The Role Of Service In P&T Decisions
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ABSTRACT

Promotion and tenure are very important to faculty members, especially to faculty that are untenured or are in the lower academic ranks. Typically, universities grant promotion and tenure (P & T) based on three components: research, teaching, and service. Research is usually relatively well defined and is based on some combination of quality and quantity of presentations and publications. Teaching effectiveness is typically evaluated using peer evaluations, student evaluations, and the ratings of administrators. The third component, service, tends to be the least well defined of the three. The reason for this may be that service is more difficult to quantify because its components tend to be numerous and vague. This study investigates the perceived importance, what is, of service in the P & T decisions and how important service should be in those decisions. Email questionnaires were sent to faculty across the nation to obtain their perceptions concerning the overall importance of service in the P & T process at their school. The survey is designed to capture data regarding the perceived present importance of service in the promotion and tenure process, and what the importance of service in the promotion and tenure process should be. The results indicate that service is considered to be between “slightly” and “moderately” important in obtaining promotion and tenure. Respondents indicated that service should be at least “moderately important” in the P & T decision process. These differences between how important service is and how important it should be are all statistically significant at the 1% level. Overall, the results show that service is more important for the promotion to full professorship decision than it is for the promotion to associate and granting of tenure decisions. In addition, analyses show that how important service is and how important it should be varies significantly with some of the demographic characteristics of the respondents’ schools.

INTRODUCTION

Promotion and tenure (P & T) are very important words for many faculty members, especially for those who are untenured or are in the lower academic ranks. The P & T process rewards faculty members for their accomplishments by providing status, recognition, monetary awards, and job security. While some universities have abandoned the practice of granting tenure, almost without notable exception, they have continued the practice of promoting faculty through the different ranks. Typically, universities grant promotion and tenure based on an evaluation of three components: research, teaching, and service. Research is usually relatively well defined and is based on some combination of quality and quantity of presentations and publications. Teaching effectiveness is typically evaluated using peer evaluations, student evaluations, and the ratings of administrators. While these two factors are usually defined, and sometimes evaluated quantitatively, service, if it is defined at all, tends to be vaguely defined and imprecisely measured. The reason for this is that service may be more difficult to quantify and can be more broadly defined.

To successfully achieve promotion and tenure, a faculty member should know what activities are deemed to be important by their institution. “Faculty members are like other people: they tend to do something for which they will receive a reward” (McCarthy). Thus, faculty members are more likely to engage in activities that they know they will be rewarded and are less likely to engage in activities that will not be rewarded.

This study investigates the perceived importance, what is, of service in the P & T decisions and how important service should be in those decisions. Email questionnaires were sent to faculty across the nation to obtain
their perceptions concerning the overall importance of service in the P & T process at their school. The survey is designed to capture data regarding the present importance of service in the promotion and tenure process, and what the importance of service in the promotion and tenure process should be.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The evaluation of service in the P & T process, at many schools, is vague. The basic definition of service is confusing and is often “applied differently not only at each institution, but may differ from department to department” (McCarthy). The confusion occurs because most schools do not have an explicit policy describing how to evaluate service. Service can include a variety of activities, such as, service to the university, service to the college, service to the department, service to the profession, service to the students, or service to the community. To make matters worse, the rewarded activities may vary from year to year, based on the composition of the P & T committee.

The mission of the university normally helps to determine the weighting placed on the three P & T components. Service has always been part of the mission of universities, “the concept of the collegiate institution was from the beginning an educational and a service endeavor” (Hawthorne and Ninke). In today’s world, “service is a mission of higher education both public and private in varying degrees and is perceived by many to be as inherent to a college or university as is teaching and research” (Hawthorne and Ninke).

The findings of Lein and Metz’s study of faculty evaluation systems in colleges of business support the idea that teaching, research, and service are all considered to be required activities of faculty members. Lein and Metz found that AACSB-accredited schools assigned average weights of 39%, 40%, and 21%, respectively, to teaching, research, and service. Non-AACSB-accredited schools assigned average weights of 56%, 19%, and 25% to teaching, research, and service. While the importance of teaching and research varies greatly, depending on accreditation, the importance of service is a significant component of P & T and is valued about the same at all schools of business. A study by Tong and Bures supports the findings of Lein and Metz.

