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A career path framework for teaching focused faculty in graduate health professions and human services education

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Over the past few decades, the composition of university faculty has shifted from full-time tenure to contingent positions. Despite this change, the Appointments, Promotion and Tenure (APT) process has not evolved with this shift. Contingent faculty may lack university-supported mentoring and professional development, leading to growing dissatisfaction and higher turnover. This turnover affects education quality and campus stability. To retain contingent faculty, with a focus on teaching-focused faculty (TFF), and to foster strong communities, universities should consider new development and promotion pathways for TFF. We describe an updated promotion pathway as a potential solution.

KEYWORDS

tenure, promotion, teaching, education, health science education, health science educator, promotion (occupational)

Introduction

Over the past decade, significant challenges such as reduced fiscal resources (Mitchell et al., 2019), fluctuating student enrollment (Long, 2014), rapid innovations in technology (Abu Talib et al., 2021; Gopalan, 2016), and an emerging demand for flexibility in educational delivery methods have caused many academic institutions to make reflexive changes. One major change that has arisen from these challenges is the significant alteration of faculty composition at universities. In particular, beginning with the 2008 recession and continuing through the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a significant shift in faculty composition from tenured faculty to contingent faculty (also known as clinical, or adjunct faculty) (Xierali et al., 2020; Farcnik et al., 2021).

A 2022 review of the US faculty landscape by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) revealed that 54 percent of approximately 1,200 universities have replaced tenured faculty lines with contingent faculty (Tiede, 2022). Contingent faculty currently account for greater than 65% of the total faculty population (McNaughtan et al., 2017; Colby, 2023). While the role of contingent faculty was initially seen as a means for fulfilling gaps in teaching coverage, contingent faculty have become a larger portion of the higher education work force. In turn, their roles within the academic institution have evolved. Contingent faculty responsibilities have expanded from primarily teaching based duties to now include serving on institutional committees, performing programmatic administrative duties, and carrying heavier teaching workloads (McNaughtan et al., 2017). Although contingent faculty comprise a majority of the higher education workforce and have responsibilities like tenured faculty, these positions are often delineated as “non-tenure” track. Therefore, they are subject to low wages and contractual employment with most contracts lasting 1–2 years (Fetcher et al.,

2019; Xierali and Nivet, 2020; Spinrad et al., 2022). Within health professions graduate education, many contingent faculty are clinicians who transitioned into a faculty position without the possibility of a tenure track position (Slayton et al., 2012). When educators are in positions that lack a secure career path, there is less incentive for employees to engage in professional development or university activities not specifically correlating to their contingent contract. The absence of a career trajectory also leads to high levels of job dissatisfaction and an increased turnover rate of contingent faculty (Myers et al., 2023). The combination of these factors creates an unstable faculty structure which can negatively effect student outcomes and the overall university community (Xu and Solanki, 2019; Crilly and Hartnett, 2015; Hearn and Burns, 2021). The contingent faculty model may not be a viable long-term solution to offset the financial hardships experienced by universities and may create unnecessary obstacles for educators to train the next generation of learners. For universities to survive and thrive, a promotion framework designed to support the advancement of contingent faculty in recognition of their particular contributions to the educational system should be established.

The following presents a pilot framework for a faculty development pathway for contingent faculty based on one institution's analysis of the Appointments, Promotion and Tenure (APT) process across their professional education programs. Existing models for supporting teaching-focused faculty provided insight to the development of a process for recording and evaluating teaching for promotion at our institution (Fetcher et al., 2019; Crilly and Hartnett, 2015; Hurlburt and McGarragh, 2016). The guided framework we provide identifies how key components from the traditional tenured faculty process can be modified to support contingent faculty through a structured and adaptable promotion pathway, specifically within the health sciences-professional service fields within graduate education.

