

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI

Non-Tenure Track Faculty

Conversations with Non-Tenure Track Faculty Summary Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The University of Missouri, like many colleges and universities nationally, has a growing number of full-time, non-tenure track (NTT) faculty. In an attempt to better understand the needs of these faculty members, hear directly from them, and get a sense of their perspective of the current conditions, focus groups were held on each of the University campuses. The focus group conversations illustrate the thoughts, opinions and experiences held by many NTT faculty at the University of Missouri. Several themes emerged:

“We enjoy the work we’re doing” – Many of the NTT faculty members enjoy working at the University of Missouri and like their jobs.

“Variation by campus, college/school and department” -- While some general themes emerged, caution is recommended. Don’t over-generalize and assume that everything is the same across all departments and colleges/schools. There are some rather dramatic differences by college or school, and they are often based on the nature of the NTT appointments and how integral the NTT faculty members are in fulfilling the college/school’s mission.

“We want to be valued for what we do” – Much of the conversation centered on the fact that NTT faculty members often feel that they are not fully appreciated for the contributions they make. They want to be recognized and valued for what they do and the role they play in fulfilling the mission of the department, college/school and campus.

“Some basic policies would be helpful” –The nature of NTT faculty appointments creates a certain level of job ambiguity, job insecurity, and concern about compensation. NTT faculty express a desire for greater job security, more clarity about job expectations and more specific guidelines about what activities will be rewarded.

“It’s about climate and inclusion” – NTT faculty want to feel that they are partners in the department or college/school and that they are appreciated. In addition to being recognized for their hard work, they want to have a voice in relevant decisions, have some protection and be included as colleagues based on their demonstrated effort, skills and talents.

Conclusion – Several of the changes don’t require a lot of new money ... just good practices. Many of the concerns, however, require a focus on the department, college/school, and campus culture and climate. NTT faculty want to be valued for what they do, to have proper notice and clarity about job assignments, and to be able to participate more fully as members of the academy. In short, they want basic respect and to be treated like partners in fulfilling the mission of the campus.

BACKGROUND CONTEXT

The University of Missouri recognizes the significant and sustained contributions of non-tenure track faculty to the teaching, research, economic development and service missions of the University. In recognition of these contributions, the University of Missouri Intercampus Faculty Council and chief academic officers, together with the UM Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs seek to introduce a new categorization of faculty. This initiative attempts to differentiate the roles and relationships for different categories of faculty members within the institution.

METHODOLOGY

The University of Missouri chief academic officers, in consultation with their staff and deans, submitted a list of representative NTT faculty with varied responsibilities, roles and disciplines. The NTT faculty were invited via email and campus mail to participate in focus group conversations held in November and December 2005 on each of the campuses. In the majority of instances, more than one option was given to the NTT faculty and spaces were filled on a first-come, first-serve basis.

A total of 73 faculty members participated in seven focus group conversations designed to better understand the perspectives, experiences, and needs of the NTT faculty. The focus groups were held in a private room on each of the campuses. Agreements of confidentiality were assured verbally by all parties before the conversations began. An employee of the University's temporary employment agency was hired to record and transcribe the conversations. The decision to use a third party for recording and transcribing the discussions was a deliberate attempt to create a safe, non-threatening environment where participants could offer candid responses.

Due to the relatively small sample size and to ensure confidentiality, identification of department, college/school and titles of the participants is not reported. Although participation rates were high, one must be cautious about generalizing these comments to the entire group of NTT faculty at the University of Missouri. This was simply an attempt to hear directly from the NTT faculty and get a sense of their perspective of the current conditions and to add their point of view to the other discussions of this issue.

The focus group conversations addressed four main topics related to their experience: 1) roles and responsibilities; 2) differences between NTT faculty and tenured/tenure-track faculty; 3) contract terms and performance expectations; and 4) resources and support. In an effort to facilitate discussion of these main topics, the following questions were used as guides:

- Introduction: What is your name? Your official title? Your department? Length of time with the University? Length of time as a full-time, non-tenure track faculty member?
- Please describe your job and the role you play in your department.
- How does your job differ from that of tenured and tenure-track faculty in your department?
- Does the University provide you with enough support to do your job well? If no, what else should they do?
- Are you asked or expected to do things that are not part of your job? If so, what are they?
- What are the terms of your employment contract?
- Is your contract renewal linked to an evaluation? How does it work? Are the evaluation criteria clear and fair?
- How are full-time, non-tenure track faculty treated in your department and college/school?
- What can the University do to make full-time, non-tenure track faculty more satisfied employees?

FINDINGS

The majority of the NTT faculty members who participated in the focus group discussions said that they enjoyed working at the University of Missouri and liked their jobs. There is, however, an opportunity to improve the culture and climate of the department, college/school or campus as it relates to NTT faculty. The following sections will discuss: (1) roles and responsibilities of NTT faculty, (2) differences between NTT and tenured/ tenure-track appointments, (3) contract terms and performance expectations of NTT faculty, and (4) resources and support of NTT faculty. Underlying these discussions are the critical issues of job security, financial resources/compensation, respect and inclusion.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

NTT faculty perceive that they are expected to carry the extra workload that their tenured/tenure-track colleagues do not want to do. In the majority of instances, NTT faculty feel they have been given increased work load without additional compensation. The perception and realities of little or no academic rights also exacerbates the problem in that the majority of the NTT faculty perceive that they have limited ability to refuse certain requests by their leadership for fear of retribution, punishment or non-renewal of contract. They would like to have their rights and responsibilities better defined.

There is great variability across colleges/schools in the participation of NTT faculty in department and college/school level shared governance. In relatively few cases, NTT faculty are fully integrated (including voting privileges on most matters except tenure and promotion) into the shared governance of their department or college/school. In other

instances, NTT faculty are left outside of faculty governance structures altogether. In at least one instance, a NTT faculty member was casually asked not to attend meetings.

