

American Association of University Professors

## Statement on Procedural Standards in the Renewal or Nonrenewal of Faculty Appointments

*The statement which follows, a revision of a statement originally adopted in 1971, was approved by the Association's Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure (Committee A), adopted by the Association's Council in November 1989, and endorsed by the Seventy-sixth Annual Meeting.*

Except for special appointments clearly designated at the outset as involving only a brief association with the institution, all full-time faculty appointments are either with continuous tenure or probationary for tenure. Procedures bearing on the renewal or nonrenewal of probationary appointments are this statement's concern.

### THE PROBATIONARY PERIOD: STANDARDS AND CRITERIA

The 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure prescribes that "during the probationary period a teacher should have the academic freedom that all other members of the faculty have." The Association's Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure prescribe further that "all members of the faculty, whether tenured or not, are entitled to protection against illegal or unconstitutional discrimination by the institution, or discrimination on a basis not demonstrably related to the faculty member's professional performance. . . ." A number of the rights of nontenured faculty members provide support for their academic freedom and protection against improper discrimination. They cannot, for example, be dismissed before the end of a term appointment except for adequate cause that has been demonstrated through academic due process—a right they share with tenured members of the faculty. If they assert that they have been given notice of nonreappointment in violation of academic freedom or because of improper discrimination, they are entitled to an opportunity to establish their claim in accordance with Regulation 10 of the Recommended Institutional Regulations. They are entitled to timely notice of nonreappointment in accordance with the schedule prescribed in the statement on Standards for Notice of Nonreappointment.<sup>[1]</sup>

Lacking the reinforcement of tenure, however, academic freedom and protection against improper discrimination for probationary faculty members have depended primarily upon the understanding and support of their tenured colleagues, the administration, and professional organizations, especially the American Association of University Professors. In the Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities, the Association has asserted that "faculty status and related matters are primarily a faculty responsibility; this area includes appointments, reappointments, decisions not to reappoint, promotions, the granting of tenure, and dismissal." Collegial deliberation of the kind envisioned by the Statement on Government will minimize the risk of a violation of academic freedom, of improper discrimination, and of a decision that is arbitrary or based on inadequate consideration.

Frequently, young faculty members have had no training or experience in teaching, and their first major research endeavor may still be uncompleted at the time they start their careers as college teachers. Under these circumstances, it is particularly important that there be a probationary period—a maximum of seven years under the 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure—before tenure is granted. Such a period gives probationary faculty members time to prove themselves, and their colleagues time to observe and evaluate them on the basis of their performance in the position rather than on the basis only of their education, training, and recommendations.

Good practice requires that the institution (department, college, or university) define its criteria for reappointment and tenure and its procedures for reaching decisions on these matters. The 1940 Statement of Principles prescribes that "the precise terms and conditions of every appointment should be stated in writing and be in the possession of both institution and teacher before the appointment is consummated." Moreover, fairness to probationary faculty members prescribes that they be informed, early in their appointments, of the substantive and procedural standards that will be followed in determining whether or not their appointments will be renewed or tenure will be granted.

The Association accordingly recommends:

1. *Criteria and Notice of Standards.* Probationary faculty members should be advised, early in their appointment, of the substantive and procedural standards generally accepted in decisions affecting renewal and tenure. Any special standards adopted by their particular departments or schools should also be brought to their attention.

## THE PROBATIONARY PERIOD: EVALUATION AND DECISION

The relationship of the senior and junior faculty should be one of collegueship, even though nontenured faculty members know that in time they will be judged by their senior colleagues. Thus the procedures adopted for evaluation and possible notification of nonrenewal should not endanger this relationship where it exists, and should encourage it where it does not. Nontenured faculty members should have available to them the advice and assistance of their senior colleagues; and the ability of senior colleagues to make a sound decision on renewal or tenure will be enhanced if an opportunity is provided for a regular review of the candidate's qualifications. A conjunction of the roles in counseling and evaluation may be productive: for example, an evaluation, whether interim or at the time of final determination of renewal or tenure, should be presented in such a manner as to assist nontenured faculty members as they strive to improve their performance.

Any recommendation regarding renewal or tenure should be reached by an appropriate faculty group in accordance with procedures approved by the faculty. Because it is important to both the faculty member and the decision-making body that all significant information be considered, the candidate should be notified that a decision is to be made regarding renewal or appointment or the granting of tenure and should be afforded an opportunity to submit material that the candidate believes to be relevant to the decision.

