

TO: Dick Montanari, Academic Senate  
FROM: Faculty Affairs Committee  
DATE: April 20, 2004  
RE: RTP Survey Report

After the 2002 revision of the University Retention, Tenure and Promotion policy, FAC was charged to gather comments and report on satisfaction and perceptions from the faculty after using the document for one year. FAC surveyed all faculty reviewed and all faculty and administrators who served as reviewers of WPAFs during AY 2002-2003. In preparing these reports FAC used comments from survey respondents, invited guests to FAC meetings and gathered comments from attendees at Faculty Center sponsored workshops on preparing the WPAF. A summary of the survey results and a paper clarifying the concept of "item" in the WPAF are attached. Please accept these reports and recommendations for Academic Senate

#### Summary and Conclusions:

- The narrative page limit of up to 15 pages was acceptable to most respondents whether being reviewed or reviewer.
- Instructions and procedures are clearer, but files are generally but not necessarily more organized.
- Most reviewers did not wish for an increase in the number of items allowed for evidence.
- Those being reviewed found it difficult to decide what to include in the file, though they liked the smaller size.
- Reviewers were asked to comment on a need for a definition of "item" and to offer suggestions. Fifteen of the 23 who responded did not favor a definition of item, others provided possible definitions.
- Those being reviewed found the RTP workshops helpful, the few reviewers that attended also found them helpful to somewhat helpful.

#### Recommendations:

- Retain the current limit of 15 pages of narrative, and the 30 item limit.
- Accept the committee's paper on "What is an Item" as a guideline for what to include as an item when preparing a WPAF.
- Encourage to the greatest extent possible that everyone going up for review and those on review committees attend the RTP workshops whether through the faculty center or through the colleges. The changes envisioned and embodied in the language of the new campus Retention Tenure and Promotion Document are as much a conceptual shift for the faculty as a procedural one and community dialog through workshops and other venues is a critical component of that process.

#### Attached:

1. Revised RTP Policy Survey Report
2. What is an Item

## Revised RTP Policy Survey Report FAC

After several years of diligent work by members of FAC, a revised RTP policy was approved by the Academic Senate in Spring 2002. The policy went into effect during AY 2002-03. In order to assess perception of and satisfaction with changes in the revised RTP process, members of FAC created a survey that was sent to all faculty reviewed during AY 2002-03, and to all faculty and administrators who served as reviewers of WPAFs. A summary of survey results follows.

### Faculty who were reviewed in AY 2002-03

Surveys were sent to 87 faculty; 36 returned the questionnaire, giving a response rate of 41%. One-third of the respondents were being evaluated for the first time; another quarter were reporting on their second evaluation, and the rest had been evaluated three or more times.

#### General questions

The first part of the survey consisted of six general questions about WPAF preparation. Each item was rated on a scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). The table below lists the items, the percentage of faculty who agreed (ratings of 4 and 5) and disagreed (ratings of 1 and 2) with the item, and the item mean and median.

Item	% Agree	% Disagree	Mean	Median
Instructions for WPAF preparation were clear.	66	17	3.7	4
Processes and procedures were easy to follow.	53	22	3.4	4
Preparing the WPAF was a good opportunity for me to evaluate my own progress.	72	19	3.9	4
I found it difficult to decide what to include in my file.	56	33	3.3	4
I wish the page limit on the narrative were higher.	33	58	2.6	2
I wish the number of items allowed for evidence were higher.	38	57	2.6	2

Two-thirds of the respondents felt that the new instructions were clear. Close to three-quarters reported that the WPAF was useful to evaluate their progress. Over half of the respondents said that the processes and procedures were easy to follow, and were satisfied with the narrative page limit and the number of allowed items. Over half also reported that it was difficult to decide what to include in the file.