Overall, there is a general sense by the focus group participants that the work they do is less respected and recognized at the campus level (and in some cases at the department or college/school level). Several suggestions to improve or build on current strengths included orientation for NTT faculty to discuss their specific roles and rights in the department, college/school and University; a NTT faculty handbook to serve as a resource; an organized body for shared governance; voting rights; reward system that recognizes and values the contribution NTT faculty make; and respect for the variety of ways the NTT faculty add value to the University.

“I think we are doing a good job for the University, but we are not being recognized.”

“I think we need more than just a name change, we need to make sure policies support more than just a name change.”

“It would be nice to have institutional structure that was more welcoming and comforting to non-tenure track faculty.”

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN NON-TENURE TRACK AND TENURED/TENURE TRACK FACULTY

When asked how the work done by the NTT faculty participating in the focus groups differs from that of their tenured/tenure-track colleagues, it was not uncommon to hear reports of little or no differences. As the conversation evolved, however, there were indications that either the type of research or teaching loads differed, or the expectation of research quality or service varied.

The conversation on workload differences between tenured/tenure-track faculty and non-tenure track faculty confirmed a lack of understanding of the academy and the tenure system by some. This misunderstanding is potentially problematic if it leads individuals to attribute inequitable treatment when none exists. Similarly, several NTT faculty noted that the workload of their tenured/tenure-track faculty varied for legitimate reasons (i.e., less teaching to focus on research). Participants reported in some cases there was little evidence of productivity over long periods of time despite different workload assignments (i.e., less teaching to focus on research but no resulting publications or grants).

The most troublesome differences between NTT faculty and tenured/tenure-track faculty had to do with disrespect and exclusion. Words and phrases like: second-class citizen, un-person, lackey, and marginalized surfaced repeatedly. An example articulated by more than one faculty member was the physical office space of faculty. In this example, the NTT faculty are housed in the basement with tenured faculty on the top floor and tenure-track faculty on floors in between the two groups.

Suggestions made by participants to improve or build on current strengths included creating a reward system that recognizes and values the contributions made by NTT faculty; respecting the variety of ways they add value to the University; providing sensitivity/diversity training; developing titles that eliminate the feelings of being part of a class system; creating a culture that fosters greater respect for NTT faculty; and making small but significant changes in the department regarding sharing of resources, space and collegiality.

“There are times when I feel like an un-person because there are things that go on where non-tenure track faculty don’t have a voice... I’m kind of in one world and the faculty are in another world.”

“I think we all feel like second class citizen at times.”

CONTRACT TERMS AND PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS

The length and terms of contracts varied greatly among the NTT faculty participants. Some NTT faculty reported recurring explicit contracts whereas in numerous other cases, NTT faculty had never received a contract. Similarly, some NTT faculty received recurring letters of employment but most letters stated nothing more than salary and the extent to which these letters articulated performance expectations was minimal. Additionally, the performance expectations for the NTT faculty are not systematically communicated across departments, colleges/schools, or campuses. The NTT faculty expressed frustration at the lack of clarity of performance expectations. They reported that the extra work they do is either not taken into account or they are not informed as to how it is evaluated. Because of the insecurity of feeling they are not able to decline additional work because of department needs, NTT faculty perceive this overload is not always recognized or linked to rewards consistent with the effort and time expended.

A related issue is the ambiguity associated with no formal policies for sick leaves, vacation, or development leaves. Suggestions to improve or build on current strengths included offering multi-year contracts; providing specific terms of employment in a formal contract or letter that is shared with NTT faculty; explicitly stating performance expectations and measures; developing a formalized and clearly communicated workload policy; and clearly articulating leaves and vacations.

“I wish there was some office on the system level that worked with non-tenure track faculty job titles and descriptions. I wish there was some understanding of what we do and what our needs are.”

“It’s a vicious cycle.... [the university] can get lucky because we do have a spouse, we have no job security but there are people who have been doing it for six or eight years.”

“Our duties are quite often things others don’t want to do.”

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

More than roles, responsibilities, contract terms and performance expectations, the biggest concern that surfaced during the focus group conversations was that of being properly recognized, respected, rewarded and included in the University. Interestingly, compensation, though clearly important, was not the first issue to be raised. Issues of respect and inclusion surfaced more quickly and abundantly. Participants in the focus groups also identified eligibility for paid leaves, better reward systems, resources for professional development, participation in decision-making and job security (i.e., longer-term contracts) as major issues. The following comments illustrate their concerns:

“Regular faculty don’t have to do anything to fit in, but non-regular faculty have to do a lot.”

“I don’t need tenure, I just need the kind of security other jobs offer for doing a job well.”

CONCLUSION

The focus group conversations with NTT faculty at the University of Missouri provided insights into the experiences and perspectives of these faculty members. Some departments and colleges/schools are leading the efforts to integrate NTT faculty more fully; treat NTT faculty with respect and recognition for the contributions they make; offer multi-year, rolling contracts; and provide more equitable salaries to NTT faculty. However, there still exists widespread variability across the University. The University and NTT faculty would be well served if guidelines are established to address clear performance expectations, specific contract terms, multi-year contract options, sick and personal leaves, vacations, and specified roles. The University also needs to increase awareness and respect regarding the experiences and concerns of NTT faculty given the discussions by this sample of faculty in the focus groups.

While many of the NTT faculty are at the University of Missouri because they choose to be, they still have a desire to be valued for the contributions they make, to have a voice in areas that directly impact the work they do, and to be included respectfully in the fabric of the institution. Many of the conditions noted in this report do not require a lot of new money... just good practices that are consistently interpreted and equitably applied.