

Frequently Asked Questions Review of Faculty Policies

Why is the UNC System reviewing faculty policies?

Faculty are at the heart of everything we do as a university, and it has been decades since we've reviewed and updated our policies on faculty support. Our mission has grown, and current policies have not kept pace with changes across higher education.

What will the review consist of?

We want to bring greater fairness and consistency to the way we evaluate and reward faculty. Our review will look at faculty career tracks, post-tenure review, teaching evaluations, and recognition programs that highlight the outstanding work of our scholars. We also need policies to balance faculty workloads and allow us to attract and retain world-class talent across the university. We'll also work to obtain authorization to develop a faculty retirement incentive program.

Who is undertaking the review?

Working with the leadership of the UNC Faculty Assembly, we'll convene chief academic officers, deans, departments heads, faculty representatives, and System Office staff for a series of working groups. A steering committee overseeing this effort will be co-chaired by David English, the UNC System's acting senior vice president for academic affairs and chief academic officer, and Wade Maki, chair of the Faculty Assembly and senior lecturer at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Why is the Board of Governors pursuing a faculty retirement incentive program?

Voluntary incentive programs for faculty retirement have long been available at our peer universities, giving campus leaders a valuable tool for meeting student needs and balancing workloads. UNC System institutions need the same flexibility. During a time of demographic shifts and enrollment challenges, it makes sense for institutions to have tools in place to manage the size of the faculty workforce, while meeting the needs of faculty members at retirement age. The System will seek special funding from the state to be able to offer retirement incentives. Considerations include which institutions are prioritized for the option and how the program will be administered.

Why make changes to faculty workload policy?

The policy is outdated. We want to make sure our faculty workload policy is aligned with our strategic plan - our goals should match what we need today, not what we needed a decade ago. We also want to make sure that faculty are evaluated and rewarded for all their work - committee participation, service, everything. The current policy does not consider research or service, two important components of our mission. It also counts course sections but not the number of students taught, and uses incomplete data from the Delaware cost structure study. The policy should take into account all elements of faculty work in order to be equitable, and ensure all individuals are carrying a full-time workload.

What are faculty career tracks? Why do they need to be reviewed?

When The Code was developed, it contemplated only two types of faculty in the UNC System: tenure-track/tenured faculty, and “special” faculty. This core policy that undergirds all aspects of faculty employment has not been significantly updated since it was first drafted over 50 years ago. The UNC System, like other universities around the country, relies upon many fixed-term faculty who are major contributors to teaching and service in North Carolina. While some institutions have crafted specific policies governing fixed-term faculty employment, there is no UNC Systemwide policy that recognizes this category of employee. Institutions have expanded the use of non-tenure track faculty in recent decades, and there is no baseline regarding best practices for these contracts, including expectations, salary ranges, promotions, and faculty rights.

Why make changes to the post-tenure review policy?

We need to ensure that post-tenure review is comprehensive and rigorous. It should include methods of rewarding outstanding faculty, in addition to identifying areas that need attention. We also need to review and analyze how to best structure the annual review process as a building block of an effective post-tenure review. In all of this, we’ll aim for a more consistent approach to post-tenure review, ensuring fair workloads and standards of productivity. The wide discrepancy in review practices across campuses and departments is a source of tension among faculty, and it feeds a concern about equity in workloads and career opportunities.

Why do we need to review how teaching is evaluated?

Teaching is the core responsibility of faculty, and forms the basis of the mission of the UNC System. The policy framework that sets out campus requirements for teaching evaluations was authored 30 years ago, and has not been updated since. Our knowledge of what constitutes good teaching has grown greatly over that time. We also have learned the various ways in which an individual's ascribed characteristics can influence their evaluation ratings. Faculty deserve an evaluation process that is robust, consistent, equitable, and supported by sound research.

What do you mean by faculty recognition programs?

The Board of Governors operates three faculty recognition programs that span the 17 constituent institutions of the UNC System - the Awards for Excellence in Teaching, the James E. Holshouser Award for Excellence in Public Service, and the Oliver Max Gardner Award. There is a broad consensus that these awards could be better structured to celebrate the excellent work that our faculty are doing across the UNC System. There also is a need to evaluate the specific rewards that faculty members receive when being selected for one of the awards, to ensure that the recognition is commensurate with the importance of the program.

What is the timeline for the policy review?

We hope to do the bulk of the work this winter and spring, so that any policy changes can go to the Board for a vote in summer 2023.