

To: All RIT Faculty  
From: Stan McKenzie, Provost  
Re: Quality Standards

November 30, 2004

Tomorrow, December 1<sup>st</sup>, marks the beginning of a new “Annual Review of Faculty” cycle (except for NTID) under RIT policy E7. During the ten years I have served as Provost, quality expectations for faculty performance have increased dramatically, as have faculty salaries. I therefore want to take this opportunity to review current expectations regarding faculty performance at RIT and the consequent impact on tenure, promotion, and annual merit allocations.

Teaching in all of its forms (including advising) certainly remains the primary faculty responsibility. With resources directed toward FEAD grants, Provost’s Learning Innovation Grants (PLIG), and the establishing of an Assistant Provost for Teaching and Learning Services, a clear message has been sent that excellence in teaching is an expectation for RIT faculty, and that mediocre teaching is not acceptable. The bar has been raised.

Likewise, both a recent policy statement on faculty scholarship and the new Strategic Plan emphasize the need for faculty to be actively engaged in scholarship to enhance student learning; scholarship activity at RIT is directly linked to student learning either through experiential participation in the faculty scholarship or through the impact of that scholarship upon the faculty member’s teaching. The standards of scholarship under which I personally was tenured (in 1974) and promoted for the last time to Professor (1981) would be insufficient today for either of those events. The bar has again been significantly raised.

Similarly, the Academic Senate recently approved changes in policy that more clearly delineate the service expectations for faculty. Senior faculty especially are expected to make significant contributions to the governance and operations of the Institute through service at the department, college, and Institute levels. Service to community organizations independent of RIT and not related to the faculty member’s professional discipline is no longer sufficient to satisfy RIT service expectations. Once again, the bar has been raised.

When I first assumed the responsibilities of Provost, the Academic Senate requested that I review carefully the annual evaluation outcomes for faculty throughout the Institute to ensure uniformity of ratings and rankings within colleges as well as among colleges. Very few problems emerged at that time.

We are now, however, faced with a situation where serious inflation of annual evaluation ratings has occurred. Some colleges currently evaluate over half of their faculty as “Outstanding,” with some departments evaluating virtually every faculty member as “Outstanding.” While I eagerly endorse the concept that the norm for faculty at RIT can

be and should be “Very Good,” the ultimately comparative nature of annual reviews against a norm needs to be able to delineate exceptional performance by a faculty member during any review period that far exceeds the norm. If the norm itself becomes “Outstanding,” then exceptional performance cannot be singularly rewarded and the merit review process loses any incentive dimension.

Faculty should therefore realize that levels of performance which in previous years were considered to be “Outstanding” might now be only “Very Good,” previous performance considered to be “Very Good” could now be only “Satisfactory,” and borderline “Satisfactory” performance in previous years would now likely be “Needs Improvement” or even “Unsatisfactory.” These changes will clearly impact tenure, promotion, and merit decisions.

I am therefore asking the deans, department chairs, and faculty in each college to do two things: 1) Review the specific criteria for tenure and promotion within that college to ascertain whether, in fairness to prospective candidates, they clearly articulate current expectations and standards for that college; 2) Determine how to avoid inflation in annual evaluation ratings so that only a distinguished few in any given evaluation cycle receive the highest rating and can therefore be handsomely rewarded through the merit salary increment process.