Internal data collection and analysis

To identify a potential framework for the professional development of contingent, teaching focused faculty (TFF), who are non-tenured at our institution, an initial exploration was conducted of the current Appointment, Promotion, Tenure (APT) process across our five professional schools (School of Dentistry, School of Medicine, School of Nursing, School of Pharmacy, School of Social Work). Electronic versions of each school's APT documents were collected and analyzed by UMB's Leaders in Education: Academy of Presidential Scholars (LEAPS) Educator Development Subcommittee. A comparison analysis was conducted on the defined metrics for promotion across the five schools to identify similarities and variations relative to requirements and specificity of criteria for faculty promotion. Metrics are standards of measurement for promotion such as courses taught, service activities, and scholarly publications. Weight is the defined value assigned to those activities (see Table 1).

Common among the five professional programs for faculty promotion is an evaluation of a faculty member's performance across the domains of teaching, scholarship, and service. In general, each school had a clear description of metrics for the tenured and non-tenured faculty path to promotion. For example, SOD has a clinical non-tenured track that each explicitly states for the Clinical

Associate Professor path, one of the defined metrics is that the faculty member must have successful experience in professional service at a level of excellence that is nationally recognized. For both tenured and non-tenured faculty, only one of the five schools (SOM) include criteria for the associated weight of impact of the faculty's work in each domain in their promotion evaluation. The other four schools did not have weighted impact for either tenured or non-tenured faculty. Additionally, the metrics varied in level of detail and specificity on the professional activities needed for promotion. For instance, the SOP has metrics that rank the evaluation of teaching with "Excellent with Promise of Distinction," "Excellent" or "Good." In contrast, the SON evaluates teaching by two primary metrics, the Instruction Workload Unit and a Faculty Evaluation Score. Each metric needs to meet a minimum value. Faculty promotion literature has identified that the research contributions of a faculty member are routinely weighted heavier in faculty promotion decisions as compared to teaching or service contributions (Rice et al., 2020). In the absence of detailed guidance for APT reviewers, it is possible this situation is occurring within our five professional schools. Currently, assessment of teaching contributions within our schools is primarily based on student evaluations and the number of courses directed by the faculty member. There are known issues relative to the inherent biases in student course evaluations particularly around the race and gender of the faculty member. Limiting the evaluation of teaching performance to these criteria reflects a lack of robustness in analysis of the full-picture of a faculty members contribution in the domain of teaching (Goos and Salomons, 2016). The absence of other elements of a teaching faculty members contribution (e.g., educational artifacts, innovations) limits a faculty member's ability to showcase all their contributions within teaching-focused activities. The deficiency in having a defined criteria for various metrics, particularly related to teaching and service contributions may result in stagnation of the career progression for many dedicated educators. The following proposal put forth by the LEAPS committee provides an approach to promotion specifically for TFF. This approach adapts the common promotion metrics of scholarship and service but applies a teaching centric focus in recognition of the predominant role of TFF within our health sciences-professional service graduate programs.

Proposed APT model for contingent TFF

The primary goals of the proposed APT framework for contingent TFF are to:

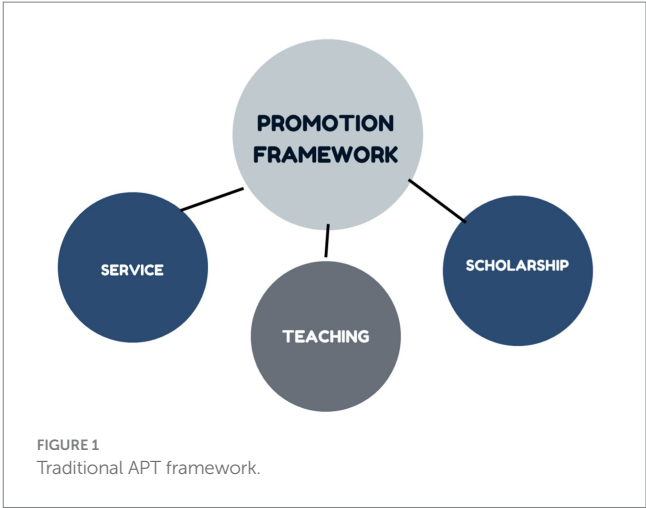
- 1 Serve as a "best practice" standard for each of the individual schools to adopt and tailor appropriately for the school's APT needs.
- 2 Establish a baseline for objective, measurable, and achievable metrics for promoting TFF.
- 3 Serve as the foundation for constructing a mentoring program to facilitate the promotion of TFF.