The Association accordingly recommends:

2. (a) *Periodic Review.* There should be provision for periodic review of a faculty member's situation during the probationary service.

(b) *Opportunity to Submit Material.* Probationary faculty members should be advised of the time when decisions affecting renewal and tenure are ordinarily made, and they should be given the opportunity to submit material that they believe will be helpful to an adequate consideration of their circumstances.

Observance of the practices and procedures outlined above should minimize the likelihood of reasonable complaint if nontenured faculty members are given notice of nonreappointment. They will have been informed of the criteria and procedures for renewal and tenure; they will have been counseled by faculty colleagues; they will have been given an opportunity to have all material relevant to their evaluation considered; and they will have a timely decision representing the views of faculty colleagues.

## NOTICE OF REASONS

Since 1971 it has been the Association's position, reached after careful examination of advantages and disadvantages, that nontenured faculty members notified of nonreappointment should, upon request, receive a statement of the reasons for the decision. In reaching this position, the Association considered the needs both of the institution and of the individual faculty member.

A major responsibility of the institution is to recruit and retain the best-qualified faculty within its goals and means. In a matter of such fundamental importance, the institution, through the appropriate faculty agencies, must be accorded the widest latitude consistent with academic freedom, equal opportunity, and the standards of fairness. The Association recognized that the requirement of giving reasons could lead, however erroneously, to an expectation that the decision-making body must justify its decision. A notice of nonreappointment could thus become confused with dismissal for cause, and under these circumstances the decision-making body could become reluctant to reach adverse decisions which might culminate in grievance procedures. As a result there was some risk that the important distinction between tenure and probation would be eroded.

Weighed against these important institutional concerns, however, were the interests of the individual faculty members. They could be honestly unaware of the reasons for a negative decision, and the decision could be based on a judgment of shortcomings which they could easily remedy if informed of them. A decision not to renew an appointment could be based on erroneous information which the faculty member could readily correct if informed of the basis for the decision. Again, the decision could be based on considerations of institutional policy or program development which have nothing to do with the faculty member's professional competence, and if not informed of the reasons, the faculty member could mistakenly assume that a judgment of inadequate performance has been made. In the face of a persistent refusal to supply the reasons, a faculty member may be more inclined to attribute improper motivations to the decision-making body or to conclude that its evaluation has been based upon inadequate consideration. If the faculty member wished to request a reconsideration of the decision, or a review by another body, ignorance of the reasons for the decision would create difficulties both in reaching a decision whether to initiate such a request and in presenting a case for reconsideration or review.

The Association's extensive experience with specific cases since 1971 has confirmed its conclusion that the reasons in support of the faculty member's right to be informed outweigh the countervailing risks. Every notice of nonreappointment, however, need not be accompanied by a written statement of the reasons for nonreappointment. It may not always be to the advantage of the faculty member to be informed of the reasons for nonreappointment, particularly in writing. The faculty member may be placed under obligation to divulge them to the appointing body of another institution if it inquired. Similarly, a written record is likely to become the basis for continuing responses by the faculty member's former institution to prospective appointing bodies.

At many institutions, moreover, the procedures of evaluation and decision may make it difficult, if not impossible, to compile a statement of reasons which precisely reflects the basis of the decision. When a number of faculty members participate in the decision, they may oppose a reappointment for a variety of reasons, few or none of which may represent a majority view. To include every reason, no matter how few have held it, in a written statement to the faculty member may misrepresent the general view and damage unnecessarily both the morale and the professional future of the faculty member.

In many situations, of course, a decision not to reappoint will not reflect adversely upon the faculty member. An institution may, for example, find it necessary for financial or other reasons to restrict its offerings in a given department. The acquisition of tenure may depend not only upon satisfactory performance but also upon a long-term opening. Nonrenewal in these cases does not suggest a serious adverse judgment. In these situations, providing a statement of reasons, either written or oral, should pose no difficulty, and such a statement may in fact assist the faculty member in searching for a new position.

Should the faculty member, after weighing the considerations cited above, decide to request the reasons for the decision against reappointment, the reasons should be given. The faculty member also should have the opportunity to request a reconsideration by the decision-making body.

The Association accordingly recommends:

3. *Notice of Reasons.* In the event of a decision not to renew an appointment, the faculty member should be informed of the decision in writing, and, upon request, be advised of the reasons which contributed to that decision. The faculty member should also have the opportunity to request a reconsideration by the decision-making body.