The question remains, why is the definition of service so vague even though service is a significant requirement of faculty? According to Florestano and Hambrick there are three reasons. First, “profession-related and non-profession-related activities are not distinguished from one another.” Second, good measures of service do not exist, thus, “it is difficult to distinguish the excellent from the good, the good from the mediocre, or the mediocre from the poor.” Third, “service is not highly valued by university faculty members and administrators and, thus, not well rewarded.”

The solution, then, may be to determine what a good definition of service is. One professor states “I do like knowing the criteria that guide how my performance is judged” (Bensimon and O’Neil). Tong and Bures define a good faculty evaluation system as one that “encourages behavior that will lead to the achievement of institutional goals, provides bases for improvement, is results oriented, has clearly stated criteria, and is explicitly linked to the reward system – merit pay, reappointment, promotion, and tenure.” Service usually consists of three main areas: service to the institution, service to the profession, and service to the community. A study by Ehie and Karathanos found that schools rank service to the institution as most important, service to the profession second, and service to the community third.

Once service is defined, the next step is to specify the relative importance that will be placed on it. If the components and weight are poorly defined faculty are more likely to expend their energies on activities that they know will be rewarded. Since teaching and research activities are better defined at most universities, faculty are more likely to concentrate their efforts in those areas instead of service activities as they know they will be rewarded for their efforts. This paper adds to the literature by examining both the perceived present importance of service in the P & T process and perceptions of what that importance ought to be.
THE STUDY

The data for this paper were collected from a survey that was sent by Email to a systematic sample of all faculty members in the United States. A total of 1,335 faculty members were selected by taking every fourth faculty member listed in the Hasselback directory, excluding adjunct faculty and deans. Respondents were given three ways in which to respond to the survey. They could reply to the Email and answer the survey as it was included in the body of the Email, they could click on a link to a webpage on which they could complete and submit the survey, or they could print the survey and mail it back. A total of 98 responses were received from the initial mailing and 153 Emails were returned as undeliverable. The undeliverable Emails were checked for the accuracy of the address, corrected, and resent. From the corrected mailing an additional 6 responses were received. Approximately a month later a reminder was sent to all faculty and 43 additional responses were obtained. A total of 147 responses were received yielding a response rate of 11%.

The survey consisted of two series of statements relating to the perceived importance of service in the P & T decision at their institution and how important it should be. Additionally, demographic questions were included to provide a portrait of the typical respondent and to examine differences in opinions related to demographics.

RESULTS

Demographic response data\(^1\) indicate that about 93% of the respondents are teaching at schools with 20,000, or less, full time equivalent (FTE) students. More than half of them are at schools with between 5,001 and 20,000 FTEs and slightly more than two-thirds of the respondents’ schools are public colleges and universities with the remainder being private. Almost 80% (79.86%) of the colleges of business (COB) are accredited by the AACSB, more than half of the COBs offer a masters degree and almost one-fourth offer a doctoral degree.

One series of questions related to perceptions of how important service currently is in P & T decisions at the respondent’s school by asking “How important do you believe that service is in the promotion to Associate professor decision at your present school?” A second series related to how important service should be in those decisions by asking “How important do you believe that service should be in the promotion to Associate professor decision at your present school?” The questions were repeated for promotion to Full professor and the tenure decisions. Five response categories labeled “not important,” “slightly important,” “moderately important,” “important,” and “very important” were provided for each of the service related questions. Note that the midpoint of the scale (3) was “moderately important.”

