

RIT

Faculty and Staff Policies and Practices: Recommendations

March 23, 2021

Submitted by: Spring/Fall Academic Planning Committee

Chair: **Christine M. Licata**, Vice Provost

Faculty/Staff Policies and Practices Subcommittee

Co-Chairs: **Jim Lee and Cathy Clarke***

Spring/Fall Planning Committee:

- **Carmie Garzione**, Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs
- **André Hudson**, School Head, Thomas H. Gosnell School of Life Sciences, COS
- **Chris Jackson**, Sr. Associate Dean, CAD
- **Joe Loffredo**, Registrar
- **Lynne Mazadoorian**, Assistant VP, Undergraduate Student Success & Director of University Advising
- **Jim Myers**, Associate Provost for International Education and Global Programs
- **Jen Schneider**, Professor, CET and Fram Chair
- **Tomicka Wagstaff**, Assistant Vice President for Academic Access Success, Division of Diversity and Inclusion
- **Anne Wahl**, Assistant Provost
- **Ian Webber**, Interim Director of ILI

- Staff Council Representative
 - **Cathy Clarke**, Chair, Staff Council

- Student Government Representative
 - **Sunny Khan**, Director of Student Operations, Student Government

- Graduate Student Representative
 - **Sri Charitha Velamuri**, GSAC Representative

- Academic Senate Representatives
 - **Marcos Esterman**, Assistant Professor, Industrial and Systems Engineering, KGCOE
 - **Clyde Hull**, Professor, Management, SCB, (Returning)
 - **Elizabeth Kronfield**, Professor, School of Art, CAD
 - **Joe Lanzafame**, Senior Lecturer, COS
 - **Michael Yacci**, Professor and Associate Dean, GCCIS

- Council of Chairs Representative
 - **James Lee**, Department Chair Electrical, Computer, and Telecommunications Engineering Technology, CET

RIT Faculty and Staff Policy Recommendations

- Faculty Nominees from Deans
 - **Peter Boyd**, Lecturer, SOIS
 - **Carlos Diaz-Acosta**, Associate Professor, Packaging Science, CET
 - **Kim Kurz**, Associate Professor, ASLIE, NTID
 - **Todd Pagano**, Associate Dean for Teaching and Scholarship, NTID
 - **Thomas Tribold**, Professor and Department Head, Golisano Institute for Sustainability
 - **Tracy Worrell**, Professor, School of Communication, COLA
- Administrative Support: **Karel Shapiro**, Administrative Assistant, Office of Vice Provost

***Note:** A subcommittee drawn from the Spring/Fall Academic Planning Committee prepared the initial recommendations and report on proposed changes to faculty and staff policies and practices which were then reviewed, discussed and modified based on consultation with the full spring/fall planning group. Lindsay Vallone represented Staff Council on this subcommittee but was replaced by Cathy Clarke in early March.

Subcommittee Co-Chairs: **Jim Lee, Cathy Clarke**

- Members:
 - **Carmie Garzione**, Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs
 - **Marcos Esterman**, Assistant Professor, Industrial and Systems Engineering, KGCOE
 - **Clyde Hull**, Professor, Management, SCB
 - **Elizabeth Kronfield**, Professor, School of Art, CAD
 - **Tracy Worrell**, Professor, School of Communication, COLA

The Provost charged the Planning Committee to consider the possible impacts of COVID which would necessitate changes to existing faculty and staff policies or practices moving forward. The recommendations that follow include both COVID-specific and COVID-inspired recommendations affecting faculty and staff policies and practices. Each recommendation provides the incentive and rationale for the recommendation, the scope of the recommendation, and the stakeholders that should review the recommendation and take appropriate action, if any.

The themes explored include:

Annual Evaluation
Plan of Work and Workload
Tenure and Promotion
Faculty/Staff Leave & Sabbaticals
Working Remotely
BetterMe/Wellness

RIT Faculty and Staff Policy Recommendations

The subcommittee consulted with key functional partners from Human Resources, Office of Legal Affairs, AdvanceRIT and Council for the Representation and Engagement of Women (CREW), University and Community Partnerships, Dr. Mindy Maygar, Faculty Associate for AALANA Faculty, the Ombuds Office, and non-committee representatives from Staff Council and Academic Senate in order to understand the context underlying current policy and explore opportunities for modifications.

The Full Academic Planning Committee voted on each recommendation, and there was strong support for each of the recommendations.