#### RTP workshops

The rest of the survey consisted primarily of open-ended questions inviting comments about various aspects of the new RTP process. The first questions were about RTP workshops. Of the 28 respondents who attended a workshop, 57% found the workshop to be very helpful, 36% said it was somewhat helpful, and 7% said it was not helpful. Faculty commented positively on workshop organization and information, and the presenters genuine concern for those who were

undergoing the review process. Some faculty said that since the policy was new, there were often more questions than answers. Other faculty felt that, since there didn't seem to be uniformity of expectations across the university (although there should be), that it would be more appropriate for each college and the library to hold its own workshop. In addition, some commented that PRC members didn't seem to be up to date on the new policy.

### **Difficulties and frustrations**

Respondents were asked to list two difficulties or frustrations in preparing their WPAF. The two most frequent comments were about having to start from scratch with a new format when respondents had files that had already been positively reviewed, and the difficulty of deciding what to put in the file. Other comments that came up more than once were: the issue of what an item is, the narrative page limit, the difficulty of new faculty being forced to put together a file four months after arriving, student evaluations not arriving before the file was due, not feeling as if there was sufficient time to put together the WPAF (or feeling that it took too much time to prepare), and the fact that it is difficult to put together a file during the first weeks of the semester.

### **Positive aspects**

Respondents also listed up to two positive aspects of preparing their WPAF. By far, the most frequent comment was that it allowed faculty to review their accomplishments and progress. Some saw the WPAF as useful for planning, or that it was a good experience for the next round of evaluation. Some respondents commented favorably on the smaller file size; others said that with the limit on the number of items, they were more discriminating in what they chose to put in their files. A couple of respondents commented that the new policy provided clearer direction on how to prepare a file.

### **What is an item?**

Respondents were asked if they were in favor of creating a definition of ITEM and to offer a definition. Of the 23 faculty who provided comments, 15 indicated that they did not favor creating a definition of an ITEM. Some felt that this would stifle creativity, or that it would be too difficult to come up with a definition general enough that it would apply across the university. Others, however, felt that it was important to provide a definition. Below are the definitions offered:

- Yes, there needs to be an operational definition of ITEM so that we know and are not penalized for not following the proper form or having the proper information. I think it should be defined as follows:
  - A class is an item—a course syllabus is an item—a course activity is an item, etc.
  - A paper is an item—a presentation is an item—a grant is an item.
  - All university committees count as 1 item—all college committees counts as 1 item—all chairs of committees count as 1 item—
- “Item” should allow grouping several tightly related documents or pieces of evidence together. In other words, the “whole” should be considered the item, not the “parts.” For instance, a Web site consisting of a number of pages or a course description consisting of syllabus, assignments, etc., should count as 1 item if desired.
- As little as one page, but not more than can be attached with one hand stapler (this gave a size of reference).

- An item would be composed of all the materials needed to place the item within my professional efforts, especially if a component of the item was innovative or exemplary but was not so if presented on its own (e.g., substantial revision of a course syllabus and its teaching methods)
- Yes—we need a definition. Examples—a syllabus, a manuscript, a committee report.
- Item: (noun). A verifiable text used by the candidate to substantiate an assertion and to illustrate to reviewers the necessity of including such in the file. The nature of the item can include, but is not limited to hardcopy/electronic document, electronic recording – video/audio, valid URL, etc.

### **Changes from previous RTP process**

Those respondents who had been reviewed under the old system were asked to comment on up to two changes (positive, negative, or neutral) in the RTP process. Two respondents said that they noticed no change. The most frequently mentioned positive change was about the 30-item limit and the fact that files were more condensed. Other respondents said that the file was now easier to organize. The most frequent negative comment was about having to revamp the file in light of the new policy. A suggestion was made that faculty who had gone through review under the old rules be protected under a grandfather clause. The only other negative comment that appeared more than once was that the lack of specific criteria left the process arbitrary and capricious (both respondents used those exact words), and that more specificity and concrete criteria were needed.

### **Other comments**

Most of the additional comments provided were already mentioned in previous sections of the survey. Suggestions were made that all PRC members attend a training workshop, that criteria be made more specific, that WPAFs should go digital, and that the whole process should be more collaborative and viewed as a faculty development opportunity (rather than a review being done “to” faculty, it should be done “with” faculty).

