Interim Report of the
Task Force on Divisional Structure and Function

April 1986

The UWM Faculty Senate authorized the creation of a Task Force on Divisional Structure and Function in May 1985. The University Committee appointed nine tenured faculty members to constitute the Task Force in October 1985. The Task Force members, drawn from all four academic divisions, are as follows:

Melvin Friedman, Comparative Literature
Phyllis Kritek, Health Restoration
Fred Landis, Mechanical Engineering
William Mayrl, Sociology
Oliver Myers, Spanish & Portuguese
Nicholas Papastamatiou, Physics
Diane Pollard, Educational Psychology
Leslie Vansen, Art
Edward Welin, Anthropology (Chair)

The task force was charged with the following functions:

1. To examine the effectiveness and fairness of the existing Divisional structures as defined in Chapter 3 of the UWM Policies and Procedures;

2. To solicit information from Departments, Divisional Executive Committees, recent candidates for promotion and other sources with regard to the above subject;

3. To gather data on Divisional structures and methods of promotion at other comparable institutions;

4. To review the criteria for promotion employed by the Divisional Committees with regard to such questions as their comprehensiveness, their adequacy, their consonance with actual practice, etc.;

5. To review the procedures employed by the Divisional committees with regard to such questions as the propriety of a committee's seeking out or employing information above and beyond that supplied them by the Department, the opportunities Departments and candidates have for responding to such information, etc.;

6. To review the current policy of using the Divisional Executive Committees in promotions to associate and full professors; and

7. To make recommendations regarding changes in the Divisional structure, criteria for promotion, procedures, etc., as may seem warranted by the Task Force in any of the above areas. Such recommendations will be reviewed by the University Committee and brought before the Faculty Senate for action.
The Task Force divided itself into two sub-groups. One, the "external" sub-group, solicited and reviewed materials from other universities in regard to the policies, criteria, procedures, etc., used for promotion and tenure. The other, the "internal" sub-group, dealt with inputs from faculty members, departmental executive committees, departmental chairs, deans, and divisional committees on the UWM campus.

Please note that this is an interim report. The Task Force has been occupied largely with sorting out information and comments from other universities and from within UWM. Evaluation of the various inputs and the formulation of recommendations remain to be done. The Task Force will reconvene in Fall 1986 to complete its work.

Information from Other Universities

The "external" sub-committee received and reviewed materials relating to promotion and tenure from 60 universities. The latter include the Big Ten campuses, the Urban 13, and a nationally representative sample of both private and state universities. Many of the country's "mature" universities, i.e., institutions with well-established graduate programs in most areas, provided the requested information. Although formally stated policies and procedures may not always correspond to actual practice, the external sub-committee proceeded on the assumption that stated policy and actual practice were in reasonably close approximation.

Promotion and tenure procedures at other universities were divided into three categories. The first consisted of those features which hold across the board; despite variations in other respects, these are the policies and procedures which are virtually universal. The second category has to do with those features which, though by no means universal, characterize the policies and procedures of many universities; these are the fairly common features. The third consists of those features that exhibit no marked "central tendency"; that is, these are features with considerable variation.

Universal Features

1. Recommendations for tenure and/or promotion are initiated in the department or a comparable academic unit.

2. Departmental tenure recommendations are reviewed by an extra-departmental committee. This committee may be university-wide or drawn from a single school or college.

3. The recommendations of tenure review committees are advisory to college and campus administrations.

4. Members of faculty committees responsible for tenure reviews and recommendations (both departmental and extra-departmental) must themselves have tenure.
Fairly Common Features

1. Promotions both to the associate and full professor ranks are usually reviewed by a committee beyond the department. These committees are often ad hoc in nature. One of several exceptions to this is UW-Madison, where a department's full professors review associate professor candidates for promotion and submit the review and supporting documentation to the appropriate Dean.

2. The stated criteria for tenure and promotion are commonly research, teaching, and service. However, among doctoral institutions, productivity in research (or in creativity, depending on the discipline) is the primary criterion for promotion and tenure.

3. The evaluations of scholars outside of the candidate's institution are sought as part of promotion and tenure reviews.

4. When such outside evaluations are sought, it is taken for granted that the confidentiality of letters from outside reviewers is maintained. This includes UW-Madison; there, when open meeting or Freedom-of-Information rules are in effect, candidates may be provided with anonymous summaries of outside reviewers' comments, but the letters and their authors remain confidential.

5. Members of faculty committees reviewing individuals for promotion are usually at or above the rank being sought.

Features with Considerable Variation

1. Some institutions explicitly discourage or even forbid the practice of extra-departmental review committees seeking information on candidates for tenure or promotion beyond what is provided by the department. Others encourage such committees to do so. Still others do not address the matter.

2. The role and power of the department chair vary considerably. In some institutions, the chair's role is apparently limited to transmitting the department's recommendation on promotion or tenure. In others, the chair has the option of making an independent recommendation.

3. In some institutions, the extra-departmental review committees are elected. In others, they are appointed on an ad hoc basis by a dean or by a standing faculty personnel committee.

