



COMMITTEE ON ACADEMIC PERSONNEL

February 26, 2021

To: Jason Stajich, Chair
Riverside Division Academic Senate

From: Yinsheng Wang, Chair *Yinsheng Wang*
Committee on Academic Personnel

Re: Proposal for a Dean's Final Merit Delegation at UCR

CAP discussed the VPAP's proposal on dean's final merit delegation. CAP recognizes the intention of the proposal to achieve cost savings and to enable more rapid decisions on faculty members' normal merit advances. CAP also appreciates the more detailed analysis provided by VPAP of the ways how other UC campuses handle similar situations and of the potential number of merit cases that might be affected by the proposed action. It is, however, not clear to CAP to what extent the proposed changes would solve the issues raised and whether the potential benefits would outweigh the pitfalls outlined below. Moreover, CAP would like to learn more about the results from VPAP's formal consultations about this issue with department chairs and deans.

CAP would like to reiterate the value of its review of merit and promotion files. Owing to concerns about confidentiality, privacy and fairness, CAP appears to be a mysterious committee about whose processes the campus knows little; nevertheless, CAP would like to note the importance of its role. In particular, CAP's review of merit and promotion files constitutes a very important component in the career advancement of faculty in the campus community and a key element of shared governance, where faculty peers, not administrators, are central to the assessment of faculty performance.

CAP is responsible for maintaining standards and equity for merit and promotion of faculty across the entire campus. To do so, CAP evaluates files that are grouped by similar action and recommendation for rank/step across all disciplines. This ensures a fair evaluation of evidence in a file based on consistent criteria and helps ensure equity across the campus.

When reviewing individual files, CAP evaluates substantive issues of academic life and research output based on observations of trends and/or recurring features. In that process, CAP tries to understand and takes into consideration different expectations in the three areas of review across various fields and departments. Research and creative activities can appear in various formats and mature at different rates. In some rapidly evolving fields, peer-reviewed journal publications may not carry as much weight as conference presentations, and the average time to publication may be much longer in some fields than others. Moreover, multi-disciplinary and collaborative research has become the norm in many fields, where a single research problem may require different technologies/approaches and involve multiple faculty members. Thus, it can be challenging to gauge an individual faculty member's contribution to research.

Evaluating normal on-time, one-step merit files is helpful to CAP in understanding the level of expectations for a given field and assists the committee in identifying whether a candidate's performance is above the bar. Such evaluations also allow CAP to better understand the expectations of engagement for different levels of the professoriate and to balance recommendations among files. By thus comparing peers from across the campus, CAP can elevate faculty beyond the recommendations of departments and deans.

Given CAP's contribution to the review process for merit and promotion files as explained above, the committee has noted some potential pitfalls of the proposed dean's final merit delegation that may need further consideration:

- 1) CAP reviews files within the boundaries set by the Call. The review of all files by CAP provides a wide purview of the entire campus; this allows for better fairness and consistency in merit/promotion reviews. Faculty in some departments may be more generous in supporting their colleagues than those in others, which may create inequality in merit advancement across different departments.
- 2) The analysis provided by the VPAP showed that ~approximately 8% of merit files with unanimous support at the department and college levels received negative recommendations by CAP. This result indicates that not a small number of cases will be impacted by the new policy.
- 3) There were multiple occasions where, after review, CAP recommended a higher step for merit advancement or additional off-scale for those files that received unanimous support for a normal merit at the department and dean levels. The proposed changes would eliminate the possibility of such recommendations.
- 4) Some CAP members felt that a delegation of final merit decision to the deans would erode the spirit of shared governance.
- 5) The majority of cases for normal, one-step merits involve Assistant Professors. With the new policy, these junior faculty members may not obtain (adequate) feedback from CAP before they submit their appraisal and tenure files.
- 6) Complications in merit and promotion files due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic as well as the change of senior campus leadership (i.e., the appointment of the new provost) raise additional concerns.

While CAP is open to further discussing the changes outlined in VPAP's proposal, the committee would like to offer suggestions for consideration, more specifically about imposing some restrictions:

- 1) Restrict the new policy to those normal merit files that receive unanimously positive vote at the department level and have the dean's support. In addition, the file should have votes from at least 75% of eligible voting members in the department.
- 2) Limit those merit files involving merit advancement at or below the rank of Full Professor, Step V.
- 3) A large majority of CAP members suggest that, for those files meeting the requirements described in 1) and 2), we follow a process implemented at UC Irvine, where deans have final merit delegation for all regular merit advancements, and CAP reviews every other merit at or above the rank of Associate Professor. A small minority of CAP members, however, felt that this is not necessary.

CAP appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on this proposal and looks forward to continued conversations with the administration before a decision has been made or any changes implemented.