FINAL REPORT:
Term Faculty Task Force

2018

Task Force Members:

- Kimberly Eby, Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs and Development, Office of the Provost (Co-Chair)
- John Cantiello*, Associate Professor, Health Administration and Policy (Co-Chair)
- Karen Alcalde, Board of Visitors representative
- Laurence Bray*, Associate Chair, Bioengineering
- Brian Fitzpatrick*, Assistant Professor, English
- Al Fuertes*, Associate Professor, School of Integrative Studies
- Michelle Lim, Human Resources Faculty Initiatives Manager
- Joseph Marr*, Associate Professor, Computational and Data Sciences
- Cindy Parker*, Assistant Professor, Management
- Keith Renshaw, Chair, Psychology and Faculty Senate
- Larry Rockwood, Chair, Biology
- Ellen Rodgers, Associate Dean, College of Education and Human Development
- Girum Urgessa, Associate Professor, Civil, Environmental and Infrastructure Engineering

*Denotes term faculty member
Introduction

Nationally, faculty hiring and retention have changed dramatically in the past two decades, as financial pressures impact how institutions of higher education balance research responsibilities with teaching, mentoring and advising needs. Increasingly, universities and colleges have hired non-tenure line faculty to meet institutional teaching and learning responsibilities, allowing tenure-line faculty to spend more time on their research and scholarly work. Non-tenure line faculty, referred to as term faculty here at Mason, have also been hired in place of tenure-line faculty as an approach to cost-savings during lean economic times. Traditionally, term faculty contracts are shorter, requiring less of an institutional commitment to the position, there are no start-up or research-related costs, and salaries are lower. National conversations and research on term faculty show that they are often treated with less respect than their tenure-line colleagues, have more restricted access to professional development resources, and have fewer opportunities for career progression.¹

Mason’s Strategic Plan is ambitious, and seeks to achieve what few institutions have accomplished. Our goals include both strengthening our reputation as a high-caliber research-intensive institution, while simultaneously expanding our access to excellence through continuing to serve a highly diverse student population. Meeting these seemingly contradictory goals requires bold thinking about how we recruit, retain, and support all of our faculty communities. Mason would be unable to thrive without our term faculty. We must recognize term faculty contributions in a systematic and inclusive way.

The Term Faculty Task Force aims to improve the status and quality of term faculty experiences through creating new, inclusive frameworks for term faculty, from strengthening meaningful pathways for career progression to heightening recognition of their varied contributions to the University. Our vision has been to identify aspirational, yet pragmatic, goals that will enhance the lived experiences of Mason’s term faculty while strengthening Mason’s capacity to deliver on its strategic vision. Ultimately, we aim for term faculty positions to be viewed as career opportunities, just as tenure-track positions are.

The Term Faculty Task Force was convened in spring 2017 through a partnership between the Faculty Senate and the Office of the Provost. The task force was charged with identifying challenges and difficulties for term faculty, as well as career development and advancement opportunities, and generating recommendations to address those challenges and opportunities. Among the myriad issues related to the well-being of the term faculty, the task force was asked to address such issues as compensation, release time, promotion, contract lengths, responsibilities and expectations, performance evaluation, and others. As appropriate, these recommendations should apply to all instructional term faculty, including those with joint appointments in University Life and in public-private partnerships (e.g., Mason-INTO, the Smithsonian Mason School of Conservation [SMSC]).

There were a number of issues that emerged as part of the task force’s inquiry that were beyond the scope of our work for this report. First of all, due to the nature of their positions, research and clinical term faculty call for different processes and guidelines; their needs and concerns should be addressed as soon as possible through a separate effort. Additionally, some members of our community raised the issue of creating a process for tenure that is based truly on genuine excellence in teaching (not the scholarship of teaching and learning). This possibility should be explored in a future effort.

The task force was co-chaired by the Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs and Development and a term faculty member from the College of Health and Human Services. The additional nine faculty members included five term and one tenured faculty, each from different colleges/schools. Of these, one had to be a Faculty Senator; one a chair/Local Academic Unit (LAU) head from a department/program with many term faculty; and one an Associate Dean from a college/school with many term faculty. The chair of the Faculty Senate was a member of our task force, and we had a representative from both Human Resources and Payroll and the George Mason University Board of Visitors (BOV).