It should be noted that some of the committee's recommendations fall outside the purview of the provost and the Academic Affairs organization. For recommendations that apply to staff across the university as a whole, the committee anticipates that the provost will determine which recommendations should be forwarded to the appropriate divisional vice president for their review and consideration.

To that end, the report contains two sections. The first section focuses on “**Academic Affairs Policies and Practices**” and the second section focuses on “**Institutional Level Policies and Practices.**”

Some of the suggested changes will require resources and in some cases, creation of new processes to equitably implement the suggested change. Because the majority of the recommendations are **not** time-sensitive, it is anticipated that full discussion and vetting with each category of recommendation will occur at the direction and discretion of the provost or divisional vice president.

We want to draw attention, however, to Recommendations #1 and 1a in the Annual Evaluation section. These particular recommendations are time sensitive given the current annual evaluation cycle and the promotion and tenure calendar. If action is approved on these recommendations, it will need to be done expeditiously and communicated as soon as possible to the key stakeholders (deans, department chairs and faculty).

Section 1: Academic Affairs Policies and Practices

Annual Evaluation

A joint memo from Academic Senate and the provost was sent to faculty last summer saying that an abbreviated evaluation will be used this year in light of COVID (https://www.rit.edu/provost/sites/rit.edu.provost/files/communications/POW_Annual%20Evaluation%20Memo.pdf). In addition, Human Resources sent a notification to supervisors and managers regarding staff evaluations. In both cases the use of an optional COVID statement was created and enables employees to describe how COVID impacted their personal or professional life. While the committee universally felt this was a positive addition to this year's evaluations, concern was expressed about unintended bias that may exist, or be perceived as existing, from

RIT Faculty and Staff Policy Recommendations

utilization of the COVID Impact Statement. To minimize the existence of this unintended bias, perceived or real, the following recommendations were created:

Recommendation # 1:

- For tenure or promotion review, evaluations from this year will not be available except at the explicit request of inclusion by the candidate. This is to ensure that the candidate is evaluated on their performance without the added stressors associated with COVID. The committee further recommends that current year evaluation reviews for all employees be available for use in the annual merit increase process.

- Sub-Recommendation 1a:

An addition should be made to the tenure and promotion policies (E05.0 and E06.0) specifying that the lack of a performance review for 2020 should not affect the evaluation of the candidate. The dean's representative that charges the tenure and promotion committees should also emphasize this as well. The purpose of the addition and emphasis in the charge is to eliminate the existence of bias in the evaluation process.

As tenure packets are typically due in September, we realize this is a shortened timeline. These recommendations would require a review by Academic Senate and potential modifications to Policies E05.0 and E06.0.

- Recommendation # 2:

Make university funding available to faculty that would assist them in recovering from the effects of COVID on scholarship and other professional activities, new initiatives, or responsibilities.

As a result of COVID the availability of external funding has been reduced, research laboratories were required to close, access to remote research sites denied, and in general interrupted most, if not all, of the research being conducted at RIT. The purpose of the funding is to jump start research efforts.

This recommendation would require further vetting by the Office of Academic Affairs and Deans Council.

- Recommendation # 3:

Ask Academic Senate to generate a charge for creating a process for dealing with significant life events that impact professional progress such as including a permanent "Life Circumstances" portion of the annual review for faculty. This optional portion of the Annual Review would document a significant life event that affected the employee's performance during the review period. Additional consideration for a larger policy shift to include a force majeure clause would be encouraged.

RIT Faculty and Staff Policy Recommendations

During committee discussions it was acknowledged that there are many different types of circumstances that can significantly affect an employee's performance during a review period.

The committee felt strongly that there needs to be a standardized mechanism for employees to document the event(s) in their lives that have affected their performance.

Faculty Plan of Work (POW)

The significant affect COVID has had on all employee's professional plans for the current year resulted in this subcommittee reviewing existing Plan of Work (POW) practices for the colleges represented on the subcommittee. The review identified differences in practice and opportunities for improvement. These recommendations are for changes to the POW process going forward and not just during the time period affected by COVID.

Ideally, the POW should be a goal-oriented exercise. With a shift in process, more colleges might place more emphasis on this planning document. We would want to encourage a cultural shift in the way faculty set goals and are supported in accomplishing those goals.

- Recommendation # 1:

Eliminate the formal POW and replace it with a brief document that states goals for a faculty member over a 3-5 year period. This document is updated as necessary (as determined by the faculty member or department chair) but no less than yearly. This would encourage closer tracking of attainable goals, and ensure faculty members are making progress. Consider incorporating goal statement(s) in the annual evaluation process, or include it in the self-assessment portion of the evaluation.

