COMMENTARY

Equity and Inclusion for Non-Tenure-Track Faculty

Brian L. Erstad, PharmD,a Andrea Romero, PhD,b Robert Miller, MArch,c Carl Liaupsin, EdD,d Ole J. Thienhaus, MD, MBA,e Paul Wagner, MS, MBA,f Edella Schlager, PhD,g Gayle A. Brazeau, PhDhi

a University of Arizona, College of Pharmacy, Tucson, Arizona
b University of Arizona, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Tucson, Arizona
c University of Arizona, School of Architecture, Tucson, Arizona
d University of Arizona, College of Education, Tucson, Arizona
e University of Arizona, College of Medicine, Tucson, Arizona
f University of Arizona, College of Applied Science and Technology, Tucson, Arizona
g University of Arizona, School of Government and Public Policy, Tucson, Arizona
h Marshall University, School of Pharmacy, Huntington, West Virginia
i Editor, American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education, Arlington, Virginia

Corresponding Author: Brian L. Erstad, University of Arizona College of Pharmacy, Tucson, AR. Tel: 520-626-4289. Email: erstad@pharmacy.arizona.edu

Submitted October 16, 2020; accepted November 23, 2020; ePublished December 2020

Although there are at least twice as many non-tenure-track as tenured and tenure-track first-time faculty entering academia based on data collected from 2013 to 2019, there are ongoing equity, inclusion, and advancement issues between these categories of faculty requiring consideration. Issues in need of addressing include contracts with clear descriptions of responsibilities with regular evaluations and promotion opportunities based on those assigned responsibilities, appropriate compensation including fringe benefits, inclusion in institutional voting and governance, and due process protections against abrupt termination. Further, universities, colleges, and professional schools, such as schools of pharmacy should foster a culture that values all faculty regardless of rank or position. The purpose of this commentary is to describe ongoing efforts and lessons by one public university with a college of pharmacy that has non-tenure-track and tenure-track faculty in the hope of providing insight into how these could be utilized as a basis to inform changes in policy by other universities with colleges or schools of pharmacy, as well as inform possible changes in Academy policy.

Keywords: academia, academic performance, clinical, university

INTRODUCTION

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) uses the term contingent faculty to refer to faculty positions other than tenure-track that often have in common little job security or diminished protections for academic freedom.1 Contingent positions are appealing from an institutional standpoint, since they allow for more flexibility in hiring and retention. Accordingly, AAUP lists a variety of potential faculty positions as contingent including non-tenure-track, clinical, lecturers, instructors, teaching assistants, postdoctoral researchers, adjunct, and part-time. In the academic pharmacy literature, discussions pertaining to faculty positions are usually of a more dichotomous nature, since there are approximately twice as many first-time non-tenure-track as tenured and tenure-track faculty entering academia based on data collected from 2013 to 2019. Most of these non-tenure-track faculty members are clinical.2,3 Additionally, much of the academic pharmacy literature pertaining specifically to clinical practice faculty is focused on scholarship, which is not surprising since practice faculty frequently are expected to perform scholarly activities but often have little formal training in this area.4-7 The requirement for many practice faculty to perform scholarship in addition their teaching, service, and clinical practice responsibilities leads to high rates of burnout compared to tenure-track faculty members.8,9 There is much less in the pharmacy literature on general equity, inclusion, and advancement issues for non-tenure-track appointments, ranging from promotion opportunities to participation in unit and college governance. The purpose of this commentary is to describe some of the major initiatives related to non-tenure-track and tenure-track equity, inclusion, and advancement issues at a public, research 1 university that has a college of pharmacy with clinical practice faculty in the hope of providing insights as a basis for possible changes in academic policies for other universities with colleges or schools of pharmacy contemplating similar initiatives, as well as serve as the basis for possible changes in Academy policy.

