

## Professional Standards Committee Minutes for November 1, 1995

Present: Block, Breitenbach, Goldstein, Potts, Riegsecker, Rousslang, Taranovski, L. Wood

The minutes of the October 25th meeting were approved. The minutes of the September 27th meeting were corrected to indicate that Rousslang had been present.

Wood announced that subcommittees will be used to begin work on other tasks while the committee as a whole focuses its discussions on the evaluation process. Responsibilities will be divided as follows: Riegsecker, instructors; Rousslang, retirement; Block, interdepartmental comparison of evaluation standards; Wood, interuniversity comparison of evaluation procedures and standards; Goldstein and Breitenbach, conflicts of interest; Taranovski, evaluation procedures at UPS.

The committee turned to its continuing discussion of evaluation procedures. Discussion lurched between three topics: class visitation, the dual purposes of evaluations, and mentorships. The conversation was distinctly exploratory. Problems were identified and solutions floated, but no motions were made and no votes were taken. A summary of the main points of discussion follows.

**Class Visitation.** The invasion of classrooms by large numbers of faculty can be disruptive. On the other hand, the evaluation of teaching is compromised when people make judgments without personal knowledge of what goes on in the classroom. It may make sense in some big departments to divide responsibility for class visits, possibly with senior faculty bearing a heavier burden. Letters of evaluation should state the evidentiary grounds for judgment by indicating the name and number of classes attended. In departmental deliberations, when evaluators make assertions about the evaluatee's performance, colleagues have the obligation to hold them to standards of evidence, recognizing all the while that individuals may legitimately differ in their professional judgment about the same body of evidence. Perhaps the PSC should declare the optimal level of class visitation, allowing departments that plead special circumstances to secure approval for deviations. The person being evaluated should have the right to assent to any plan involving visitation by a subcommittee of the department.

**Dual Functions of Evaluation.** Evaluations seem to have two functions: (1) providing feedback that can help the evaluatee improve performance and (2) making a judicial decision about reappointment, tenure, or promotion. The first could be called *formative evaluation*; the second, *summative evaluation*. The confusion between these two functions, especially in the initial evaluations, can lead to unpleasant surprises in later evaluations, especially at the tenure evaluation. Moreover, the feedback (whether suggestions, praise, or criticism) provided during the formative mode may become the basis for objection, challenge, and even litigation if a negative decision on tenure or promotion is made during a summative evaluation. Some members of the committee thought it would be wise to differentiate more clearly the two types of evaluation by developing distinctive procedures

for those evaluations that do not lead to action--e.g., 1st-year assistant, 2nd-year assistant, and 3rd-year associate. Other members observed that this topic involved fundamental questions about the very nature and purpose of evaluation. It was agreed that committee members should communicate their positions on these fundamental questions by e-mail rather than spend meeting time discussing them.

**Mentorships.** It might be possible to reduce the tension between formative and summative evaluation by instituting a system of mentorships, through which senior colleagues communicate expectations, answer questions, give advice, and provide support for junior faculty members. Junior faculty might want several mentors--inside the department, outside the department, and even outside the university. Committee members noted several potential problems with a formalized mentorship system. Mentors might encourage slavish imitation and conformity; they might not adequately represent the views of the entire department; they might become uncritical lobbyists for the junior faculty member; they might provide grounds for lawsuits if an unsuccessful candidate for tenure alleged that the mentor was inept. Mentorships might further increase the faculty's work load, though presumably our greater success in bringing junior faculty to tenure would eliminate the burden of running searches to replace those who are denied tenure.

As the meeting concluded, Taranovski agreed to prepare a barebones outline of the procedures in a summative evaluation for tenure. The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, November 8, at 3:00 p.m. in the Shelmidine Room.

Respectfully submitted,  
William Breitenbach