## WRITTEN REASONS

Having been given orally the reasons which contributed to the decision against reappointment, the faculty member, to avoid misunderstanding, may request that they be confirmed in writing. The faculty member may wish to petition the appropriate faculty committee, in accordance with Regulation 10 of the Association's *Recommended Institutional Regulations*, to consider an allegation that the reasons given, or that other reasons which were not stated, constitute a violation of academic freedom or improper discrimination. The faculty member may wish to petition a committee, in accordance with Regulation 15 of the *Recommended Institutional Regulations*, to consider a complaint that the decision resulted from inadequate consideration and was therefore unfair. The faculty member may believe that a written statement of reasons might be useful in pursuing a professional career.

If the department chair or other appropriate institutional officer to whom the request is made believes that confirming the oral statement in writing may be damaging to the faculty member on grounds such as those cited earlier in this statement, it would be desirable for that officer to explain the possible adverse consequences of confirming the oral statement in writing. If, in spite of this explanation, the faculty member continues to request a written statement, the request should be honored.

The Association accordingly recommends:

4. *Written Reasons.* If the faculty member expresses a desire to petition the grievance committee (such as is described in Regulations 10 and 15 of the Association's *Recommended Institutional Regulations*), or any other appropriate committee, to use its good offices of inquiry, recommendation, and report, or if the request is made for any other reason satisfactory to the faculty member alone, the reasons given in explanation of the nonrenewal should be confirmed in writing.

## REVIEW PROCEDURES: ALLEGATIONS OF VIOLATION OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM OR OF DISCRIMINATION

The best safeguard against a proliferation of grievance petitions on a given campus is the observance of sound principles and procedures of academic freedom and tenure and of institutional government. Observance of the procedures recommended in

this statement—procedures which would provide guidance to nontenured faculty members, help assure them of a fair professional evaluation, and enlighten them concerning the reasons contributing to key decisions of their colleagues—should contribute to the achievement of harmonious faculty relationships and the development of well-qualified faculties.

Even with the best practices and procedures, however, faculty members will at times think that they have been improperly or unjustly treated and may wish another faculty group to review a decision of the faculty body immediately involved. The Association believes that fairness to both the individual and the institution requires that the institution provide for such a review when it is requested. The possibility of a violation of academic freedom or of improper discrimination is of vital concern to the institution as a whole, and where either is alleged it is of cardinal importance to the faculty and the administration to determine whether substantial grounds for the allegation exist. The institution should also be concerned to see that decisions respecting reappointment are based upon adequate consideration, and provision should thus be made for a review of allegations by affected faculty members that the consideration has been inadequate.

Because of the broader significance of a violation of academic freedom or of improper discrimination, the Association believes that the procedures to be followed in these two kinds of complaints should be kept separate from a complaint over adequacy of consideration. Regulation 10 of the *Recommended Institutional Regulations* provides a specific procedure for the review of complaints of academic freedom violation or of discrimination:[2]

If a faculty member on probationary or other nontenured appointment alleges that a decision against reappointment was based significantly on considerations violative of (1) academic freedom or (2) governing policies on making appointments without prejudice with respect to race, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, marital status, or sexual orientation, the allegation will be given preliminary consideration by the [insert name of committee], which will seek to settle the matter by informal methods. The allegation will be accompanied by a statement that the faculty member agrees to the presentation, for the consideration of the faculty committees, of such reasons and evidence as the institution may allege in support of its decision. If the difficulty is unresolved at this stage, and if the committee so recommends, the matter will be heard in the manner set forth in Regulations 5 and 6, except that the faculty member making the complaint is responsible for stating the grounds upon which the allegations are based, and the burden of proof will rest upon the faculty member. If the faculty member succeeds in establishing a prima facie case, it is incumbent upon those who made the decision against reappointment to come forward with evidence in support of their decision. Statistical evidence of improper discrimination may be used in establishing a prima facie case.

The Association accordingly recommends:

5. *Petition for Review Alleging an Academic Freedom Violation or Improper Discrimination.* Insofar as the petition for review alleges a violation of academic freedom or improper discrimination, the functions of the committee that reviews the faculty member's petition should be the following:

- (a) to determine whether or not the notice of nonreappointment constitutes on its face a violation of academic freedom or improper discrimination;
- (b) to seek to settle the matter by informal methods;
- (c) if the matter remains unresolved, to decide whether or not the evidence submitted in support of the petition warrants a recommendation that a formal proceeding be conducted in accordance with Regulations 5 and 6 of the *Recommended Institutional Regulations*, with the burden of proof resting upon the complaining faculty member.