Respondents believe that service is “slightly” to “moderately” important (mean = 2.44) in the decision to promote a faculty member to associate professor. This result is similar to that of the question concerning the granting of tenure. The mean response for granting tenure is 2.44. The similarity of the two results may occur because many schools combine the two decisions and/or use similar criteria in the evaluation process. The overall results concerning promotion to full professorship yields a mean of 3.05, suggesting that service is seen to be moderately important in the evaluation process. The increased importance of service in the promotion to full, in comparison to its role in the decisions concerning promotion to associate and tenure, suggests that the evaluation process for the promotion to full is inherently different. Results of a t-test tend to confirm that observation. The t-statistics, not tabulated, for the comparison of the importance of service in the promotion to full vs. promotion to associate and the promotion to full vs. granting of tenure are 4.91 and 4.73 respectively. Both are significant at 0.01% level of confidence. These results suggest that service is perceived to be significantly more important in the promotion to full than it is in the promotion to associate or the granting of tenure. There is no significant difference in the importance of service between the associate and tenure decisions.

The mean response to the question of how important service should be for the promotion to associate decision is 2.92, which corresponds approximately to the category “moderately important.” The mean response for the tenure decision question is 2.98. Again, this result is similar to the promotion to associate decision. For the

\(^1\) A copy of the statistical tables can be obtained by contacting the lead author.
question concerning how important service should be in the promotion to full professor, the mean response is 3.61, suggesting that service should be “moderately important” to “important.” An analysis of how important should service be in the three P & T decisions reveals that service should be considerably more important for the full professor decision than the associate and tenure decisions and t-test results confirm the increased importance. Responses to how important service should be in the promotion to full professor decision were compared with those for the promotion to associate decision. The t-statistic, not reported, was 6.25. A similar analysis comparing the promotion to full decision with the tenure decision yielded a t-statistic of 5.45. Both of these t-statistics are significant at 0.01% level of confidence. These results suggest that faculty believe service should be a more important factor for the full professor decision than the other two decisions. There is no significant difference in how service should be valued for the associate and tenure decisions.

A statistical comparison of the means of responses to the questions of “how important service is” and “how important service should be” for each of the three decisions was made. In each case the mean response is significantly higher, at the 0.01 level, for should be. This indicates that faculty members believe more importance should be attached to service when P & T decisions are made. They may have that opinion because they see service as a required component demanding a large commitment of time that goes under rewarded.

HOW IMPORTANT SERVICE IS: DIFFERENCES BASED ON DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

Demographic information was obtained from the respondents relating to the size of the school, whether it is a public or private institution, its AACSB accreditation status and the highest degree offered. Statistical analyses were run to determine any significant differences that existed between the mean responses based on these factors. Statistical tests were run to find any significant differences in the mean responses to how important service “is” in the three decisions (promotion to associate and full, and tenure) grouped by the size of the school, whether it is a public or private institution, its AACSB accreditation status and the highest degree offered. Schools were grouped into three groups of approximately the same size; small (5,000 or less FTE), medium (5,001 to 10,000 FTE), and large (More than 10,000 FTE). This grouping resulted in 39% of the respondents in the small school category, 30% in the medium, and 31% in the large category.

A Kruskal-Wallis analysis indicated that significant differences in perceptions of how important service is based on the size of the school. Those differences were significant at the 0.01 level for promotion to associate, 0.05 for promotion to full, and 0.01 for tenure. Also, results indicate little difference between the attitudes of respondents at small and medium schools. However, significant differences were observed between attitudes of respondents at small and medium schools compared with respondents at larger schools (more than 10,000 FTE). Respondents at small and medium schools tend to believe that service is more important in all three decisions than do respondents at larger schools. That observation may reflect reality because the mission of smaller schools typically places less emphasis on research and more on teaching and service whereas, research is usually a major component of the evaluation model in larger schools.

When the respondents are divided based on their affiliation with either a public or private university no significant differences are present. Therefore, it appears that both the public and private school weight service in a similar manner for the three P & T decisions. Also, in terms of the accreditation status (AACSB or non-AACSB) both types of schools appear to place about the same weight on service for the promotion to associate decision and the granting of tenure decision. However, for the full professor decision there is a significant difference in the weighting of service. At universities that are AACSB accredited service is believed to be more important in the evaluation process for the full professor promotion than it is at non-AACSB universities for the same decision.