**Term Faculty Task Force Values**
The task force’s work is guided by the following mutually agreed-upon values:

- Equity
- Faculty rights
- Respect for all the diverse roles faculty play within the institution
- Recognition of the strengths of all contributors to our community
- Inclusivity
- Creation of opportunities regardless of background or title
- Transparency
- Faculty well-being
- The spirit of possibility
- Unity

The Term Faculty Task Force engaged in the following activities to meet our charge:

- We researched promising practices and policies from across the country and our peer institutions, informed in large part by *The Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success*, a national leader and resource on non-tenure line faculty.
- We examined existing practices at Mason through interviewing nearly all of the department chairs/Local Academic Unit (LAU) heads.
- We developed and conducted a term faculty survey that solicited perspectives from all full-time faculty (tenure-line, term, and administrative/professional) at Mason to inform our recommendations.
- We held three community-wide forums (fall 2017, spring 2018, fall 2018) to share our progress, communicate findings, and gather feedback from campus community members.
- We requested feedback on our draft recommendations from our Mason faculty colleagues and leadership through an online survey in fall 2018.

**Review of National Practices and Policies**
Meeting for the first time in spring 2017, the task force began identifying goals and priorities for improving the standing of term faculty at Mason. Researching national promising practices and resources throughout late spring and early summer 2017 helped inform interview questions for department chairs/LAU heads. Our review continued throughout the summer and fall 2017, ultimately informing our spring 2018 faculty survey.

Key results from our research indicate the following:

- Policies should ensure term faculty members are represented appropriately in matters of shared governance, including hiring, evaluation, promotion, curriculum, work environments, & bylaws.
- Term faculty should have access to grievance and due process procedures.
- Given appropriate credentials, term faculty should be able to serve on graduate committees.
- Given strong performance, there should be expectations for continued employment and longer contracts.
• Expectations for term faculty promotion should be standardized and communicated.
• Relationships between workload expectations and term faculty evaluation should be explicitly stated, including responsibilities for administration, leadership, service, and research.
• Resources and support for professional development should be available.

**Interviews with Department Chairs/ LAU Heads**

Conducted during the summer of 2017, the interviews were key in revealing current practices and knowledge regarding term faculty at Mason. Task force members interviewed 59 department chairs/ LAU heads or other relevant college/school leaders. The interview data was analyzed and presented at a community forum in fall 2017 and posted on the Office of the Provost website.

Key results from our interviews indicated the following:
• Respondents expressed a strong desire to support term faculty.
• Expectations for service and research vary in practice and whether they are explicit in contracts.
• Generally speaking, standard teaching loads for term faculty are 4:4.
• Some respondents were unaware that pathways for promotion for term faculty exist.
• Respondents articulated a desire and need for clearer guidelines and policies.
• It is very rare for term faculty to participate in review and/or promotion committees.
• Low compensation, particularly when compared to tenure-line faculty, was a source of low morale.
• LAU leadership plays a critical role in shaping unit culture for term faculty.

**Term Faculty Survey**

In fall 2017, the task force developed a survey for all full-time faculty that was administered in early spring 2018. The survey focused on what Mason faculty would like to see change for term faculty in an ideal world. A total of 748 full-time faculty responded, resulting in a 31% response rate. The results were analyzed and shared through a community forum and the Office of the Provost website. Open-ended comments from the survey were reviewed and summarized in summer 2018 and informed the development of our recommendations.