Copyright 2020 by American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy.
In June 1993, AAUP released a report titled, “The Status of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty,” which was adopted by elected council leadership. Prior to listing a series of recommendations pertaining to non-tenure-track faculty, the preface of the report raised concerns about administrative attempts to move faculty off the tenure-track and issue term-limited contracts to full-time non-tenure-track faculty that would among other things affect the quality of education and undermine the stability of the tenure system. The report recommended limiting reliance on non-tenure-track faculty and limiting the use of part-time faculty to no more than 15% of the total instruction of an institution. The report listed eight recommendations as minimum standards for non-tenure-track faculty: description of duties, regular evaluations, compensation and promotion based on specified duties, appropriate compensation and fringe benefits, timely notice of non-reappointment, enduring conditions necessary to perform assigned professional duties, inclusion in institutional and departmental governance, and appropriate consideration of part-time faculty for full-time positions that become available. Following publication of the AAUP report, other publications on the AAUP website discussed the rights of non-tenure-track faculty and attempts to control the increasing numbers of non-tenure-track faculty holding contingent appointments.

In November 2012, AAUP council leadership adopted a policy on inclusive governance for faculty members with contingent appointments that are estimated to comprise over 75% of all US faculty appointments (up from approximately 55% in 1975). The five principles forming the basis of recommendations in this report stated that: the term “faculty” should be defined on an inclusive rather than exclusive basis, faculty in contingent appointments should have opportunities for governance similar to those in tenure-track appointments, governance opportunities must be exercised to be genuine, academic freedom and governance reinforce each other, and all faculty members should have academic freedom and be entitled to due process protections.

With respect to pharmacy colleges and schools, the substantial increase in the proportion of clinical (usually non-tenure-track) to tenure-track faculty over the past several decades reflects an attempt to improve the foundational practice skills of pharmacy students prior to graduation. In contrast to tenure-track faculty with teaching and research responsibilities centered on more fundamental scientific research, it is not uncommon for clinical faculty members to have at least 25% of their total effort focused on activities at a clinical practice site. The increased percentage of clinical activities necessitates a reduction in some other area of effort, usually scholarship. These changes come at a time when the tenure system is under increasing scrutiny due to concerns related to long-term productivity, inconsistent and unfair application of tenure-related policies and procedures, and diversity and inclusion issues. There has been a paucity of discussion of these issues in the academic pharmacy literature or guidance from the Academy, despite these substantial changes in the composition of pharmacy faculty in the past few decades and the increasing scrutiny of tenured positions.

For example, AACP does not have formal policy concerning equity, inclusion, and advancement issues for non-tenure-track versus tenured and tenure-eligible faculty members. Similarly, there is no mention of this issue in AACP’s current strategic plan.

The University of Arizona is undertaking initiatives related to recruitment, promotion, and retention in support of career-track faculty. These initiatives also promote the University’s goals and philosophy underpinnings of creating equitable and inclusive conditions of employment for all faculty. One of the early initiatives that will be discussed in this commentary concerns a list of best practices developed by a University task force with the intent of providing guidance to departments and colleges beyond minimum standards for non-tenure-track faculty such as those compiled by AAUP. One caveat to this discussion is that this is a work in progress at the University of Arizona; principles of equity and inclusion involve cultural changes that must be desired and adopted system-wide with ongoing assessments of effectiveness.