This recommendation would require changes to policy (e.g. E.05), and would require a review by Deans Council, Council of Chairs, Office of Faculty Affairs and Academic Senate. The Office of Faculty Affairs has provided data on the prevalence of Faculty Plan of Work at Benchmark Institutions and is included in Appendices A.1 and A.2 at the end of this report.

Tenure and Promotion

In an effort to create more equitable processes, and to mitigate the impacts of extraordinary circumstances on behalf of a faculty member, both related to COVID and other life circumstances, the following recommendations were formulated.

RIT Faculty and Staff Policy Recommendations

- Recommendation # 1:

COVID extensions should be automatically applied to tenure timing for all pre-tenure faculty. A candidate for tenure would be required to request an exemption from receiving a one year extension.

This recommendation is limited to the duration of time that COVID affects faculty at RIT, and is meant to remove any hesitancy on the part of pre-tenure faculty from requesting or accepting an extension to their time to tenure review. However, candidates for tenure should also have the option to be reviewed without delay. This recommendation would require a review by Deans Council, Office of Faculty Affairs, Faculty Affairs committee, Academic Senate and Human Resources.

- Recommendation # 2:

In letters to external reviewers for tenure and promotions to associate professor, incorporate guidance to reviewers that they should comment on the body of research and scholarship, and ignore the amount of time at the current rank. Recommendations should be focused on the sum of the scholarly activities to date.

This recommendation is for a permanent change to the tenure and promotion process and would include all letters to external reviewers. To clarify, this does not affect the process for promotion to full professor.

There is current work on this in the Office of Faculty Affairs and the AdvanceRIT Office. This recommendation would require a review by the Research and Scholarship committee within Academic Senate, Deans Council, and Council of Chairs.

- Recommendation # 3:

Implement a “Junior Faculty Leave” for pre-tenure faculty. This leave would be limited to pre-tenure faculty members whose scholarly activities have been significantly impacted by COVID and enable them to receive a reduction or elimination of teaching responsibilities for a defined period of time (semester or academic year). The purpose of this recommendation is to provide pre-tenure faculty time to recover their scholarship program significantly affected by COVID. This option should only be available to faculty who utilized the COVID tenure extension. It is hoped this would supplement existing procedures and policies in place and would be consistent across all colleges.

This recommendation would need to be reviewed by Deans Council, Council of Chairs, Faculty Affairs committee and Academic Senate.

RIT Faculty and Staff Policy Recommendations

Faculty Leave & Sabbaticals

- Recommendation #1:

Modify Policy E18.0 Faculty Leave for Professional/Career Development specifically E18.2 Eligibility to include tenured faculty and principal lecturers.

- Sub Recommendation 1a:

Review and make appropriate modifications to Policy E18.3 Administration of Faculty Leave for Professional/Career Development so that it would apply to all categories and ranks of Regular Faculty Employees eligible for Faculty Leave for Professional/Career Development. At a minimum modifications may be needed to the section on Application (E18.3.A), The Committee on Professional Development Leave (E18.3.B), and the Evaluation of Request for Leave (E18.3.C).

Section 2: Institutional Level Policy and Practice Considerations

Annual Evaluation

A joint memo from Academic Senate and the provost was sent to faculty last summer saying that an abbreviated evaluation will be used this year in light of COVID (https://www.rit.edu/provost/sites/rit.edu.provost/files/communications/POW_Annual%20Evaluation%20Memo.pdf). In addition, Human Resources sent a notification to supervisors and managers regarding staff evaluations. In both cases the use of an optional COVID statement was created and enables employees to describe how COVID impacted their personal or professional life. While the committee universally felt this was a positive addition to this year's evaluations, concern was expressed about unintended bias that may exist, or be perceived as existing, from utilization of the COVID Impact Statement.

- Recommendation #1

Make university funding available to staff that would assist them in recovering from the effects of COVID on new initiatives or responsibilities.

As a result of COVID, employees have often been tasked with new responsibilities as a result of the COVID restrictions and the hiring freeze. If these new responsibilities will continue, the funding will help with proper training.

This recommendation requires further vetting by Human Resources.

RIT Faculty and Staff Policy Recommendations

- Recommendation #2

Ask Staff Council to generate a charge for creating a process for dealing with significant life events that impact professional progress such as including a permanent “Life Circumstances” portion of the annual review for staff. This optional portion of the Annual Review would document a significant life event that affected the employee’s performance during the review period. Additional consideration for a larger policy shift to include a force majeure clause would be encouraged.

