

**Dornsife Faculty Council Tenure Track Caucus
Memo for the Office of the Dean**

To: Dean Amber Miller

Re: Clarifying Role of Service in the Merit and Promotion Review Processes

May 8, 2019

1) Background & Rationale

Many members of USC's tenured and tenure-track (T/TT) faculty feel that the lack of clarity regarding how service (typically a 10-20 percent component of a T/TT faculty member's job description) factors in to the merit and promotion review processes has fostered an imbalanced system that too often dis-incentivizes quality, meritorious service as a critical component of a faculty member's merit and promotion review portfolio. Specifically, associate-level tenured faculty are often burdened with service expectations that do not qualify for the type of 2- or 4-unit course release benefits that accompany certain administrative positions (departmental chair, director of graduate or undergraduate studies), but are similarly time-consuming in nature: these include certain departmental roles (service on graduate studies, undergraduate studies, and curriculum committees), university-wide roles (reviewing fellowship applications, serving as outside members of PhD dissertation committees), and profession/discipline-related roles (service on editorial boards of academic journals, blind-reviewing manuscripts, and publishing book reviews).

We believe it is important to recognize and reward the importance of service to the university, especially as we consider the overall quality of our research and teaching, and particularly the status of our graduate programs. There are often disincentives for faculty to prioritize departmental and university-wide service roles because there are a lack of clear rubrics for how service is assessed: listing a service position on a CV, for example, indicates nothing about how that service was successfully or unsuccessfully rendered. Moreover, those who perform well in their service duties are more likely to be repeatedly asked to take on additional service roles, which impacts their ability to develop their research profile and promotion materials. Of course, members of this caucus recognize the preeminent position of research at an "R1 institution" like USC, and we applaud the accolades and boost in stature that T/TT faculty who place their primary focus on developing their research profile bring to the university. At the same time, we wish to emphasize that faculty members who have been awarded prestigious research grants and fellowships that free them from administrative roles (as well as some teaching responsibilities) rely heavily on their colleagues to carry the service loads that keep their departments operational, thereby disadvantaging those colleagues in the primarily research-focused merit and promotion review processes. Finally, we find it especially important, given the diversity and inclusion issues that USC faces regarding the hiring, promotion, and retention of faculty members from underrepresented demographics, that faculty from those underrepresented demographics often (ironically but understandably) perform more than their fair share of service duties, and this service burden—given the lack of clarity around service evaluation for merit and promotion—

may negatively impact their promotions, further hampering USC Dornsife's ability to diversify its faculty body.

2) Formal Request to the Dean

Based on the rationale outlined above, the DFC Tenure Track Caucus seeks clarification and greater transparency from the administration regarding how service is factored in to the merit and promotion review processes (specifically promotion from associate to full professor, as we are consciously setting the question of tenure itself aside for now). We ask the administration to be as explicit with the service component as it is with the research and teaching metrics for most T/TT faculty. We are not asking for any formal change to the current policy, as our caucus is keenly aware of the sensitivity among the faculty regarding perceptions of top-down demands that seem to add further layers of assessment and evaluation and that make the merit and promotion review processes appear more arduous. We would simply like to see the creation of guidelines regarding qualitative and quantitative measures of service (if such judgments are indeed currently part of the review processes). This should include examples of appropriate mixtures of department, university, and profession-level service. We think merit reviews are a particularly important place to stress the quality of a faculty member's service contribution, including regular attendance at major department events and meetings.

Other questions for which we would like feedback from the administration include:

- What practices are required or expected of departmental chairs in terms of equitably delegating service responsibilities?
- When a faculty member does not perform a service role adequately or professionally, is this factored into the merit and promotion review (and how)?
- What assistance, training, and mentorship are available for junior faculty with little or no prior experience in service positions?

Clarification of these areas will be a first step toward our goal of generating a more collegial and equitable service environment for T/TT faculty at USC.

3) Potential Areas of Development for a More Equitable T/TT Service Structure

While our caucus only asks for clarification of the current service policy, we would like to recommend some areas of potential service policy development for the Dean's consideration. We have confined our identification of these areas to relate only to the three-year merit reviews (for T/TT faculty at all ranks) and the promotion guidelines to full professor, as we realize that the granting of tenure is a sensitive and carefully-governed area that should be protected:

- Create room for greater flexibility in the quantitative metrics of research, teaching, and service for T/TT faculty, particularly for professors who may gravitate toward more service engagement while still hitting baseline research benchmarks. Such flexibility would potentially allow for greater retention of faculty from underrepresented demographics, helping bolster the diversity of USC's faculty body.
- Accelerate the earning of sabbatical, so that T/TT faculty are granted one semester off (at full pay) for every three academic years (six semesters) of

teaching a full load, or a full two semesters for every six academic years (twelve semesters) of teaching at capacity: this would be especially beneficial to bolster the research profiles of faculty members who during their teaching semesters perform exceptional service (other forms of leave, such as parental leave, should not substitute for a real sabbatical).

The Tenure Track Caucus welcomes feedback from the Dean on any of the above requests and recommendations, and we look forward to continuing to develop these discussions around T/TT faculty service in the 2019-2020 academic year.

Submitted by:

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Approved by the Dornsife Faculty Council on 5/8