Initiatives at the University of Arizona

At the University of Arizona, changes in leadership gave impetus to several initiatives for non-tenure-track faculty. One of the early initiatives was a change in track title from non-tenure-track to career-track faculty to be inclusive (ie, what they are) rather than exclusive (ie, what they are not). This was part of a larger discussion of titles including those in adjunct positions. Revised promotion and tenure documents at the university level addressed the specifics of career-track faculty. For example, in the summary of the candidate’s workload assignment, categories were added for clinical service, extension, and other professional activities in addition to the previous traditional service category. Another change to the promotion and tenure documents for career-track faculty was a revision of the template letter to external reviewers that included consideration of teaching and service in addition to the previous focus on scholarship. In the same spirit, mandates for revised promotion and tenure documents in departments and colleges were developed and implemented. Similarly, there were modifications in policy and process pertaining to annual performance reviews enabling the same basic review processes for career-track, tenured and tenure-eligible faculty. Examples include requirements for peer review. Directions were also provided for subsequent meetings between the administrative head and faculty member to discuss the findings. In addition, there were also directions on the availability of the options for appeals.
An ad hoc committee of the University’s Faculty Senate (voting members include administrators, faculty, students, and appointed personnel) has had an ongoing charge to identify opportunities for career-track faculty for professional advancement and for full participation in shared governance at all levels of the University. Among their findings, this ad hoc committee reported that diversity of current titles has made it difficult for career-track faculty to understand what processes (eg, promotion ladders) and what rights (eg, participation in shared governance) apply to their specific titles. The Vice Provost also appointed two task forces related to career-track faculty. The first was charged with evaluating annual performance review procedures (still ongoing) and the second was charged with developing best practices for career-track faculty.

The Vice Provost asked for volunteers from among department chairs and center directors to serve on the task force to develop a list of best practices for career-track faculty at the University of Arizona. This specific task force was led by the Head of the Department of Pharmacy Practice & Science. Other task force members included interdisciplinary faculty from the Honors College, Architecture, Applied Technology, Linguistics, Disability and Psychoeducational Studies, Physics, Psychiatry, and the School of Government and Public Policy. Issues were discussed by in-person meetings initially, and then transitioned to virtual meetings and email communications due to COVID-19. The task force employed an iterative (modified Delphi approach) for decision-making, and ultimately there was unanimous support for six Best Practices, which underwent minor modifications by a University Steering Committee on Career-track Faculty Processes with subsequent distribution to all heads and directors for feedback (Table 1).

Following the work of the Career-track Faculty Task Force, the Provost appointed a Steering Committee on Career-track Faculty Processes with representation from Human Resources, University Analytics and Institutional Research, Faculty Senate, Department Chairs, and the Provost’s office. The committee’s charge was to identify and advance changes to University policy and administrative processes to improve recruitment, promotion, and retention in support of career-track faculty with the goal of creating equitable and inclusive conditions of employment for all faculty in the University. The work of the Steering Committee is an ongoing effort that is taking place in three phases beginning with shared governance issues, followed by potential policy and title changes, and ending with an implementation phase. The hope is to enter the implementation phase of the Committee’s efforts within the year.

The issue of titles is particularly challenging given the series of titles allowed by the Arizona Board of Regents (ABOR) and the variety of other titles, often with additional prefixes or suffixes assigned at the departmental and college levels. For example, within the general career-track category, the University currently allows for other titles such as instructor, lecturer, professor of practice, clinical, research, or just career-track. From the standpoint of culture, there is nothing to indicate anything but shared respect between faculty members, regardless of department, tenure status, or academic titles.

College of Pharmacy Initiatives and Actions

Apart from efforts at the university level, the College of Pharmacy at the University of Arizona has a long history of working to ensure equity between tenure and non-tenure-track faculty with respect to governance, titles, and cultural issues. The College of Pharmacy at the University of Arizona has two departments, the Department of Pharmacology & Toxicology with tenure-track and tenured faculty who teach and perform scholarship in pharmacology, toxicology, pharmaceutics, drug delivery, medicinal chemistry, and drug discovery, and the Department of Pharmacy Practice & Science that has clinical (primarily non-tenure-track), non-clinical-teaching faculty (non-tenure-track), pharmacogenomic (tenure-track), and health and pharmaceutical outcomes’ faculty (non-tenure-track, tenured and tenure-eligible). All full-time (0.51 or greater full-time equivalent) faculty with responsibilities related to teaching, scholarship, and service (regardless of career- or tenure-track) have voting privileges on departmental and college issues. Further, all major College committees established by bylaws include faculty from both departments. Another example relates to the term “clinical,” which was used in the past as a prefix to the formal titles of assistant, associate, and full professor when describing clinical practice faculty. Approximately ten years ago, the faculty voted to eliminate the “clinical” prefix for general voting and governance issues to eliminate any possible perception of second-class faculty status in the College. From the standpoint of culture, there is nothing to indicate anything but shared respect between faculty members, regardless of department, tenure status, or academic titles.