During committee discussions it was acknowledged that there are many different types of circumstances that can significantly affect an employee’s performance during a review period. The committee felt strongly that there needs to be a standardized mechanism for employees to document the event(s) in their lives that have affected their performance.

This recommendation will be forwarded to Staff Council.

Staff Leave of Absence

This recommendation is specifically focused on Policy E29: Staff Leave of Absence. This policy currently details the process for staff to request a leave of absence for a defined period of time. COVID highlighted the need for all employees to have the ability to request a leave of absence.

When committee members compared Policy E29 to Policy E18: Faculty Leave, it was noted that there are no criteria for the review of staff proposals outlined in the policy. The differences between these policies was the reason for the committee recommendations.

The following recommendations require a review by Human Resources.

- Recommendation #1:

Add in criteria to Policy E29 for how staff proposals are reviewed. Our suggestions mirror Policy E18:

The principal criteria used by the committee in evaluating candidates' applications for professional leaves will be:

- The merit of the plan submitted;
- The contribution of the proposal to the employee’s professional/career objectives;
- The individual's past and potential contribution to the university.

- Sub Recommendation 1a:

The committee recommends that a section be added to Policy E29 that would allow the employee a means to appeal if the manager rejects the initial proposal.

RIT Faculty and Staff Policy Recommendations

- Sub Recommendation 1b:

In order to assist employees interested in taking professional leave, offer a new course, through Talent Roadmap, that would help employees find avenues for opportunity and offer advice on proposal development.

Currently there is no appeal option in the process section of policy E29. It seems that only approved requests go to Human Resources. The committee envisions an appeal process where a representative from Human Resources would be engaged in a conversation with the employee and manager concerning the requested leave. It is noted that there is no appeal for faculty members as the decision is made by a committee. Due to the variance in job duties across campus for staff, a committee approach may not be the most equitable process. Therefore, we recommend the appeal for the staff process only.

Working Remotely

The need to conduct university operations remotely through much of the COVID crisis highlighted the value of creative work arrangements. The Flexible Work Arrangement (FWA) program has existed for a significant length of time at RIT. However, the committee found that knowledge of the program among RIT employees is very limited. A document is now being circulated, and has been posted on the Human Resources webpage, describing the program. The FWA document provides guidelines for managers, and guidance that a FWA will be supported when the arrangement works for both the university and the employee. Though the university, as a whole, prefers autonomy, HR can provide structure to the program and strive to maintain equality across the campus. The committee feels that any process that requires less negotiations or appeals makes it more equitable. It is in the best interest of the university to provide a more inclusive environment for employees which avoids bias, and having a firm stance on accommodating FW requests is key.

All of the following recommendations need to be reviewed by Human Resources, and the Office of Legal Affairs.

- Recommendation # 1:

Develop and document an appeal process involving the employee's Human Resources Manager (HRM) for the employees who disagree with the decision by management in the FWA request. In addition, notate when the provost or associate provost need to be involved in the appeal process concerning faculty.

- Recommendation # 2:

Human Resources should collect and analyze the data from the COVID FWA experience to understand the need for accommodations and the desire in FWAs. The goal is to characterize what has been learned this year in order to drive a policy discussion. There is significant

RIT Faculty and Staff Policy Recommendations

awareness by employees and management that flexibility is key to the workforce of tomorrow; unfortunately this may be counter to the needs of the university for some positions.

- Recommendation # 3:

Investigate the feasibility of labeling all staff employment postings as either a potential fully or partially remote work position or a required work on campus position. If adopted, the designation should be a required element of a job posting for all staff postings across campus. If the position is not designated as remote work, a rationale should be required.

- Recommendation # 4:

Create guidelines for managers on how to accomplish more flexibility and accommodations in staff positions, including guidance on communication with employees with an FWA, holding flex meetings, and supporting equitable treatment. There may be a tendency for managers to deny a request when there are unknown difficulties with this arrangement.

- Recommendation: #5:

Define the default location setting for meetings as virtual. Any meeting that is not virtual will require a virtual option. This recommendation was created with the intent of eliminating bias and creating equitable treatment of all employees based on attendance preference/ability. Additionally, there are productivity and efficiency benefits for employees when they are able to attend virtual meetings. The spirit of the workforce of tomorrow is encapsulated by this recommendation. We recognize that this is a significant change in work culture and expect that there will be resistance to this recommendation when vetted.