Key results from our survey indicated the following:
• Support for issues showed little variability across faculty ranks, nearly all issues were rated as important by term, tenure-line, and administrative/professional faculty.
• Issues that faculty indicated were important included
  o Access to professional development opportunities, including reimbursement for expenses
  o Voting rights and participation in faculty governance
  o Considerations for term faculty conducting research
  o Clearer policies regarding
    ▪ Performance evaluations and contract renewals
    ▪ Process for promotion
    ▪ Workload specifications and expectations
  o Support for increased pre and post-promotion contract lengths
  o Tenure-line faculty showed least support for creation of study leave policies for term faculty
Task Force Recommendations

Contract Lengths

- Flexibility for academic units is imperative, but academic units should not use more than three 1-year contracts for any individual term faculty member. The practice of issuing repeated 1-year contracts for an individual faculty member over many years can be exploitative over an extended time.

- In order to create a more stable environment for term faculty members, all LAUs should establish pre-promotion contract pathways. Units have the flexibility to choose pathways that best fit their hiring needs.

Examples of initial and pre-promotion contract lengths for new term faculty hires are as follows:
  - Three 1-year contracts, followed by a 3-year contract
  - 1-year contract, followed by a 2-year contract, then a 3-year contract
  - 2-year contract, followed by a 2-year contract, then another 2-year contract
  - 3-year contract, followed by another 3-year contract

- The Office of the Provost should create and communicate guidelines to LAUs for the recommended procedures for term faculty appointment to multi-year contracts. These guidelines should provide guidance to LAUs about any exceptions, in addition to addressing leave policies for term faculty.

- Upon promotion, a new contract will be issued and contract lengths for term faculty should increase to 5 years (longer contract lengths are acceptable).

Promotion

- Mason is committed to creating a culture of success and pathways for promotion for all faculty
  - Academic units are expected to support the process of term faculty members going up for promotion to Associate Term Professor or to Senior Instructor/Associate Professor of Practice after their 5th year of service.
  - Academic units are expected to support the process of term faculty members going up for promotion to Full Term Professor or to Distinguished Instructor/Full Professor of Practice when they meet the LAU criteria for promotion.

- Promotion pathways should be available to term faculty with and without the terminal degree in the field:
  - For term faculty with the terminal degree in the field, promotion will be from Assistant Term Professor to Associate Term Professor, to Full Term Professor.

---

2 The Term Faculty Task Force recommendations reflect the consensus of the task force members and are collectively informed by our research into national effective practices, our interviews with chairs/LAU heads, the results of our survey, and feedback collected formally and informally during fall 2018.

3 The instructor series titles are appropriate for persons who hold the master’s degree or equivalent academic and/or professional qualifications, but who do not hold a terminal degree in the field. The term professor of practice series titles may be used for faculty in lieu of the term professor series titles if appropriate for the assignment and credentials of the individual. For disciplines where professional preparation of students is a major goal, the involvement of experienced practitioners in teaching the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the profession may be valuable. Professors of practice bring specialized expertise to the instructional programs of the university and may or may not hold a terminal degree in the discipline or a related field of study.
For term faculty without the terminal degree in the field, promotion will either be
- from Instructor, to Senior Instructor, to Distinguished Instructor, or
- from Assistant Professor of Practice, to Associate Professor of Practice, to Full Professor of Practice.

- The Faculty Handbook should be revised to make explicit pathways for promotion for term faculty, including general criteria for term faculty promotion (See Appendix A).
- All term faculty must be evaluated by the LAU, the Dean, and the Provost for promotion.
- Each LAU should develop and communicate their process and criteria for term faculty promotion.
  - LAUs should develop and communicate clear expectations around the composition of the review committee. The membership of the review committee should include both term and tenured faculty who are typically at or above the rank to which the candidate is being promoted.
- Promotion casebooks should follow the guidelines from the Office of the Provost. LAUs who require additional documentation should communicate that clearly to their term faculty members.
- The Office of the Provost should:
  - Create guidelines for the recommended procedures for term faculty promotion.
  - Hold term faculty promotion information sessions.
  - Working with Faculty Senate and University Counsel, update the appeals process to be inclusive of term faculty.