## REVIEW PROCEDURES: ALLEGATIONS OF INADEQUATE CONSIDERATION

Complaints of inadequate consideration are likely to relate to matters of professional judgment, where the department or departmental agency should have primary authority. For this reason, the basic functions of the review committee should be to determine whether the appropriate faculty body gave adequate consideration to the faculty member's candidacy in reaching its decision and, if the review committee determines otherwise, to request reconsideration by that body.

It is easier to state what the standard "adequate consideration" does not mean than to specify in detail what it does. It does not mean that the review committee should substitute its own judgment for that of members of the department on the merits of whether the candidate should be reappointed or given tenure.[3] The conscientious judgment of the candidate's departmental colleagues must prevail if the invaluable tradition of departmental autonomy in professional judgments is to prevail. The term "adequate consideration" refers essentially to procedural rather than to substantive issues: Was the decision conscientiously arrived at? Was all available evidence bearing on the relevant performance of the candidate sought out and considered? Was there adequate deliberation by the department over the import of the evidence in the light of the relevant standards? Were irrelevant and improper standards excluded from consideration? Was the decision a bona fide exercise of professional

academic judgment? These are the kinds of questions suggested by the standard "adequate consideration."

If, in applying this standard, the review committee concludes that adequate consideration was not given, its appropriate response should be to recommend to the department that it assess the merits once again, this time remedying the inadequacies of its prior consideration.

An acceptable review procedure, representing one procedural system within which such judgments may be made, is outlined in Regulation 15 of the *Recommended Institutional Regulations*, as follows:

If any faculty member alleges cause for grievance in any matter not covered by the procedures described in the foregoing regulations, the faculty member may petition the elected faculty grievance committee [here name the committee] for redress. The petition will set forth in detail the nature of the grievance and will state against whom the grievance is directed. It will contain any factual or other data which the petitioner deems pertinent to the case. Statistical evidence of improper discrimination, including discrimination in salary, may be used in establishing a prima facie case. The committee will decide whether or not the facts merit a detailed investigation; if the faculty member succeeds in establishing a prima facie case, it is incumbent upon those who made the decision to come forward with evidence in support of their decision. Submission of a petition will not automatically entail investigation or detailed consideration thereof. The committee may seek to bring about a settlement of the issue satisfactory to the parties. If in the opinion of the committee such a settlement is not possible or is not appropriate, the committee will report its findings and recommendations to the petitioner and to the appropriate administrative officer and faculty body, and the petitioner will, upon request, be provided an opportunity to present the grievance to them. The grievance committee will consist of three [or some other number] elected members of the faculty. No officer of administration will serve on the committee.

The Association accordingly recommends:

6. *Petition for Review Alleging Inadequate Consideration.* Insofar as the petition for review alleges inadequate consideration, the functions of the committee which reviews the faculty member's petition should be the following:

(a) to determine whether the decision of the appropriate faculty body was the result of adequate consideration, with the understanding that the review committee should not substitute its judgment on the merits for that of the faculty body;

(b) to request reconsideration by the faculty body when the committee believes that adequate consideration was not given to the faculty member's qualifications (in such instances, the committee should indicate the respects in which it believes that consideration may have been inadequate);

(c) to provide copies of its report and recommendation to the faculty member, the faculty body, and the president or other appropriate administrative officer.

## Endnotes

1. The "Standards for Notice" are as follows:

1. *Not later than March 1 of the first academic year of service*, if the appointment expires at the end of that year; or, if a one-year appointment terminates during an academic year, at least three months in advance of its termination;

2. *Not later than December 15 of the second academic year of service*, if the appointment expires at the end of that year; or, if an initial two-year appointment terminates during an academic year, at least six months in advance of its termination;

3. At least twelve months before the expiration of an appointment after two or more years in the institution. (AAUP, *Policy Documents and Reports*, 9th ed. [Washington, D.C., 2001], 31. [Back to Text](#))

2. Faculties processing complaints under Regulations 10 and 15 may wish to secure the further advice of the Association's Washington office. [Back to Text](#)

3. As used here, "department" may refer to any institutional body or individual responsible for making a recommendation or decision on reappointment. [Back to Text](#)