### **WPAF Reviewers**

Surveys were sent to 60 reviewers and 31 were returned, yielding a response rate of 52%. Of the surveys returned, 26 were from PRC members, 2 were from the University Promotion and Tenure Committee, and 3 were from administrators. Because of the small number of surveys from administrators and P&T members, all reviewers were treated as one group.

### **General questions**

The first part of the survey consisted of four questions about submitted WPAFs. Each item was rated on a scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). The table below lists the items, the percentage of faculty who agreed (ratings of 4 and 5) and disagreed (ratings of 1 and 2) with the item, and the item mean and median.

Item	% Agree	% Disagree	Mean	Median
This year’s WPAFs were well-organized.	61	16	3.6	4
Candidates seemed to engage in serious self-reflection.	65	16	3.8	4

I wish the page limit on the narrative were higher.	13	71	2.0	1
I wish the number of items allowed for evidence were higher.	16	68	2.1	2

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Over 60% of the respondents felt that the WPAFs they reviewed were organized, and almost two-thirds said that candidates seemed to engage in self-reflection. Most reviewers did not wish for a higher page limit on the narrative or an increase in the number of items allowed for evidence. Respondents were also invited to clarify their responses, or provide suggestions/comments based on their experiences. The comments represented a variety of opinions. One respondent said that the revised RTP document is an improvement, and another said that the files were informative and easy to review. Two reviewers commented that, for them, the reflective statement is the most revealing part of the file. Two other reviewers expected more reflection in the narrative. Two reviewers would like to see past reviews for those going up for Full Professor. Other reviewers recognized that file quality varied, not necessarily as a function of the revised policy.

### **RTP workshops**

Ten respondents reported attending an RTP workshop; half felt it was very helpful, and the other half felt it was somewhat helpful. One reviewer commented that the workshops allow people at all levels of review and ranks to discuss the parts of the RTP process that are open to interpretation. Two respondents said that the new process was still vague, which limited the helpfulness of the workshops.

### **What is an item?**

Respondents were asked if they were in favor of creating a definition of ITEM and to offer a definition. Of the 19 reviewers who responded to this question, 9 did not want to create a definition. Some preferred the flexibility of not having a definition, or felt that the item limit was not abused in the files reviewed, so that no problem existed. However, 53% wanted a definition, and even some of the reviewers who were opposed to a rigid definition did ask for further clarification. Below are relevant comments; the variety of responses points to the difficulty in determining a firm definition of the term.

- Yes, I would favor a definition. This would not only give “reviewees” a better indication of what is expected, it would give reviewers consistent guidelines. I do not necessarily think of an item as one course syllabus or one set of teaching evaluations, but rather an item can be several pieces of evidence that make up the item. For example, a particular course may be highlighted to demonstrate innovative teaching, which would be one item. However, this “item” may include a course syllabus, a particular lesson, a video, etc. I can see that this definition might again lead to information overload, so I would think that the definition of an “item” might also include something like “an item may consist of no more than x supporting documents.”
- Give an idea of the intention. An item, e.g., a syllabus, exam, etc. Or e.g., CD with all syllabi.
- An item should be ONE thing, for example a journal article. For teaching a sample syllabus.
- An item is a complete set of documents of the same nature. To clarify, here is what an item is and is not: An item is not a set of documents, such as an “item” for a course being the syllabus, course hand-outs, sample tests, and evident of students’ work. In my definition the

syllabus would be one item, course hand-outs is one item, sample tests is one item, sample of students work is an item. If the professor provides “items” for a second course, the same rules would apply, each being separate items. Clarifying further, if three sample tests for a particular course were provided, it would be one item and not three.