**Compensation and Benefits**

- University administration should continue to work for salary floor increases, as well as actively explore other salary compensation strategies for term faculty.
- The university should engage in a salary equity study with the goal of reducing gross disparities in wages related to faculty appointment types, gender, race/ethnicity, salary compression issues, etc.
- Colleges/schools should examine salary differentials between term and tenure-line faculty members, report the findings to the Provost, and make efforts to address identified concerns in the context of disciplinary, regional, national, and market-based norms.
- As Mason moves towards providing more services, courses, and support across the calendar year, term faculty with significant summer responsibilities should be given additional compensation and/or put on 10- or 12-month contracts to account for this work.
- The Office of the Provost should work with Human Resources and Payroll to explore possibilities for
  - Phased retirement options for term faculty
  - Emeritus status and associated benefits for term faculty
- The Office of the Provost and Human Resources and Payroll should review current benefits orientation materials and consultation practices regarding retirement plans for term faculty to ensure new term faculty maximize personal and financial benefit when choosing a retirement and other benefits plans.

**Workload: Responsibilities and Expectations**

- It is critically important that Mason have workload policies in place that are equitable and fair, transparent, and consistently applied. The contributions of term faculty are different across the
university; thus, it is important to adopt an approach that allows LAUs and their term faculty to determine the best ways to leverage term faculty expertise and strengths. All LAUs should examine, revise as necessary, and communicate their workload policies for term faculty (as for tenure-line faculty). Specifically, LAUs should make explicit expectations regarding (but not limited to):

- Teaching loads that provide a realistic account of faculty time, given that there are legitimate differences across different types of courses. For example, workload adjustments should be made to account for:
  - Writing Intensive (WI) courses, Synthesis or Capstone courses, Written Communication courses (e.g., ENGL 302), course with accompanying labs and recitations, senior design courses, and other courses that require significant time for grading and responding to student work.
  - New course preparations and initial offerings of significantly redesigned courses (e.g., faculty engaged in curriculum development grants through Mason Impact).
  - Online course development and initial offerings of online courses.
  - The degree to which courses are provided additional resources, such as GTAs or other teaching and learning support.
  - Class size.
  - The number of new courses faculty members prepare in a given semester.
  - Student mentoring, both undergraduate and graduate.

- Course releases to account for significant administrative responsibilities and leadership, such as student advising, program leadership, faculty mentoring, course coordination, etc.

- Departmental, college/school, and university service, given the desire to ensure that term faculty have a voice and engage in service responsibilities, as appropriate. Service and leadership within external professional communities, including professional practice, may also be considerations in establishing teaching loads from year to year.

- Course buyouts for term faculty engaged in sponsored research, scholarship, and creative activities.

- Any increased expectations for service and leadership post-promotion, if applicable.

- LAU leadership should ensure that term faculty responsibilities are put in writing and that subsequent contract responsibilities should be re-evaluated and negotiated in consultation with the term faculty member.

- Term faculty who have the required credentials should be eligible to apply for graduate faculty status.

**Performance Evaluation and Progress to Promotion**

- All academic units are expected to provide constructive feedback to term faculty about progress toward promotion in their annual reviews.

- All academic units are encouraged to provide more comprehensive feedback about progress toward promotion at least years two prior to promotion.

- Evaluation of teaching should not rely exclusively on student course evaluations.
  - LAU leadership should take into consideration issues such as class size and make-up, whether or not the class is required for the major, the appropriateness of the course design and instructional strategies, the ways in which learning is assessed, etc.
Additional sources of information for the evaluation of teaching include: peer review of syllabi and/or assignment(s), evidence of growth and development as an educator, support for innovative learning, online and digital learning course development, learning assessment strategies, etc.

- LAU leadership should ensure that term faculty evaluations (annual reviews and promotion) are aligned with term faculty contracts and workload responsibilities, existing and future. Term faculty should be evaluated on all aspects of work that they do as a professional on behalf of Mason (See Appendix A).

**Participation in Faculty Governance**

- Term faculty should have voting rights in their LAU and college/school. LAU leadership should review their current bylaws to determine what, if any, revisions might be needed.

- Term faculty should be eligible to:
  - Participate in performance evaluation processes of other term faculty.
  - Serve on LAU, college/school, and university committees as appropriate for their assignments.
  - Participate on search committees and in performance evaluation processes of their LAU leadership.

