for early tenure and/or promotion by exception?

I would like to take this opportunity to share some observations related to both the application and award of early tenure/promotion to Associate Professor by exception, as well as the awarding of early promotion to Full Professor by exception. These reflections come from comparisons with other institutions of higher education across the country, while recognizing GSU's specific structure and agreements.

The period of time outlined in the GSU-UPI Agreement for the retention/ evaluation process between the date of initial appointment and the date of evaluation for tenure and/or promotion is considered to provide an optimal period of time to observe and review a faculty member's efforts in the areas of Teaching/Primary Duties, Research/Creative Activities, and Service, and to make a determination of the faculty

member's overall exceptional high standard(s) of performance in these areas. My thoughts and observations below are based on a review of standard academic practice at GSU, as well as other Institutions of Higher Education.

A primary reason to proceed cautiously with regard to the application and evaluation of a faculty member for early tenure and/or promotion by exception is that such an exception provides less time to evaluate an individual faculty member, and when considering the award of early tenure and/or promotion we have a responsibility to ensure that we are taking the correct course of action by making certain the individual has clearly demonstrated that he/she has exceeded the standard(s) of Superior Teaching/Primary Duties, and/or Superior Research/Creative Activities, and/or Effective Service as indicated in the Agreement.

In addition, we have the responsibility to determine that an individual faculty member's performance is significantly exceptional in relation to objective national academic standards to warrant an award of early tenure and/or promotion, while maintaining the quality and integrity of our evaluation, tenure, and promotion process to ensure that GSU is viewed as competitive with other institutions of higher education in the recruitment and retention of excellent faculty.

GSU Timelines and Application for Tenure and Promotion:

Faculty who are hired at GSU as Assistant Professors without tenure and without credit for prior academic experience are considered for tenure and promotion to Associate Professor during Evaluation Year 6. In successful cases, the award of tenure is effective at the beginning of the next Academic Year.

Timelines to apply for promotion to Full Professor are stated in the GSU-UPI Agreement, i.e. tenured, Associate Professors may apply for promotion to Full Professor in the fourth year following the award of tenure/promotion to Associate Professor.

Faculty who apply for consideration for tenure and promotion to Associate Professor prior to Evaluation Year Six are considered as applying early and therefore by exception. Faculty who apply for consideration for promotion to Full Professor prior to the fourth year after the award of tenure are considered as applying early and therefore by exception.

At most institutions of higher education, it is considered to be standard academic practice to wait until the end of the specified evaluation period (*as indicated above*) before initiating a tenure and/or promotion review.

Thoughts Regarding Expectations of Performance for Faculty Applying for Early Tenure/Promotion by Exception:

- Per the GSU-UPI Agreement, faculty applying for early tenure and promotion to Associate Professor by exception or applying for promotion to Full Professor by exception must minimally present documentation that establishes that their achievements and accomplishments in the areas of Teaching/Primary Duties

and/or Research/Creative Activities, and/or Service show evidence of exceptional performance beyond the defined standards for tenure/promotion to Associate Professor or the standards for promotion to Full Professor respectively.

- Exceptional performance is not defined in the GSU – UPI Agreement or in any of the Division/Department Criteria, and is the professional judgment of the evaluating committee members, division/department chairs/directors, deans, and provost and president.
- Based on standard academic practice there is an expectation that for faculty being considered for early tenure and/or promotion by exception, the level of achievement/accomplishment in the areas of Teaching/Primary Duties and in Research/Creative Activities will significantly exceed the standards in these areas, and to a lesser extent, exceed the standard in the area of Service.
- Standard academic practice indicates that exceptional performance leading to the award of early tenure and/or promotion would include some significant national and/or international recognition within the faculty member's discipline.
- In addition, it would be expected that the faculty member had demonstrated exceptional performance and progress in the areas of Teaching/Primary Duties and Research/Creative Activities, and to a less extent Service while at GSU.
- Based on the fact that the faculty evaluating committees and administrators' expectations of achievements and accomplishments associated with an application for early tenure and/or promotion are significantly high, it is likely that a faculty member would be awarded tenure and/or promotion during a regular evaluation period as defined in the GSU-UPI Agreement, but might not meet the substantially higher expectations to be awarded early tenure and/or promotion by exception.

Therefore, program faculty and reviewing peer division personnel committees, and/or division/department chairs and directors may want to have thorough discussions with faculty who are considering application for early tenure and/or promotion to avoid subsequent misunderstandings and disappointment, and to then advise them to proceed only after careful and responsible thought about the expectations for the award of tenure and/or promotion by exception.

- Faculty should be advised that prior to applying for early tenure and/or promotion by exception they should use their academic judgment to ensure they have a clear and well documented level of exceptional achievement/ accomplishments that exceed the standards required for tenure and/or promotion as defined in the GSU – UPI Agreement, that support the tenets of standard academic practice, and that will continue to ensure that GSU is viewed as competitive with other quality colleges and universities in the recruitment and retention of excellent faculty.

Summary

In summary, it should be noted that in order to maintain the quality of our retention, tenure, and promotion evaluation process as defined in our Division Criteria, and to ensure that we are viewed as competitive with other institutions of higher education in the recruitment and retention of excellent faculty, we need to ensure that our evaluation, tenure, and promotion process is in line with standard academic practice. It is observed that the maintenance of solid academic standards should include a hesitation or reluctance to award tenure and/or promotion prior to the timelines specified in the GSU-UPI Agreement.

I encourage all non-tenured faculty who may consider applying for early tenure/promotion to Associate Professor by exception and tenured faculty applying for early promotion to Full Professor by exception to carefully consider the thoughts and observations discussed in this paper prior to making any such application.

Also, I encourage Division Personnel Committee members and University Personnel Committee members, as well as Division/Department Chairs/Directors, and Deans in their recommendations related to early tenure and/or promotion by exception to use caution and sound academic judgment to ensure there is clear evidence that the individual faculty has achieved national recognition and a level of performance that would warrant early tenure at most universities, as well as GSU.

I want to leave you with the fact that in reviewing the standards for tenure and promotion required at GSU, as well as the working definitions of these standards specified in the fifteen Division/Department Criteria it is very clear that Governors State University holds its faculty to very rigorous standards in evaluating them for tenure and promotion at the regularly specified evaluation times. Therefore, it should be clearly noted that not being forwarded for early tenure and promotion is not and should not be considered in any way to be a failing given the high level of achievement necessary to attain this national and/or international preeminence.