

"General Guidelines for Research" in P&T Proposal Appear Contradictory and Meaningless

by
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On 23-Aug-07, Interim CoB Dean Alvin Williams circulated (via e-mail) a draft of the CoB's proposed *new* Promotion and Tenure policies. In that e-mail Williams informed CoB faculty that the College's Management Team and College Advisory Council had both already approved the proposal, and that CoB faculty would be allowed to vote on it at the 31-Aug-07 fall faculty meeting. Among the many fine details in the CoB's Management Team-approved P&T Proposal is the following section, which appears to contain several contradictory and meaningless phrases and thoughts:

General Guidelines for Research

There are sufficient differences across academic disciplines within the College of Business such that journal rankings and classifications should be determined at the department level. Such journal lists require review and approval by the Management Team and Dean.

- The approximate research expectations for receiving promotion in-rank to Associate Professor and/or tenure consists of six publications in refereed journals which establish an individual in the professional literature of his/her disciplinary field. The publications should represent a healthy and respectable blend of quality scholarly journals, with strong preference for articles in A- and B-level journals in the candidate's discipline.
- The quality of research is valued over the quantity of publications. As a result, an increase in the number of A-level publications may decrease the expected number of B-level publications.

A sustained and continued level of productivity is considered a minimum requirement for promotion in-rank to Full Professor.

The first item worth mentioning is the phrase above stating that the approximate research expectations for receiving promotion and/or tenure consists of "six publications in refereed journals which establish an individual in the professional literature of his/her disciplinary field." Which way is this to be interpreted?

Interpretation 1: Publishing 6 refereed journal articles in one's field establishes an individual in the professional literature.

Interpretation 2: One must be careful to ensure that the 6 refereed journal publications that are produced in one's field have the effect of establishing oneself in the professional literature.

The first interpretation sets a numerical standard: 6 refereed journal publications in one's field establishes someone in a professional literature. That's it. The second says that 6 refereed journal publications in one's field might establish someone in a professional literature, while it also may not. Here's an example. Person A comes along and publishes 6 refereed journal articles in his/her field (field Y). He/she is tenured and/or promoted. Next, Person B comes along and publishes 6 refereed journals in his/her field (also field Y). However, members of the CoB's management team don't particularly care for Person B, and they use the fact that he/she has only 3 citations to his/her research to conclude that he/she didn't properly manage the 6 refereed journal publications in a way that "established him/her in a professional literature."

A secondary point worth making here is that the document should say "academic literature" instead of "professional literature," however doing so might jeopardize the prospects of too many of the future accounting hires.

The next statement says that the "publications should represent a healthy and respectable blend of quality scholarly journals, **with strong preference** for articles in A- and B-level journals . . ." Here's a question: how *strong* will the preference for A- and B-level journals be? We think we know the answer to that:



Preference for Sean Salter to have A- and B-level journal publications.



Preference for Kenneth Zantow to have A- and B-level journal publications.

Statement #3 should floor most CoB faculty, because they've never seen it before: **The quality of research is valued over the quantity of publications.** This is a complete 180° on what the CoB was built on, back when "Ed Nissan was the only business professor doing research." It's always been quantity over quality!

Well, what does this statement mean in practice? The next sentence in the policy proposal provides the answer: As a result, an increase in the number of A-level publications **may** decrease the expected number of B-level publications. I have taken the liberty of putting a red box around the key term in the above explanation. If you're like most, you'll be warning those colleagues you are fond of to stick with the "old quantity rule," because this new one looks like a farce. It's hard not to think about the old Life Cereal commercials when you see this statement. Maybe Mikey will get tenure and/or promoted with just a few As. I wouldn't bet on it.

Finally, the excerpt above ends with the meaningless drab: A sustained and continued level of productivity is considered a minimum requirement for promotion in-rank to Full Professor. Will a "sustained and continued" **low** level of productivity suffice? One that barely registers? Probably for some. The language above lacks the substance to not allow it.