Summary of CAPP review of "Proposal to Authorize the Bowers College of Computing and Information Science to Use the Teaching Professor Title," "Cornell Jeb E. Brooks School of Public Policy Proposal for the Academic Title of Teaching Professor," and "Teaching Professor Titles Proposal – College of Engineering"

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Overview

CAPP was asked to simultaneously review three proposals on the adoption of teaching professor titles from the Bowers College of Computing and Information Science, the Jeb E. Brooks School of Public Policy, and the College of Engineering.

Summary of CAPP Review

Overall, the committee appreciated the work that went into the three proposals and understood that the adoption of the teaching professor titles is seen by each of the schools as both necessary and important.

The committee found three areas of concern with the proposals. First, there are subtle differences across the three proposals (note that the College of Engineering proposal came across as the more thorough proposal, and potentially in some ways a model for others, now or in the future.) For example, there are differences in appointment lengths, reappointment procedures, lead times on terminations, limitations on the number of teaching faculty, use of titling modifiers, teaching loads, and the retention/continued use (or not) of legacy lecturer/senior lecturer titles. Taking one of these – teaching loads – two proposals (Bowers, Engineering) specify 2-2 loads for their teaching faculty while Brooks specify 3-3. Of course, we're used to seeing different teaching loads as the norm in different colleges, and even different departments within the same college, so maybe that's fine. But those differences partly reflect the very different shape faculty members' other duties can take in different departments, whereas the duties for teaching professors, as described in these proposals, seem similar across the three colleges.

Another example relates to the requirement of the positions. All three proposals indicate teaching faculty will hold PhD or terminal degree equivalents in their respective fields, but the Brooks proposal seems to indicate graduate degrees are sufficient in some cases for the title of Associate and that "Teaching Professors must hold a graduate degree that is appropriate to the level and field of instruction that the individual will provide" without clarity as to whether there is consistency in the degree type.

The Engineering proposal indicates additional title modifiers typically associated with termed engagements of "acting," "courtesy," and "visiting" will be applied to the teaching titles, while the Brooks and Bowers proposals indicate short-term or transitory relationships will be limited to the use of "Lecturer" titling.

The committee is concerned that such differences will inevitably generate some inequalities in expectations for faculty with the same university title in different colleges. Every college is going to have to have different criteria and different procedures, and the structure of classes themselves can be quite different (e.g., graduate students in some departments teach their own classes under the (hopefully) careful supervision of a course coordinator – generally a lecturer who would likely become teaching professors). Additionally, the committee recognizes that differences already exist for regular TT faculty as well, so there may be little that can be done about it. However, although there may be some differences

across proposals given the different configurations of each discipline, it would be helpful if some of the reasoning that guides these differences are made more transparent to help clarify how and why different units intend to manage these new positions particularly as additional proposals from other schools and colleges emerge from across campus.

Second, the committee found it difficult to imagine the process of soliciting external letters in support of teaching faculty as it is hard to see how someone external to Cornell (or someone at "arms-length" from the candidate) could be in a position to evaluate a candidate's teaching, a criterion for promotion. This is a potential issue for the Bowers and Engineering proposals (the Brooks proposal does not require external letters but seeks two letters from "faculty or program directors with whom the candidate has worked.") The Bowers proposal requires at least 5 letters, at least two of which must come from "out-of-college." It was not clear whether the thought is that perhaps someone at another Cornell college might be recruited to observe the candidate's teaching? The Engineering proposal requires at least two letters, which may be internal or external to Cornell, but one must be at "arms-length", defined as "external to the department, not suggested by the candidate, and with no significant ties to the candidate." It is not clear whether the thinking is that a peer evaluator from outside the department will be recruited by the department faculty to observe the candidate's teaching; external letter writers will be asked to look at the candidate's teaching dossier (including evaluations) and base their evaluation just on that; or there is some other mechanism in mind.

Perhaps those who have developed the different proposals have a better sense of how the processes will look in practice, but it is difficult to imagine whether or how there is a specialized body of external teaching faculty who can comment knowledgeably about a teaching faculty's record within a specific domain or department within a given school or college. Teaching faculty are, by definition, expected to be focused on teaching activities internal to Cornell, activities which may be very difficult to assess externally. The committee recognizes that there are provisions for more external-facing activities such as writing textbooks or doing pedagogical leadership for a particular discipline which would presumably be easier to assess externally, though those activities tend to be framed in the proposals as desired and it is implied they would be less common occurrences among the teaching faculty. For example, given that lecturer positions in the languages at many top R1 universities have been replaced by those of teaching professors, having external peer review is a reasonable possibility, but it would have to be managed carefully, with well-defined procedures.

A third concern raised relates to the student evaluations in the dossiers for promotion/reappointments. All three proposals say student course evaluations will be included, but only the Engineering and Brooks proposals are to include letters from current/former students. It did not appear that Bowers would be requiring student letters. The committee recognizes that the usefulness of such letters may be limited and the responses from pool of those solicited for feedback may bias for skewed views (either strong positive or strong negative reactions). However, it would seem that student impressions are important for a role described as primarily valuing classroom performance and that, similarly, letters from former students are critical and can be very helpful to understand both teaching abilities and mentoring qualities.