Significant differences were also present when responses were grouped based on the highest degree offered by the institution. In comparing schools that offer only bachelors with schools that also offer masters, there are no significant differences in the perceived importance of service in all three P & T decisions. Significant differences are present, however, in the comparisons between schools that offer a doctorate and those that offer only the bachelors and masters as their highest degree. The significant differences are present for both the promotion to associate and granting tenure decisions. In both cases, doctoral granting schools appear to place considerably less importance on
service than the schools that offer as their highest degree either the bachelors or the masters. Interestingly there is no significant difference in the perceived importance of service in the promotion to full decisions based on the classification of schools by highest degree offered. Taken together it appears that faculties on the tenure track at doctoral granting school believe they are largely evaluated on non-service factors (i.e. research) but service becomes a significant factor in the attempts to become full professor.

Overall, the results suggest that the relative perceived importance placed on service in P & T decisions is not uniform across all of the schools in the sample. Rather, the relative importance varies with the characteristics of the school and the analysis tends to show two distinct groups. Schools that were classified as small and medium in size place significantly more emphasis on service for all three decisions than do the large schools. Also, schools that do not offer a doctoral degree place more importance on service for the promotion to associate and granting of tenure decisions than do schools that offer a doctorate.

HOW IMPORTANT SERVICE SHOULD BE: DIFFERENCES BASED ON DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

Statistical tests were also run to find any significant differences in the mean responses to how important service should be based on the demographic factors. When the responses are divided based on the size of the university, the chi-square statistics reveals significant differences among the responses related to the size of school for the promotion to associate and granting of tenure decisions. There is no significant difference in how important service should be for all three of the P & T decisions at small and medium schools and between medium and large schools. However, significant differences are present when small and large schools are compared for promotion to associate and granting of tenure. For both the promotion to associate decision and the granting of tenure decision, respondents from large schools believe there should be significantly less emphasis on service than the respondents from small schools. The magnitude and direction of the differences in the mean responses from small to medium to large schools for promotion to associate (e.g. 3.16, 2.91, and 2.64 for small to large) indicates that a trend exists and the differences between small and medium and between medium and large are not enough to indicate significance.

Interestingly, there is no significant difference among the three sizes of schools when it comes to how important service should be in the promotion to full. The lack of significance for the chi-square statistics for the full professor decision suggest that despite the obvious differences based on school size for the associate and tenure decisions the same standard for service should be applied to the full professor decision regardless of the size of the school.

The chi-square statistics are not significant in the responses for how service should be used in each of three P & T decisions based on the classification of public vs. private universities. The insignificant differences suggest that respondents from both public institutions and private universities believe that service should be valued in a similar fashion.

According to a Kruskal-Wallis analysis, based on the accreditation status of the respondents’ schools, significant differences are revealed. Respondents from AACSB schools believe that service should be valued significantly less for the promotion to associate decision and the granting of tenure decision than their counterparts at the non-AACSB schools. For example, the mean response of faculty from AACSB schools is 2.79 for the promotion to associate decision (between slightly important and moderately important) is significantly less than the mean response of 3.46 (between moderately important and important) from faculty at non-AACSB schools. This relationship holds true for the granting of tenure decision as well. However, the beliefs of the two groups of faculty converge when it comes to the promotion to full decisions. The slight difference between the two means is not significant.

Finally, analyses were conducted based upon the highest degree offered by the university. The chi-square statistic is significant for the promotion to associate decision and the granting of tenure decision. Respondents from institutions offering only a bachelors degree and those that also offer a masters reported no significant difference in how service should be used in the three P & T decisions. Significant differences are present in the comparison between the doctoral granting institutions and those that offer only a bachelors or masters degree. Respondents from
doctoral granting schools believe that service should be valued significantly less than their counterparts from at the other types of institutions for the promotion to associate and granting of tenure decisions. There is no significant difference of the responses for the promotion to full decision.