- Term faculty members should have meaningful engagement in program planning at the LAU level, especially as it relates to aspects of the curriculum for which they bear teaching responsibility. Although non-tenure-line instructional faculty members cannot be involved in reviewing cases of promotion and tenure for tenure-line faculty members, they may otherwise be voting members of the departmental faculty in accordance with the policy set by individual departmental governance.

**Professional and Career Development**

- LAU leadership should engage in conversations with term faculty members about career goals and interests as part of their academic unit management.

- LAU leadership should identify and/or develop mentoring opportunities for term faculty, and encourage and reward term faculty participation, as appropriate.

- The Office of the Provost should create and offer mid-career workshops for term faculty.

- Term faculty should receive some reimbursement for approved professional development expenses, including travel for meetings of relevant professional societies, from their LAU or colleges/schools.

- Term faculty members should be eligible for summer grant funding opportunities that supports them in developing, implementing, assessing and disseminating teaching and curricular innovations.

- The Office of the Provost should work with Faculty Senate and deans to develop a policy for term faculty professional development leave. Deans should work with LAU leadership to set aside resources to fund this effort.

- LAU leadership should ensure faculty orientation or other onboarding resources are equally available to all new faculty.

**Leadership for Inclusive Community and Well-Being**

- The Office of the Provost and Faculty Senate should appoint a committee to advise The Office of the Provost in moving the recommendations forward.
• LAU leadership should actively take steps to create an inclusive climate and culture in which all faculty feel welcome, regardless of position responsibilities or part-time or full-time status.
  o Where appropriate, policies for term and tenure-line faculty should not be different; access to professional resources needed for success should be similar.
• While we recognize that instructional term faculty contributions are different from those of tenure-line faculty, their contributions are critical to the success of George Mason University and the students we serve. The task force believes that “term” should not be required in institutional materials (e.g., websites, business cards, etc.), but must be noted in BANNER for record-keeping.
  o Based on our conversations with colleagues at all levels of the institution, this recommendation appears to be where we – as a community – have significantly divergent viewpoints.
  o If there are specific reasons that colleges/schools would need to make those distinctions (e.g., accreditation compliance), then our analysis of best practices across peer institutions suggests that the most preferable title would be “collegiate faculty.” We believe that the title should reflect the contributions of faculty, not the type of contract they hold.
  o In this framework the titling would shift from “Term Assistant Professor” to “Collegiate Assistant Professor,” from “Term Associate Professor” to “Collegiate Associate Professor,” and from “Term Full Professor” to “Collegiate Full Professor.”
    ▪ These titles would be noted in BANNER for record-keeping.
    ▪ The use of “Collegiate” in the title may be administratively necessary in some areas (e.g., faculty website directories) but not others (e.g., email signatures, business cards). Colleges/schools should evaluate their administrative needs and require it only where deemed necessary.
Appendix A: RECOMMENDED LANGUAGE – Criteria for Promotion

Tier 1 Promotion (from Assistant to Associate, from Instructor to Senior Instructor, or from Assistant Professor of Practice to Associate Professor of Practice)

Term faculty whose primary area of focus is teaching should be evaluated in relation to their contracted position responsibilities. Candidates for Tier 1 promotion must demonstrate at least high competence in teaching. Applications for a candidate’s promotion are evaluated by the local academic unit (LAU), the Dean, and the Provost. Colleges and schools may elect to include a second level review. LAUs are responsible for developing and communicating standards for high competence in teaching to their faculty and those involved in each level of review.

All full-time term faculty members are expected to be engaged at the LAU and/or school/college level. Expected participation and service includes, but is not limited to, such activity as attendance at faculty meetings and participation in committees or activities relevant to their negotiated roles and responsibilities.

Many term faculty members take on significant administrative responsibilities as part of their assigned duties. In cases where term faculty members have administrative responsibilities, this must be taken into account in promotion decisions. Units should be transparent in their criteria for successful performance of leadership and administrative responsibilities.

