

To: All Faculty
From: Rank and Tenure Committee
RE: Rank and Tenure Committee Work in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic

March 21, 2022

During the past two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges upon PLU students, faculty, and staff. As the acute phase of the pandemic is – hopefully! – drawing to an end, the Rank and Tenure committee would like to reiterate its commitment to careful consideration of the context of faculty activity during the COVID pandemic while applying the criteria for tenure and promotion

In addition to the more general concern of whether R&T will be taking into account the context of the pandemic in future tenure/promotions files, the committee has heard questions and concerns from faculty regarding the impact of student demands for flexibility on Teaching and Course Feedback forms and how such comments may impact a future tenure or promotion case. Some faculty have sought the guidance of the committee on how to address this issue, or even better, how to convey to students why faculty cannot always be infinitely flexible and therefore to prevent poor feedback. We fully sympathize with these faculty concerns, and would like to reaffirm the committee's commitment to taking into full account *all* the circumstances – professional and personal – that faculty have faced and will continue to face due to the pandemic.

Reaffirming Rank and Tenure's Commitments

In Spring 2020, the Rank and Tenure committee worked on designing a replacement EvaluationKIT course feedback form and approving it by the Faculty. The questions in that “emergency” form were designed to solicit feedback that was informative of the particular situation and potentially helpful in improving distance learning at a time when most faculty were novices in that area. In addition, the Rank and Tenure committee advised faculty to use their course feedback from Spring 2020 only for their own formative analysis and ensured them that neither the forms nor analysis thereof will be a required part of a tenure/promotion file or performance review. The Committee further advised Deans and Chairs to omit Spring 2020 Course Feedback Forms from annual reviews and letters of recommendation for tenure and promotion candidates. Faculty were given the option to request inclusion of the Spring 2020 feedback forms for both purposes *only if they desired*.

In addition, in Spring 2020, the Rank and Tenure committee also placed a permanent memo in its own files, addressed to future members, emphasizing the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic has presented in all of the three areas of faculty activity: teaching, scholarship, and service, and urging future R&T members to “*view the cases [...] in a light that appropriately acknowledges the disruption caused by the pandemic of Spring 2020*”, thus reiterating R&T's commitment to viewing faculty activity in the years following Spring 2020, in addition to the semester when the the pandemic *started*, through that lens.

Responding to the Present Moment

The Rank and Tenure Committee encourages faculty to view the Teaching and Course Feedback forms as only one piece of evidence in a broad portfolio of excellence in teaching. As in all cases, it is the responsibility of individual faculty to put students' responses on the Teaching and Course Feedback forms in context by discussing particular challenges they encountered in their teaching during the pandemic, steps they took to address these challenges, and how students responded to these steps. The committee recognizes that faculty responses to requests for flexibility are grounded in balancing student needs, curricular considerations, and faculty capacity after careful consideration. The Rank and Tenure Committee will carefully consider all particular situations that arose during the pandemic, and will view the Teaching and Course Feedback forms in the appropriate context, informed by the reflection of the faculty candidate considered for tenure or promotion.

In conclusion, we would like to commend all of our faculty colleagues for their dedicated and selfless work teaching students, advancing their scholarship, and serving the University in times of great professional challenges and personal hardship. We would like to reemphasize R&T's commitment to viewing faculty activity in pandemic and post-pandemic years in its appropriate context.

Sincerely,
The Rank and Tenure Committee
Michael Behrens
Bogomil Gerganov (Chair)
Lindsey Nice
Harry Papadopoulos
Edwin Powell
Tyler Travillian
Genevieve Williams