Lessons Learned and Future Directions

Across the Academy there is increasing recognition that issues of equity, inclusion, and advancement exist between non-tenure-track and tenured and tenure-track faculty. Even the term non-tenure-track refers to what faculty members are not, rather than what they are or can contribute to the program. For some professional schools (eg, medical schools) where the number of tenure-track faculty may be a small minority, such a negative definition is especially incongruous and inconsistent with promoting a culture of inclusion. There are ongoing efforts by national academic
organizations, such as the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and by universities, such as at the University of Arizona, to ensure inclusivity of all faculty members. To achieve this goal, cultural changes will have to be inculcated throughout universities, from appointing career-track faculty to important leadership positions, participating in peer-review committees, providing voting privileges, and, in short, fully incorporating them into the daily life of units or programs. At the same time, they need a functional reason to hold an appointment that is different in nature from their tenured and tenure-eligible colleagues. Recognizing the central and growing roles played by contingent faculty at most universities requires putting policies and practices in place to promote a cohesive culture where all faculty members function as a single equitable community. Failure to promote cohesion is likely to impede timely and effective governance activities necessary to advance the mission of the university.

The experience of one public, research 1 university that has a college of pharmacy with clinical practice faculty provides some potential lessons learned and key steps for other colleges or schools contemplating discussions of faculty equity, inclusion, and advancement. Arguably, the most important lesson learned is that major change requires active and visible support by university administrators, such as the provost and vice-provost. While there are changes that can take place at the college or school of pharmacy level, particularly with respect to culture, more encompassing and longer-lasting policy changes are likely to require commitment by university administrators, inter-connected university-wide committees, and a variety of stakeholders. Examples would include policy changes related to shared governance, titles, promotion and tenure procedures, and annual performance reviews. Such changes are likely to take time, since they often require review and approval by a variety of governing bodies. During the early stages of discussions of faculty equity, inclusion and advancement, a key step early in the process is to develop a shared vision of desired best practices as a direction for reforms.

Finally, the Academy should consider policy changes related to equity, inclusion, and advancement for non-tenure-track faculty. A useful starting point for AAUP would involve reconsideration of policies for description of duties, regular evaluations, compensation and promotion based on specified duties, appropriate compensation and fringe benefits, timely notice of non-reappointment, enduring conditions necessary to perform assigned professional duties, and inclusion in institutional and departmental governance.

REFERENCES
Table 1. List of Best Practices Identified by Career-Track Faculty Task Force

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voting and governance</td>
<td>Career-track faculty should have the same rights to vote and participate in unit governance as tenure track/tenured faculty, except as limited by University Handbook for Appointed Personnel (UHAP) policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracts, equity and compensation</td>
<td>Career-track faculty should have the opportunity for multi-year contracts to the degree that that college and institutional finances permit, as well as clear and non-cumbersome mechanisms for career advancement and compensation commensurate with their contributions to the institution and individual qualifications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions, titles and percent effort</td>
<td>The broader title of career track should be adopted for all non-adjunct, non-visiting faculty who are not classified as tenured, tenure-eligible, or continuing status. All references to non-tenure track should be eliminated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual performance reviews</td>
<td>Career-track faculty should receive annual performance reviews using the same administrative procedures as tenured, tenure-eligible, or continuing status faculty. Where appropriate and needed, specific review criteria should be developed in service to these evaluations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>A clear distribution of effort should be assigned upon hire and revisited annually. Decisions on promotion should be based on performance in workload assignments by domain (teaching, research, outreach/service, clinical, etc).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>The University should foster a more engaged community by giving appropriate representation, including voting rights and participation in shared governance, to employees on the basis of their institutional contributions as opposed to their ranks, positions, or titles.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>