

Report to the Faculty of Arts & Sciences
Committee for Retention, Promotion and Tenure

From: Michael Deschenes, Chair of RPT for 2015-16

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Committee members for 2015-16: Michael Deschenes, George Greenia (replacing John Oakley), Henry Krakauer, JC Poutsma, Michael Tierney, and Susan Webster

This report summarizes the activities of the RPT Committee for the academic year of 2015-16.

The Committee on Retention, Promotion, and Tenure (RPT) serves in an advisory capacity to the Dean of Arts & Sciences. It is comprised of six members who are elected by the Faculty of Arts & Sciences and is charged with reviewing recommendations made by departments and programs of that academic unit concerning the retention, tenure, or promotion of members of those departments and/or programs. The committee's recommendations are forwarded to the Dean of Arts & Sciences who then forwards his/her recommendation to the Provost. Retention (interim review) cases usually come to RPT only when a department or program recommends against retention, or the Dean disagrees with the decision of the department/program. No such retention cases were handled by RPT during 2015-16, although a large number of tenure and promotion cases were submitted for review. During such reviews, the maintenance of objectivity is crucial; thus when a member of the committee had a conflict of interest in the case of a particular candidate – such as being a member of the same department/program – the committee member was replaced for that discussion and decision by a past member of RPT who represented the same academic area, i.e. Area I (humanities), II (social sciences), or III (exact sciences). The RPT wants to express its sincere gratitude to the many former committee members who agreed to serve as substitutes during the past year.

During the 2015-16 academic year, the committee reviewed 19 dossiers for tenure and promotion to the rank of Associate Professor in the fall of 2015. In the spring of 2016, the committee reviewed 10 cases for promotion to the rank of Full Professor. Of the cases up for tenure, all received positive recommendations from RPT, and all but one received similar positive recommendations from the Dean and the Provost. It was determined by the Provost that in one of the 19 cases, a final decision should be delayed for one year. The remaining 18 were granted tenure with promotion to the rank of Associate Professor by the College's Board of Visitors.

During the spring deliberations of RPT, eight of the 10 cases examined for promotion to Full Professor received unanimous positive recommendations, while one of them resulted in three positive votes and three abstentions. Another candidate received a unanimous negative vote. Subsequently, both of those cases were endorsed by the Dean and the Provost, and all 10 candidates received endorsements from the Board of Visitors and were promoted to the rank of Full Professor.

As in the previous several years, 2015-16 was marked by improvements in the quality and thoroughness of dossiers assembled and electronically submitted to RPT's Blackboard site for review. RPT still received too many incomplete or disorganized dossiers. The case involving the split decision (three positive votes to three abstentions) featured numerous inadequacies both in the procedure of gathering material for the dossier, as well as in its content. In particular, some members of RPT expressed the view that with modern technology, much more of the candidate's creative work could have been delivered to, and assessed by, the external reviewers. In this case, the committee had few, if any, reservations about the candidate, but had substantive ones concerning what material was provided to external reviewers along with concerns regarding the narrow, non-comprehensive nature of the letters they wrote.

With respect to the candidate who received a unanimous negative vote from RPT, senior administrators were privy to mitigating factors of which RPT was unaware. Both the Dean and the Provost concluded that those factors were compelling enough to reverse the vote of RPT.

It is noted here that the ad hoc committee charged to examine best practices for RPT completed its work this year and submitted its report to the Dean. One particularly relevant statement in that document strongly recommended that each dossier submitted for review by RPT should include the standards used by the home department/program during its decision-making process for cases of tenure and/or promotion. The RPT welcomes this recommendation. The report also suggested that, in the cases of candidates with joint appointments, more clarity should be provided to the RPT to assist it in assessing the relative weight of each of the two units. Again, the RPT welcomes this suggestion.