- Recommendation # 6:

Investigate the feasibility of employee remote days. If appropriate, a section would be added to the FWA for employees to choose remote days and on-campus days. Employees would choose to have set remote days every week, but a list of requirements and expectations for remote days should be generated and kept consistent across campus. Staff Council may be the best place to facilitate a campus-wide discussion among staff on this recommendation, working in partnership with upper administration on implementation.

- Recommendation # 7:

Create and conduct training for employees on integrating in person and online meeting platforms and best practices to ensure an inclusive meeting.

- Recommendation # 8:

Revise or create new documentation/training for managers to include language that will ensure that FWA's will not impact an employee's performance appraisal and rating. In

RIT Faculty and Staff Policy Recommendations

addition, ensure the employee and manager have conversations to discuss the impact and future implications.

- Recommendation # 9:

Communication to all employees and managers about the availability of a Flexible Work Arrangement is key to its acceptance in our workplace. Human Resources should share information with *all employees* about eligibility, options, and the process involved on a regular basis using email communication, presentations to pertinent groups such as shared governance, and an offering through Talent Roadmap.

BetterMe/Wellness

Due to the added demands placed on students, staff, and faculty during the COVID crisis, both in their professional and personal lives, utilizing resources focused on the mental health of the entire RIT family is more important than ever. The need for mental health resources will be ongoing even when the campus returns to pre-COVID activity levels. In reviewing the BetterMe/Wellness program, two shortcomings were identified by the committee. It was identified that many faculty and staff are not aware of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and for many who are aware of its existence, the full breadth of available services is not known.

These recommendations require a review by Human Resources.

- Recommendation # 1:

Review the usage of faculty/staff of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). There may be a misperception of the services, or the faculty/staff may not be using the services appropriately. There are many ways the EAP can assist faculty/staff, but many are unaware they have to ask for it.

- Recommendation # 2:

Change the default EAP reply to certain questions from ‘here is a list of providers’ to ‘I can help you find an appointment with a provider.’

RIT Faculty and Staff Policy Recommendations

Appendix A.1: Benchmark Institutions and the use of a Faculty Plan of Work and Faculty Evaluation

| RIT Benchmark Schools (Current 21) | Evaluations | POWs |
|--|-------------|--|
| Carnegie Mellon University | Yes | No |
| Case Western Reserve University | Yes | No |
| Clarkson University | Yes | No |
| Cornell University | Yes | No |
| Drexel University | Yes | No |
| Gallaudet University | Yes | No |
| Illinois Institute of Technology | Yes | No |
| Kettering University | | |
| Lehigh University | Yes | No |
| Massachusetts Institute of Technology | Yes | No |
| New York University | Yes | No |
| Northeastern University | Yes | No |
| Pace University | Yes | No |
| Polytechnic Institute of New York University | | |
| Purdue University Main Campus | Yes | No |
| Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute | Yes | No |
| Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology | | |
| Stevens Institute of Technology | Yes | Plan of activities (no details provided) |
| Syracuse University | Yes | No |
| University at Buffalo State University of New York | Yes | No |
| Virginia Tech | Yes | No |
| Worcester Polytechnic Institute | Yes | No |

*Yellow highlight indicates Institutions that did not have information available.

RIT Faculty and Staff Policy Recommendations

Appendix A.2: Potential Benchmark Institutions and the use of a Faculty Plan of Work and Faculty Evaluation

| RIT Potential 28 Benchmark Schools | Faculty Evals | POW |
|--|---------------|--|
| Boston University | Yes | No |
| Carnegie Mellon University | Yes | No |
| Case Western Reserve University | Yes | No |
| Clarkson University | Yes | No |
| Cornell University | Yes | No |
| Drexel University | Yes | No |
| Florida Institution of Technology | Yes | No |
| Illinois Institute of Technology | Yes | No |
| Lehigh University | Yes | No |
| Miami University | Yes | No |
| New Jersey Institute of Technology | Yes | No |
| Northeastern University | Yes | No |
| Pennsylvania State University | Yes | No |
| Princeton University | Yes | No |
| Purdue University Main Campus | Yes | No |
| Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute | Yes | No |
| Rice University | Yes | No |
| State University of New York at Albany | Yes | No |
| State University of New York at Binghamton | Yes | No |
| | | Plan of activities (no details provided) |
| Stevens Institute of Technology | Yes | No |
| Syracuse University | Yes | No |
| University at Buffalo State University of New York | Yes | No |
| University of Connecticut | Yes | No |
| University of Massachusetts Boston | Yes | No |
| University of Rochester | Yes | No |
| University of Vermont | Yes | No |
| Virginia Tech | Yes | No |
| Worcester Polytechnic Institute | Yes | No |