The traditional evaluation system includes a review of a faculty member across the pillars of Scholarship, Service, and Teaching (see Figure 1).

TABLE 1 Tenure career paths.

School	Scholarship						Service						Teaching					
	Tenured			Non-tenured			Tenured			Non-tenured			Tenured			Non-tenured		
	Metrics	Weight		Metrics	Weight		Metrics	Weight		Metrics	Weight		Metrics	Weight		Metrics	Weight	
SSW	✓	X		✓	X		✓	X		✓	X		✓	X		✓	X	
SOD	✓	X		✓	X		✓	X		✓	X		✓	X		✓	X	
SOP	✓	X		✓	X		✓	X		✓	X		✓	X		✓	X	
SON	✓	X		✓	X		✓	X		✓	X		✓	X		✓	X	
SOM	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	

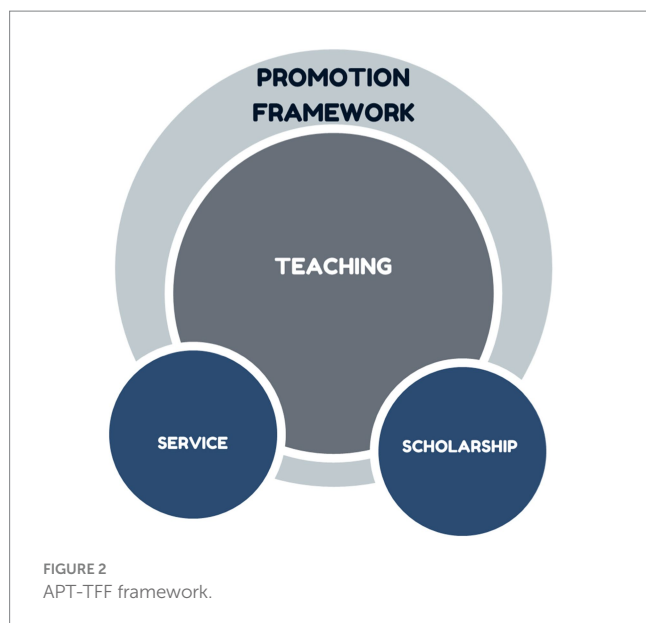
Promotion Data/Information from UMB School. APT documentation was curated from members of the committee and LEAPS executive council. School of Social Work (SSW), School of Dentistry (SOD), School of Medicine (SOM), School of Nursing (SON), and School of Pharmacy (SOP).



Because each pillar is generally considered separately and the views on the weight of each for promotion can vary among the schools, our proposed framework for TFF utilizes a teaching portfolio as the foundational resource for faculty evaluation for the promotion process. It focuses on systematic evidence of effective teaching and merit for promotion for a more equitable evaluation. This APT-TFF framework is an adaptation of the current APT system where the domain of “Teaching” shifts to become the load-bearing pillar (see Figure 2).

The “Teaching” pillar would contain evidence of teaching performance from multiple sources to provide a comprehensive overview of the candidates’ teaching experiences and reduce bias from any single source, (in contrast to the current system which has focused primarily on student course evaluations). Sources of evidence to support a faculty members accomplishments and contributions in the teaching domain may include student evaluations, peer evaluations, recorded media (e.g., videos, audio) of teaching, samples of teaching products/artifacts, reports of teaching observation by faculty experts, measures of student obtainment of learning outcomes affiliated with the faculty’s teaching activities and earned teaching awards/recognition. The push for evidence from multiple sources enables APT decision makers to evaluate TFF based on a more robust representation of a TFF’s full contribution to academics at their university.