- I am not sure the word ITEM needs to be defined, but rather subcategories of ITEMS need to be identified and then defined. For example, either EACH COURSE TAUGHT should be a separate item and candidates have to decide which courses to include, or COURSES TAUGHT IN SEMESTER X should be one item. In the first case that ITEM can include syllabus, handouts, examples of student work, and any other material prepared for the course. In the latter case, all the same material can be included for all courses taught in that semester. Another example, each experience of service should be one item: e.g., member of GEC, and all supporting material from the term on GEC should count as one item.
- One item = one activity or product (e.g., syllabus, paper, performance, term paper assignment).
- I prefer not to limit the items by attaching a definition of item. However, examples may be given as to how a certain selected “item” provides specific evidence and how the creative selection of items can support and substantiate entirely different career stories.
- I favor creating guidelines which discourage a faculty member from cramming a bunch of documents together to count as one item. For example:
  - if multiple documents are acceptable within an item, there should be a limited number
  - they should indicate a thread or trend
  - that trend should be explained by a maximum of 5 sentences as an introduction to the “item.”
- I would like a definition, but I don’t have a suggestion. I think we need to work on specifying essential items that should be included in all files.

**Changes from previous RTP process**

Reviewers were presented with a series of items asking them to compare their experiences of reviewing files under the revised policy and the previous policy. The table below lists responses.

Item	% Agree	% Disagree	Mean	Median
This year’s files were better organized than in the past.	32	23	3.1	3
This year’s files provided sufficient narrative for evaluation.	68	9	4.0	4
This year’s files were easier to review than in the past.	59	9	3.9	4
Overall, reviewing the “new” WPAFs is preferable to reviewing the “old” WPAFs.	59	14	3.9	4

The largest percentage of reviewers (45%) were neutral on the item about file organization. Evidently, the revised policy did not result in much of a change in the degree to which files were organized. Over two-thirds of the reviewers felt that the narrative, with its 15 page limit, was sufficient for evaluation. Over half felt that the most recent WPAFs were easier to review, and that reviewing them was preferable to reviewing previous years’ files. Fourteen reviewers added comments to this section. Of those who commented, 6 (43%) saw no difference in the

files, while two (14%) reported that the narrative and item limits made the files easier to navigate and review. Four of the reviewers complained that the narratives did not contain enough information or were not reflective enough. Two reviewers also stressed the importance of organization of the files. As one reviewer said, "...The key to (an) easy to understand file is the ORGANIZATION. It is very frustrating when you can't find something that is referenced in the narrative or index."

### **Other comments**

Five additional comments were included in the survey responses. Three reviewers said that the revised policy resulted in a better process. One reviewer said that the policy should stress more documentation of scholarship, and less documentation of service (the reflection on service is more important than documentation). Finally, one reviewer called for departments and colleges to develop their own RTP standards.

## What is an item?

### History

When the RTP policy was being revised, FAC members were faced with two realities that needed to be changed. First, faculty had become less selective in what they included in their WPAFs, resulting in large files that were increasingly difficult to evaluate. Second, a general sense of distrust seemed to exist in terms of documentation of service contributions. The result was that faculty provided documentation of the smallest service contributions which resulted, again, in larger, but not necessarily more informative, files.

### Attempted solutions

In order to make the files more selective and representative of best practices, the revised 2003 RTP policy placed a 15-page limit on the reflective statement and a limit of 30 items to serve as documentation of contributions to teaching, scholarship/creative activity, and service. Provost Sheath has also requested that, as part of their file, faculty include a “complete” vita; one that provides detailed lists of classes taught (including number of students), publications, and service contributions. Much of this information had previously been included in the reflective statement or in the listing of file materials.

### The problem

In the new policy FAC did not define the term “item.” Not surprisingly, the lack of a definition led to confusion on the part of faculty compiling their WPAF’s, as well as those who review the files. The opinions held by faculty and administrators cover the continuum from an item is equal to “one piece of paper” to an item is “everything that can fit in one staple”.

It should be noted that results of the RTP survey carried out last year indicated that file size had diminished as the result of the new policy, primarily among new faculty. It is not surprising that faculty who have had files in the review system multiple times are reluctant to change the way they put their WPAF together. Faculty accustomed to the old system may hesitate to counsel new faculty to include less. We might expect, therefore, that as faculty who came in under the old policy are promoted out of the review system, the culture change called for by the new policy should result in smaller files in the future. In essence, we are trying to invoke a culture change that will take 2 to 4 years to accomplish.

