

CMUFA on “Variable Workload” Proposals

November 2012

The Agreement (Article 10.14.a) requires departments to review their procedures, criteria, standards, and bylaws (or just “bylaws” for short) every three years. It is during this review that the administration can request departments to consider changes. (Requests for changes at other times are to be restricted to unusual situations such as changes in external accreditation standards – see 10.14.b.)

As per a schedule agreed to by the FA and CMU in 2008, each year departments in two colleges are asked to conduct their periodic reviews. We believe that having the dean show his/her cards to all departments at the same time benefits each department’s ability to respond in the way that best fits its needs.

The colleges conducting reviews in 2012-13 were Science & Technology and Health Professions. Departments in both colleges have been asked to consider adopting a plan for faculty workload with “Research Intensive” and “Teaching Excellence” tracks. Of particular interest to the FA is that the deans have written college-wide standards of evaluation for faculty in these tracks and have indicated that departments adopting the track plan must also adopt these standards by adding them to their bylaws as appendices. Communications with the CST dean’s office have confirmed that they do indeed view these as college-wide standards that could only be changed by mutual consent of the dean and *all the departments in the college*.

Article 10 makes clear that each department has the right to propose changes to its bylaws according to the process outlined therein. Article 14 makes clear that a department’s faculty are best informed about the nature of their discipline(s) and are therefore in the best position to develop the criteria and standards for evaluating the work of faculty in RTP decisions. The chairs of the FA Grievance Committee believe that adoption of college-wide criteria and standards that departments may not individually modify to suit their needs is a violation of these two articles of the Agreement. We filed a grievance to this effect on October 15. Initial discussions with representatives of Faculty Personnel Services (the so-called “Step One” meeting) will take place on Nov. 7.

It is important for faculty to understand that the FA is not objecting to the possibility of research or teaching tracks. The objection is to the imposition of college-wide standards by the administration, which the FA believes is a ceding of the departmental autonomy protected by Articles 10 and 14 of the Agreement. Some departments, notably Psychology, have already developed modified workload arrangements and incorporated them into their bylaws. Other departments, including some in CST and CHP, may want to consider doing so as well. As long as the department freely deliberates and proposes changes that are suitable for its faculty and are consistent with the Agreement, the FA is supportive of this process.