4. Although, as noted, the stated criteria for tenure and promotion are virtually always research, teaching, and service (to the institution, profession, and community), there is much variation in the detail in which these are made explicit. Some institutions make it clear that service is the least important criterion; one, in fact, states: "Neither performance nor time spent in an administrative post shall be considered in decisions regarding faculty retention, promotion, and tenure."
5. While it is usually required that negative recommendations for tenure or promotion by departmental and extra-departmental review committees must be accompanied by a statement of the reasons for the action, some institutions go beyond this. For example, one university requires that: "In any case in which the Committee's recommendation [apparently whether positive or negative] is not unanimous, its report shall include the dissenting opinions with supporting data."

6. There is considerable variation in the coupling (or uncoupling) of tenure and rank. In some institutions, promotion to or initial appointment at the rank of associate professor is always linked with tenure. Some universities follow a variable policy: promotion to or initial appointment at associate professor rank may or may not be accompanied by tenure. With regard to initial appointments at the rank of associate professor (and in some cases at the rank of full professor), some institutions explicitly disallow that such appointments carry immediate tenure.

7. Occasionally, the list of administrators who are required to review and make recommendations in tenure and promotion cases include the dean of the graduate school.

8. While there appears to be general agreement that an associate professorship may well be the highest rank achieved by some faculty members, some institutions include in their procedures a "normal duration" for that rank. For example, Cornell gives it as six years; UW-Madison gives it as five years.

Responses from within UWM

About 50 individual faculty members, representing all tenured and tenure-track ranks except Instructor, responded to the Task Force's invitation to communicate their thoughts and concerns regarding the policies, criteria, procedures, etc., having to do with tenure and promotion. In addition, communications were received from groups of faculty (including several departmental executive committees) and a number of administrators. Members of the Task Force also met with and received input from each of the Divisional Committees.

Correspondents addressed a wide range of issues. However, input tended to revolve around the policies, procedures, and criteria employed by Divisional Committees regarding:

(1) the granting of tenure,
(2) promotion to associate professor, and
(3) promotion to full professor.

On one fundamental point, UWM faculty and administrators are in agreement: There is need for faculty review committees outside the department to make advisory recommendations on tenure.
Beyond this fundamental agreement, there is no overall consensus. On the one hand, responses from some faculty members and departmental executive committees suggest that current policies, criteria, and procedures should remain as they are. Some proponents of the "don't change a thing" view hold that although the present system may not be ideal, it serves the purposes reasonably well of providing appropriate peer review and ensuring high levels of quality of UWM's tenured faculty. Other "don't change a thing" expressions are apparently responses to a rumor (quite unfounded) that the Task Force might recommend the dismantling of the Divisional Committee structure.

Other comments direct criticisms at and call for changes in the present system. Major issues raised by various correspondents are summarized below:

1. There is concern that true "peer review" is not always obtained. In some instances, it is believed that members of Divisional Committees are so far removed from a candidate's specialty that they do not adequately perform the functions of peer judgment.

2. Some respondents express the view that the Divisional Committee often serves as "judge, jury and prosecutor", and that when departmental representatives attempt to "make the case for a candidate", the discussion frequently turns adversarial rather than evaluative. In this connection, it is noted that although a basic tenet of American jurisprudence, and of fairness, hold that an appeal not be made to the same body that reached the original decision, current appeals against a recommendation by a Divisional Committee must be made to the same committee.

3. Procedures and criteria for promotion to full professor are matters of contention. Some correspondents insist that the Divisional Committee is not the appropriate body to review such promotions, while others believe that review for promotion to full professor should remain within the committee's purview. At the same time, a significant number of respondents feel that only full professors should review candidates for promotion to full professor.

4. Instances are reported in which the criteria for evaluating internal candidates for promotion are more stringent than those imposed on external appointments. There is also frustration with pressures to appoint an external candidate "to whom we have already offered the job", including appointments for administrators.

5. Divisional Committees pay insufficient attention to the special features that may characterize the publishing situation in various fields. Specific complaints are that across-the-board emphasis is placed on refereed papers in prestigious journals without recognition that conference proceedings and less-than-prestigious sources may be normal and important outlets in some fields. This may be a criticism of both the Divisional Committee and the candidate's department; departments do not always provide the committee with departmental criteria that call attention to the special characteristics of the publishing situation or other special features of the field.
6. Some complaints allege that the Divisional Committee sometimes solicits information on candidates beyond what the department provides. Should the Divisional Committee regard the department's documentation as inadequate, it is held that the committee should so inform the unit, without doing an "end run" around what the department submits.

7. Some junior faculty insist that they have no clear idea of what is expected of them in a tenure review. This tends to be as much a criticism of departments as of Divisional Committees.

8. Although there is general acceptance that research and/or creativity are of central importance with respect to promotion and tenure, correspondents note that there is unclarity and inconsistency regarding the weight that is or should be accorded quality teaching and service.

In general, although issues were raised with regard to all four Divisional Committees, there appears to be less dissatisfaction with the Divisional Committees in the Humanities and Social Sciences than with those in the Natural Sciences and Professions.