

The driving force behind the consideration of modifications in the criteria for promotion and tenure in the School of Medicine is an attempt to deal with the increasingly collaborative nature of biomedical research, both nationally and at the Health Center. In particular, at the Health Center there are a number of research efforts in which faculty with unique skill sets are essential for the success of research programs, yet these individuals are themselves not the principal investigator or even the “prime mover” for the research. Examples of the skill sets of such individuals are biostatisticians, mathematicians, physicists and modelers, and activities in their specialized areas are their primary responsibilities. Almost always these individuals are faculty members, indeed top individuals with these skill sets would likely not accept positions here unless they are given faculty rank.

If it is indeed the case that individuals whose job description is largely as essential research collaborators are given faculty rank, as is certainly the case at present and likely in the future, it is incumbent on the institution to develop criteria whereby such individuals can be evaluated for promotion and perhaps tenure. One simple solution to this situation is of course to simply use the present criteria. However, for individuals in the investigator track, where almost all such “collaborative individuals” would be placed, the current promotion/tenure criteria would most often preclude the possibility of such collaborative individuals being promoted or given tenure – even if they were doing everything that their job description requires, and doing it in an exemplary fashion.

What then are the possible responses of the institution to the problem noted above? It appears there are three.

- 1) Retain the current promotion/tenure criteria. This is simple, (and will keep us “pure”) but will likely lead to an inability of most individuals of this type to be promoted/tenured. If they are in a medical educator track, then there is no up or out proviso, so they would not be lost after 7+ years. However, it seems likely that this “option” would make it more difficult to attract and retain top-notch individuals of this type.
- 2) Create a separate professional category for collaborative investigators.
- 3) Modify current promotion/tenure criteria to recognize the essential and valuable contributions of collaborative individuals to our research enterprise.

There can certainly be discussion of whether option 2 or 3 is best, but given the plethora of “professional categories” already available, it doesn’t seem appropriate at this time to create one more.

Consequently, a proposal being considered is to modify the current promotion/tenure guidelines to recognize a reality – but to ensure in as far as possible that individuals in this situation who are considered for promotion/tenure are: a) indeed essential; b) make high quality independent contributions to several different research programs; and c) demonstrate significant contributions to their own fields as well.

The great concern with any such modified criteria is, of course, how individuals in this situation will be evaluated by the SAPC to be sure that they do or do not meet these criteria,

especially since so much of these individuals' work is collaborative. Certainly, any independent publications or outside funding for such individuals can be evaluated relatively easily and outside referees could readily evaluate the importance, novelty and significance of any such independent work. However, while independent achievements of the latter type may be required under any new promotion/tenure guidelines, this may reflect a minor fraction of these individuals' efforts, with the majority being collaborative. How will the collaborative achievements of these individuals be evaluated? It seems most likely that the usual evaluation methods may not be appropriate, since what is needed is independent assessment of the importance, novelty and significance of the individual's contributions to collaborative work. Some suggestions to obtain balanced, objective evaluation of the latter include the following:

- 1) Each Principal Investigator or Research Group head with which the individual publishes collaboratively should write a letter to the SAPC outlining in detail the contribution of this individual to any publication(s) and why the individual's unique skill set was essential.
- 2) The individual's Department Chair/Center Director must provide an extensive list of outside referees who are capable of evaluating the importance, novelty and significance of the specific contributions of the individual under consideration to publications with which he/she is associated, as well as any independent work.
- 3) Some of the references described in 2) above should also be requested to provide additional names of qualified referees.
- 4) In so far as possible, referees should be people who have had no direct interaction with the individual under consideration.