Dear Department Chairs and Directors,

Over the past three years, The Dornsife Faculty Council has been engaged in a review of the Merit Review process. We have made a number of recommendations to the Dean based on our research. Several of those recommendations are being translated into policy, including the Dean’s recent imperative for all departments to create a transparent set of criteria for the merit review process. There were several recommendations, however, that could not be converted into policy, for one of the following reasons:

1) Some of our recommendations could not be applied in all departments, because of department size or discipline-specific impediments.

2) Some of our recommendations are already policy, yet were included in our recommendations because we have evidence that these policies are not being followed in all departments.

Dean Miller has therefore asked that the Dornsife Faculty Council share these recommendations directly with chairs, as a list of best practices. While the following are not mandated – and not implementable in every case – they are widely desired by the faculty for reasons of fairness and equity, and we encourage you to follow them in your department.

Composition of the Committees:

1) Whenever possible, the members of the Merit Review Committee should be elected by the faculty, rather than appointed by the chair or director.

2) All Merit Review Committees should be composed of both RTPC and TT faculty members (if the department has members of that stream within it).

3) If the department has separate committees for TT and RTPC faculty, the chairs of the respective committees should be occupied by faculty from that stream.

Creation of the Dossier:

1) Dean Miller’s criteria for the merit review dossier specifies that it include only a CV, syllabi, and one-page supplemental sheet. This should be adhered to. If departments have a need to deviate from it, they should set a clear maximum number of pages for each section of the merit file (except student evaluations and syllabi, the length of which will be different from instructor to instructor).

Use of Student Evaluations:

1) Student evaluations should not be used as a primary measure of faculty merit.

2) While assessing each faculty dossier as a group, the Merit Review Committee should set aside time to discuss and take into consideration how bias (implicit or explicit) might have affected the results of the student and peer evaluations.

3) As bias (implicit or explicit) has been shown to affect student and peer evaluations, numerical scores from the student evaluations should not be used to assess faculty
without simultaneous careful consideration of the qualitative comments as well as the instructor’s optional prefatory statement.

4) In formulating the qualitative feedback for the merit review report, the merit review committee should not cite individual student comments unless they are representative of a larger trend.

**Delivery of the Report:**

1) The Merit Review Report that is returned to each faculty member at the end of the process should make explicit the connection between the established rubric/criteria and the assigned score.

2) The qualitative feedback provided in the report should be a minimum of 200 words.

3) If the Merit Review score is lower than a “4,” the committee or chair/director must provide practical guidelines on how the faculty member can improve, as well as instructions on how to receive the support and resources necessary to achieve this end.

4) Departments should provide information on how to appeal the merit review score and what the appeal process looks like should be provided to all faculty on an annual basis.

Following the above best practices will improve faculty members’ perception and experience of the merit review process, and improve morale.

With appreciation,

The Dornsife Faculty Council