Tier 2 Promotion (from Associate to Full, from Senior Instructor to Distinguished Instructor, or from Associate Professor of Practice to Full Professor of Practice)

Term faculty whose primary area of focus is teaching should be evaluated in relation to their contracted position responsibilities. Candidates for Tier 2 promotion must demonstrate genuine excellence in teaching. Applications for a candidate’s promotion are evaluated by the LAU, the Dean, and the Provost. Colleges and schools may elect to include a second level review. LAUs are responsible for developing and communicating standards for genuine excellence in the focus area to their faculty and those involved in each level of review.

All full-time term faculty members are expected to be engaged at the LAU and/or school/college level. Expected participation and service includes, but is not limited to, attendance at faculty meetings and participation in committees or activities relevant to their negotiated roles and responsibilities. For Tier 2 promotion, candidates are expected to demonstrate some leadership in their professional capacities, whether within Mason or in the context of their professional organizations or communities.

Many term faculty members take on significant administrative responsibilities as part of their assigned duties. In cases where term faculty members have administrative responsibilities, this must be taken into account in promotion decisions and units should be transparent in their criteria for successful performance of leadership and administrative responsibilities.

Teaching

Effective teaching is demonstrated through a combination of course and curricular materials, learning outcomes, assignments, and assessments designed to promote student learning; through review of those materials, outcomes, assignments, and assessments by knowledgeable peers and colleagues; through student evaluations of their learning experiences; and through engaging in professional/teaching development activities.

Examples of contributions to teaching include:

- Development and implementation of new courses, curricula, and programs (face-to-face, online, or hybrid)
- Use of evidence-based, innovative, inclusive, and/or high-impact teaching and assessment practices
- Development of instructional materials, including appropriate use of emerging and digital technologies
- Training and supervision of teaching (graduate) and/or learning (undergraduate) assistants
- Course coordination for courses with multiple sections
- Mentoring students, both undergraduate and graduate
- Clinical and field supervision of students
- Student academic advising
- Mentoring faculty colleagues
- Participating in educational development activities to strengthen knowledge, skills, and/or abilities

**Institutional and Professional Engagement**

Engagement at all levels of the institution and in the professional discipline will be given positive weight in personnel decisions. This engagement might take the form of service and leadership; of engagement in professional development to enhance the student learning experience or other benefits to students and the LAU; and/or of research and scholarship activities. Each LAU will make known in a timely manner its expectations for institutional and professional engagement, within the context of the Tier 1 and Tier 2 promotion framework outlined above.

*Examples of service and leadership contributions include:*  
- Advising and supporting co-curricular experiences for students  
- Participating in and/or chairing committees within the LAU, college/school, or university  
- Contributions to and/or leadership of relevant professional organizations, communities, and/or conferences  
- Community engagement, service, and/or leadership related in some way to expertise

*Examples of scholarly contributions include:*  
- Publications (peer and non-peer reviewed), including journal articles, books, book chapters, monographs, etc. These may be within the professional discipline(s) and/or represent contributions in the form of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)  
- Sponsored or supported research, creative activity, and professional practice; grant and contract awards  
- Conference and other scholarly presentations (peer reviewed and invited)  
- Artistic and professional performances and exhibits  
- Intellectual property, patents, and evidence of relevant entrepreneurial activities may also be provided for consideration towards promotion  
- Engagement of undergraduate and graduate students in research production and dissemination

*Examples of professional development include:*  
- Participating in workshops/opportunities to improve teaching and learning practices and approaches  
- Participating in workshops/opportunities to enhance knowledge around a specific content domain related to professional expertise (e.g., new research methods and analyses)  
- Participating in workshops/opportunities to develop leadership capacity that would enhance their Mason work

**Leadership/ Administrative Responsibilities (if applicable)**

Leadership and administrative responsibilities include the agreed-upon performance goals, as well as any new initiatives, opportunities, or projects that emerged that were not part of the original agreed-upon performance goals during the contract period(s). Term faculty should provide documentation to demonstrate that their contributions in this area fully meet the standards specified by the LAU and make a positive contribution.