

COMMITTEE ON FACULTY AFFAIRS, ACADEMIC FREEDOM, AND TENURE:

A Proposal to Strengthen the Appointments of Nontenured Faculty

With Long Service to the University

Abstract

The Faculty Affairs Committee recommends that the University, in order to attract, retain, and protect the many nontenured faculty on whom it depends, strengthen its commitment to members of this group who have demonstrated their value to Columbia over the years by providing longer notice periods for decisions not to renew their appointments.

Our proposal applies to all full-time nontenured faculty on all Columbia campuses, but is particularly designed for those whose appointments have been extended or renewed beyond the eight-year time limit set by the tenure clock. These faculty hold the following titles:

Lecturer in Discipline, Senior Lecturer in Discipline
Lecturer in Language, Senior Lecturer in Language
Assistant Professor at CUMC, Associate Professor at CUMC, and Professor at CUMC
Assistant Clinical Professor of Law, Associate Clinical Professor of Law and Clinical Professor of Law
Assistant Professor of Practice, Associate Professor of Practice, Professor of Practice

We refer to this group throughout as Non-Tenure-Track (NTT) faculty.

The Prevalence of NTT Faculty at Columbia

The roles, titles and responsibilities of NTT faculty vary throughout the University; however, in every school they play vital roles. In some schools, their roles are mostly indistinguishable from those of their tenured colleagues. NTT faculty conduct a significant portion of the teaching and mentoring of students, serve on committees, carry out research and take on administrative roles. On the medical campus, they in fact constitute a majority of the faculty. In the Mailman School of Public Health, for example, 71% of full-time faculty members are non-tenured. It is important to recognize that most of these faculty members make career-long commitments to the University.

Appointments, Renewals, and Termination

The Faculty Handbook sets the following policy guidelines for termination of nontenured faculty members: “Full-time officers of instruction, with the exceptions noted below, must be given notice no later than March 1 of the first academic year; no later than December 15 of the second; and at least 12 months prior to the end of the stated term of appointment in all subsequent years, except in the case of those in their seventh year of counted service, who must receive notice by May 31.” These are the same guidelines that apply to non-tenured faculty on the tenure track. The main exception applies to CUMC: “Full-time officers of instruction in the Faculties of Dental Medicine, Medicine, Nursing, and Public Health who hold clinical appointments or titles indicating appointments in an affiliated hospital or institute are entitled to six months’ notice after completing two years of full-time service, except when nonrenewal results from the termination or modification of an affiliation agreement between the University and another institution, the closing of an affiliated institution, or significant curtailment of its operations.” It should be noted that the “clinical” prefixes in the schools of Medicine, Dentistry, Nursing and Public Health were recently removed and replaced with “at CUMC.” Now, for example, a nontenured associate professor not on the tenure track has the title Associate Professor of X at CUMC.

The Faculty Handbook further says that “Full-time non-tenured faculty appointed with unmodified titles may be reappointed for one, two, or three years; full-time clinical faculty, practice faculty, and members of the special instructional faculty with the modifier “in (discipline)” in their titles may be offered reappointment for up to five years.”

The institution of tenure, in addition to protecting academic freedom and promoting discovery and the free exchange of knowledge, plays an equally important role in providing students with continuity and consistency in their education. A typical course can take years to develop and refine. In addition, most courses are part of a larger program, the successful design of which requires insight and time. Tenure is a key safeguard against disruptions in the continuity of academic programs—including unpredictable changes in the composition of the faculty—that are damaging to teaching and learning.

For graduate students, particularly doctoral students, it is critical to have a mentor/advisor who is committed to them for the length of their thesis training. A changeover in faculty mentors can have a devastating effect on a doctoral candidate’s career. This is a serious issue on the medical campus, where many doctoral students have NTT faculty members. Last year three senior nontenured faculty members, with over 50 years of combined service to the University, were given letters of non-renewal with six months’ notice. These faculty members were faced with finding new positions in a very short and unrealistic time frame. In addition, they mentored several doctoral students who now had to find alternative mentors for their thesis work. This is a situation that should not be faced by any faculty member who has made a long-term commitment to the University or to their doctoral students.

Additionally, many NTT faculty members are recipients of long-term federal and private grants, which provide salary income for them and for other University personnel, as well as revenues for the University through Indirect Cost Recovery (ICR).

For all of these reasons, it is essential for NTT faculty with long service at Columbia to have a stronger commitment from the University. To earn such a commitment, faculty members must demonstrate their value to the University through excellence in teaching, mentoring, service, and also research where appropriate, in accordance with expectations for all full time faculty members.

While these expectations vary among departments, generally both tenured and non-tenured faculty are responsible for teaching the equivalent of four courses per year, typically two per semester on a nine-month appointment. A course is defined as a semester-long instructional unit in which the faculty member gives all or most of the lectures, leads a seminar, or serves as director for a team-taught class. Other University-related activities such as committee work, directing teaching programs and mentoring graduate students, can also be credited as the equivalent of teaching one semester-long course, depending on the time and labor these activities entail. Involvement in funded research projects also counts as an appropriate portion of an NTT faculty member's teaching commitment, as it does for tenured and tenured-track faculty members. Such substitutions for teaching are granted in consultation with the faculty member's departmental chair or dean.

A long-term commitment to NTT faculty is premised on two assumptions:

1. Faculty will maintain their current level of commitment to teaching, research and service.
2. The financial environment of the School/Department/program is not expected to suffer drastic changes over the course of the commitment (e.g., a steep decline in student enrollment).

Proposed notice provisions for non-renewal of NTT faculty:

For the first 7 years of service, the Faculty Affairs Committee recommends following the guidelines set by the Faculty Handbook, but applying them uniformly to all campuses across the University, including the Medical Center. In their first year, faculty should be apprised of their review schedule. After a review, faculty who are not meeting expectations for their position must be given notice of nonrenewal no later than March 1 of the first academic year; no later than December 15 of the second; and at least 12 months prior to the end of the stated term of appointment in subsequent years, except in the case of those entering their seventh year of counted service, who must receive notice by May 31 in year six. Terms of appointment will vary, depending on current practice and on the faculty member's title.

After 7 years of service, a major review will take place. If the outcome is positive, the faculty member's appointment will be renewed until the next review, sometime in the next 2-5 years, depending on current practice in the school or department. Faculty whose reviews at the end of their seventh year are unsatisfactory, must receive at least an 18 month notice of non-renewal. Faculty with multiyear appointments must receive a notice of non-renewal 18 months prior to the stated term of their appointment.

After 12 years of service, a successful review will mean renewal of the appointment, with the next review to take place in five years. Faculty members whose reviews at the end of their 12th year are unsatisfactory must receive at least 24 months' notice of non-renewal. Faculty with multiyear appointments must receive a notice of non-renewal 24 months prior to the stated term of their appointment.

After 17 years of service, a positive review will mean another renewal of the faculty member's appointment, with the next review to take place in five years. It is recommended, that faculty members, whose reviews at the end of their 17th year are unsatisfactory, should receive at least 36 months' notice of non-renewal. Faculty with multiyear appointments should receive a notice of non-renewal 36 months prior to the stated term of their appointment.