Overall, there are significant differences in opinions of how service should be used in the P & T process based on the size of the university, accreditation status and highest degree offered. However, these differences are present only at the promotion to associate decision and the granting of tenure decision. Across the various demographic factors the respondents’ beliefs are similar for the full professor decision. This indicates that faculty members have different views of how service should be used in the promotion to associate and the granting of tenure decisions based upon the characteristics of their institution and that these characteristic are not important for the promotion to full. In fact, respondents report that the importance of service should be uniform across all universities for the promotion to full decision. There is no significant difference based on public versus private classification.

**COMPARISON OF HOW IMPORTANT SERVICE IS AND SHOULD BE: DIFFERENCES BASED ON DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS**

Response means were tested to determine if significant differences exist between the attitudes of respondents, grouped by demographic factors, on how important service is and how important it should be in the three decisions investigated. Results indicate that respondents, overall as a group, believe that service should be more important than it currently is in each of the decisions.

Respondents at small schools believe that not enough importance is given to service in each of the three P & T decisions. These results are similar to those of the large schools where respondents felt that service is under valued in the P & T decisions. For the medium schools, respondents felt that service should be given more weight for the promotion to associate decision but, the difference was not significant at the 0.01 level. However, they believe that service should be given a significantly greater emphasis in the promotion to full decision and the granting of tenure decision.

When considering whether the university was public or private, both groups believed, at the 0.10 level of significance (or stronger), that more emphasis should be placed on service in P & T decisions. However, for public universities the differences were significant at the 0.01 level, indicating that respondents from public universities believed more strongly that more emphasis should be placed on service. Respondents at both AACSB accredited and non-accredited schools believed, at the 0.01 level of significance, that more emphasis should be placed on service in all three P & T decisions.

A comparison of how important service is with how important service should be, based on the highest degree offered, yielded some interesting differences. Interestingly, respondents at institutions offering only a bachelors degree believed that their institutions properly valued the importance of service in the promotion to full decision but that it should be given more weight in the promotion to associate and tenure decisions. For schools offering masters and doctoral degrees, respondents believed that more emphasis should be placed on service for all of the decisions. Additionally, the significance level (0.01) of the difference was greater than that for schools (0.10) offering only a bachelors degree.

**CONCLUSIONS**

About 93% of the respondents were teaching at schools with 20,000, or less, FTE students and over two-thirds were teaching at public colleges and universities. Nearly 80% of the COBs are accredited by the AACSB, more than half offer a masters degree and almost one-fourth offer a doctoral degree.

Overall the results indicate that the importance of service is not uniform for the different P & T decisions. Service is considered to be only “slightly important” to “moderately important” in the promotion to associate and in the tenure decisions. However, service is seen as “moderately important” in the promotion to full professor decision, which is significantly stronger than the support shown for promotion to associate and for tenure. Also, respondents
indicated that service should be given more weight in each of the three P & T decisions. The differences between how service is valued and service should be valued for each of the three P & T decisions is statistically significant. Analyses comparing how important service is and how important service should show the faculty respondents typically believe that service is undervalued by their institutions and that additional emphasis should be given to service.

Further analyses revealed that the importance of service is dependent on demographic factors of the school. Small and medium schools presently place more emphasis on service than large schools for all three P&T decisions. Non-PhD schools place more emphasis on service than schools with PhD programs for the promotion to associate and tenure decisions. Interestingly, the importance of service is perceived to be the same for the promotion to full professor regardless of the highest degree offered by the department. Public and private schools value service essentially the same in each of the P&T decisions.

Significant differences were present for how important service should be when the data were grouped by demographic factors. When comparing small schools to large schools, AACSB schools to non-AACSB schools, and PhD schools to non-PhD schools in the promotion to associate and tenure decisions, significant differences were found in how service should be valued. Generally, respondents from smaller, non accredited schools tended to believe that more weight should be given to service in the promotion to associate and tenure decisions. However, there is no significant difference among these groups for how important service should be in the promotion to full professor decision.

REFERENCES