The roles of scholarship and service would still be present in the teaching portfolio, but rather than be separate pillars of the promotion process, they can support the teaching portfolio to increase its value. Relative to the scholarship domain, we propose that scholarship is reviewed for TFF based on the contribution of their work to the scholarship of teaching and learning. In this manner, the contributions by the faculty member can serve as evidence in both the scholarship and teaching domain in the evaluation process. While the traditional evaluation of scholarship is based on quality and quantity of publications in peer-reviewed journals and textbooks/peer reviewed presentations at local/national/international conferences, the evaluation of scholarship for TFF might also include faculty generated media designed to share teaching innovations (such as podcasts), demonstration of effective integration of new forms of technology within their courses/educational programs, and/or innovations within their course design/delivery. While grant-funded research is a significant consideration in promotion review of tenure track faculty, less emphasis should be applied to the promotion review for this



metric with TFF. The changes proposed here represent a tailored, expansion of the existing Boyer model which includes scholarship of teaching as a tenet of health professions scholarship (Jahangiri and Mucciolo, 2011).

Along the same lines, any review of the service contributions by TFF should take into consideration the impact of teaching-related specific service with a consideration for faculty engaging in experiences that contribute to the development of skills within teaching and learning. For instance, leadership roles on campus or school-based committees that aim to support teaching (i.e., curriculum committees) should be recognized as these roles provide TFF opportunities to advance communication, collaboration, and mentorship skills, which in turn can enhance the quality of teaching. Furthermore, faculty can learn varied leadership styles which are transferable to leadership through instruction. The style of instructional leadership plays a critical role in student outcomes (Robinson et al., 2008). Overall, given that the workload distribution of TFF is often heavily weighted in the domain of teaching, any APT review should also have a relationally weighted assessment.

Because the APT-TFF framework is a modification of the current existing UMB APT frameworks, it can serve as a best practice model for the UMB campus and other health sciences-professional service graduate level academic institutions. By increasing the focus and robustness of the teaching pillar with support from scholarship and service, this provides more measurable and outcome-based teaching metrics for TFF. It can also be the foundation for the development of a mentorship program tailored to support TFF.

Proposed implementation of APT-TFF framework

The keys to successful implementation of this model requires a teaching-focused support infrastructure and a leadership-supported shift in the weight of teaching-focused activities for promotion. At UMB, the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning (FCTL) is available to support UMB's professional schools with

evidence-based teaching, learning, assessment, and evaluation practices. In coordination with the FCTL and the office of Faculty Affairs, the APT-TFF framework can be tailored to individual needs of schools. FCTL can help ensure success is a focus on education for the promotion committees to facilitate its acceptance. Additional support can be provided if a campus peer mentoring program is established that supports the promotion pathways of TFF.

Viable metrics to evaluate the adoption of an APT-TFF framework could include the number of TFF that apply for promotion and the number that achieve promotion. An evaluation of the impact of specific TFF mentorship with educational programs might include the number of active mentorships and outcomes achieved for established mentee/mentor development plans. Sustainability metrics could be defined in terms of number of new mentors produced each cycle, growth of an educational program and the extent of campus resources provided to programs. These metrics can be used to determine the overall effectiveness and contribute to campus strategy regarding faculty recruitment and retention.

Conclusion

The teaching-focused pathways that have advanced in undergraduate education have not been fully adapted into graduate education in the health sciences-professional service fields. TFF are becoming the primary interface with students at many universities, so there is a need for TFF to have a standardized, feasible pathway of promotion with adequate resources and support. Within our own institution, we identified an inconsistency among promotion frameworks across the professional schools between tenure and non-tenure track faculty roles.

The proposed LEAPS framework for non-tenure TFF allows for a reframing on how these faculty can have a successful career pathway in the academic environment. This includes a shift to teaching activities as the primary focus by which scholarship and service contributions are evaluated. Overall, adoption of the framework could foster the retention of TFF and subsequently build strong education focused teaching communities. The creation of a structured and adaptable promotion framework with clear expectations, resources, and metrics is paramount to the success of universities looking to retain TFF.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

GC: Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. SR: Conceptualization, Investigation,

Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. KG: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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