### What is an item?

The issue remains, however, that without guidelines about what constitutes an item, faculty will present varying degrees of documentation in their files, making the task of reviewing files more difficult and possibly discriminatory. FAC believes, however, that defining what is meant by the term “item” is much less important than getting faculty to understand the significance of the reflective statement to the WPAF. The reflective statement is not a list of accomplishments; that is the function of the complete vita. Instead, the reflective statement provides faculty with an opportunity to explain their educational philosophy, to highlight some successes, and discuss lessons learned.

When writing the reflective statement for their WPAF, faculty should strive to present a coherent story about their work. Similarly, when selecting items for the WPAF, faculty should choose a

representative sampling of material that supports and documents the reflective statement. Each item must, in some way, be directly linked to the reflective statement.

We do understand, however, that faculty and reviewers are seeking guidance about what an item is. We have concluded that it is impossible to present a definition of the term “item,” although we do have some thoughts about what an item is not. An item is not, necessarily, one piece of paper, one syllabus, one journal article, or one CD (although these could each be considered an item in the appropriate context). On the other hand, an item is not all the pages that can be held together with one staple!

Instead of a definition, this document provides examples of possible items for each of the three sections discussed in the reflective statement. We begin with scholarship/creative activity, as the easiest section to document, and end with teaching, which is the most difficult.

**Scholarship/creative activity items:** It is not necessary to provide documentation of every activity that falls in this category. These accomplishments are all listed in the vita. Documentation should be reserved for what faculty perceive as their most important scholarship and creative activities. The documentation should be directly linked to the reflective statement, and the discussion should include why the selected activity is important (e.g., how did this item contribute to the field, etc.).

Items chosen for discussion should be appropriate to the faculty member’s discipline. The following examples should not be taken as an exhaustive list of all possible items, but as illustrations of the “size” of typical scholarship/creative activity items. An item in this section could be a reprint or preprint. If an article has been accepted to a journal but not yet published, a copy of the manuscript and the acceptance letter from the editor would constitute an item. Similarly, an article that has been submitted but not yet reviewed should be accompanied by documentation that it has been received by the journal editor. In addition, it could be a grant proposal submitted to an external agency and its status. Books, monographs, and technical reports would each count as items. For the arts, it could be the review of a play, showing, or musical performance. Please see the current RTP policy for other examples of items in this category.

**Service items:** It is not necessary or desired that faculty provide documentation of every service activity. The complete vita should list all service activities and a short statement of the role faculty played in the conduct of those activities. The reflective statement is a place to highlight only the most important activities and documentation should relate directly to the activities highlighted in the narrative. For example, when serving on a committee, if a faculty member was primarily responsible for the development of a policy or procedure, inclusion of the policy or procedure would constitute an item. Chairs of Academic Senate committees might include, as an item, the final report of the committee as evidence of tasks accomplished. A workshop conducted for a community group might be documented by a letter of thanks or a copy of the program.

**Teaching items:** Teaching is our primary mission, yet it is the most difficult area of faculty work to document. This section of the reflective statement is particularly important. It should not be a list of courses and number of students taught (again, these kinds of information

would be found in the complete vita). Instead, the reflective statement should be a thoughtful analysis of process and outcomes for a sample of classes.

Our definition of “item” for this section is somewhat generous because we recognize the difficulties inherent in documenting an activity that is, essentially, private (at least in terms of other faculty). If a particular course is discussed in the reflective statement, we believe that all of the selected material associated with that class might be considered an item (e.g., syllabus, sample exam, sample assignment, peer evaluation, etc.). However, all such material must be discussed in the reflective statement, or it should not be included as documentation. There is no reason to put in multiple syllabi for the same course, for example, unless a point is being made about major changes in the curriculum for that course. One exam or one assignment is sufficient unless the reflective statement includes a discussion of different assessment techniques.

### **Conclusion**

FAC members think that the complete vita, the reflective statement page limit, and the requirement to discuss each item in the reflective statement will, in turn, result in reduced and more selective documentation. We also look forward to the day when reflective statements are truly reflective. We are convinced that, as the culture changes, faculty will begin to accept the fact that promotion and tenure decisions do not hinge on the size of the WPAF, but on the accomplishments of the individual.