Career-Track Faculty Contributions Affirmed With Changes in Terminology, Promotion Processes

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The term for faculty who are teaching and doing research off the tenure track has been changed to "career track" as part of a larger effort to recognize their contributions and integrate them with their tenured and tenure-track colleagues.

Also underway are efforts to standardize processes for promotion and salary increases for these faculty, who were formerly called "nontenure track."

"The term 'career track' was chosen by Faculty Senate leaders to recognize that our nontenure-track faculty colleagues have careers at the UA," said Thomas P. Miller [1], vice provost for faculty affairs and professor of English. "And we have an obligation to support them through their careers."

The new term was officially adopted in May, following a vote by the general faculty and the approval of Provost Andrew Comrie [2].

"I'm very happy with our shift from 'non' terminology to the positive 'career track' term," Comrie said. "I believe it reflects a broad desire across campus to affirm the role of our career-track colleagues as valued members of the academic team."

These reforms were championed by a task force that was created by the Faculty Senate. In 2013, a senate ad hoc committee on nontenure-track issues was asked to explore policy changes that would better reflect the contributions that nontenure-track faculty make to the University. The other members of that group were Lynn Nadel [3], chair of the faculty and Regents' Professor Emeritus of Psychology, Michael Brewer [4], vice chair of the faculty and interim senior information resource officer for University Libraries, and Mika Galilee-Belfer [5], director of strategic planning and special projects in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

"The change in nomenclature to 'career track' is one part of a broader effort to better integrate these faculty into the UA community," Nadel said. "Other changes include the extension of certain voting rights, and the encouragement to units to include career-track faculty in as much of department/unit life as possible. It's a good start, but it's just a start."

Indeed, other changes surrounding career-track faculty are in the works or already approved. These include:

**Standardized career paths and promotion-review processes:** The University has overhauled the promotion process for career-track faculty to help clarify the process for earning raises, Miller said. Additionally, Miller and others are helping departments and units implement annual reviews to document the achievements of career-track faculty so that
information can be used when determining promotion eligibility? a process that has long been standard for tenure-track faculty, but not their career-track counterparts.

**More multiyear contracts as opposed to year-to-year:** Career-track faculty who have been on year-to-year contracts for three of the last four years are now considered part of the general faculty, and units are being encouraged to consider offering three-year contracts. This change also makes them eligible for election to the Faculty Senate.

These are welcome changes for career-track faculty like Jeremy Frey [6], a lecturer in the Department of English and a senator-at-large, and Amy Fountain [7], associate professor in the Department of Linguistics and secretary of the faculty. Both serve on the senate’s ad hoc committee on nontenure track issues.

"I was a little bothered by how I would go to administrators about a promotion and there were kind of these dead ends with the progression of my career," Frey said. "I was a nontenure-track person bumping up against what it means to be nontenure-track."

Fountain said feedback from her tenure-track colleagues has been almost entirely positive.

"I've seen a real culture change in lots of other units toward understanding the role of career-track faculty as people who are actually mission-critical," she added.

Changes to career-track faculty policies within colleges and departments are in progress. The deadline for units to complete revisions to promotion criteria was Monday, but some units are still finalizing their provisions.

The focus on career-track faculty issues is not meant to minimize the vital contributions of tenure-track faculty, Miller said. And, he added, this initiative came from the Faculty Senate and is not part of any effort to replace tenure-track faculty with career-track faculty.

Miller noted that the UA has the highest percentage of tenure-track faculty of any Arizona university.

"In fact, we have the third highest percentage of tenure-track faculty of the 15 universities that are designated by ABOR as peer institutions [8]," he said.

In the spring, Miller said, all career- and tenure-track faculty will be surveyed about working conditions in their colleges, departments and units. The responses will be used to guide deans and department heads in addressing concerns.

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