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Internationalizing the Tenure Code: Six Strategies for Policy Design and Implementation

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INTRODUCTION

As higher education systems and institutions seek to internationalize, there can be no denying the centrality of faculty to these efforts. How faculty are rewarded for their contributions to internationalization is a crucial question for institutions undertaking this process. Although U.S. higher education is increasingly relying on “contingent” faculty, tenure and promotion are still the primary incentive and reward structure for faculty performance at many colleges and universities.

The American Council on Education’s (ACE) *2011 Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses* survey found that just 8% of institutions had incorporated internationally-focused criteria into their promotion and tenure policies. In a follow-up study, ACE analyzed such policies from the institutions comprising the 8%, and interviewed their provosts and other leaders about the process of doing so. Six strategies for policy design and implementation emerged from their advice.



INTERNATIONALIZING THE TENURE CODE: SIX STRATEGIES FOR POLICY DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

1. Assess the overall state of internationalization on campus.

Changing the tenure code **should not be considered “low hanging fruit”** when it comes to internationalization. Given the multitude of competing demands on junior faculty time, adding additional requirements or expectations for tenure and promotion is almost always a controversial proposition. If internationalization is not firmly embedded in the culture and operations of the institution – to the extent that many faculty are already substantially engaged in and committed to internationalization-related activities – then attempts to incorporate such activities into promotion and tenure requirements will almost certainly be met with resistance, and ultimately, are unlikely to succeed.

In order for the faculty (both newly hired and long-standing) to fully accept and buy into tenure and promotion policies that include internationalization-related criteria, they need to have access to tools and resources that will allow them to continue to build their international expertise and ensure they are able to fulfill the expectations set forth. If “giving presentations at international conferences” is among the proposed criteria, for example, does the institution provide funding for faculty to travel abroad? If faculty are expected to contribute to the internationalization of the curriculum, are there workshops or other opportunities for them to learn how to incorporate globally-focused elements into their course syllabi?

In short, **institutional readiness is critical to the success of policy changes.** Before tackling the tenure code, it is important for institutions to thoroughly and honestly assess the overall state of internationalization on campus, and use this assessment to inform the specific changes made. Or, if such an assessment yields a decision that the campus is not yet ready to embrace internationally-focused tenure policy changes, it can point to key areas that require attention in order to create an environment in which such changes may be feasible in the future.

2. Consider existing barriers and “lived reality.”

Prior to *adding* language to the tenure code in order to encourage faculty global engagement, an assessment of the existing process from the angle of internationalization is an important first step. Looking at the policies themselves, **are there criteria or specifications in place that – perhaps unintentionally –**



deter faculty from pursuing particular types of international activity? For example, in terms of research, tenure standards that award more “credit” for single authored publications than those that are co-authored will potentially inhibit international research collaborations, which by nature would lead to a joint product.

Beyond stated policies, there is also the **lived reality of the tenure and promotion process**, and how it plays out in individual departments and across campus. The culture of the tenure process, and the “power” of the tenure code – i.e. what is written in policies versus what is actually taken into account in decisions – can vary substantial between and within institutions. Current attitudes toward international activities, and the guidance junior faculty receive about whether to undertake them, can significantly influence tenure and promotion outcomes.

Taking into account the reality of these dynamics and their impact on faculty decisions about whether and how to pursue internationalization-related work is important in **ensuring that any changes made to the tenure code to encourage such activity will have traction**, and will not be “cancelled out” by other issues; focused discussions with junior faculty and key “influencers” in the tenure and promotion process throughout campus can reveal sticking points and major issues, and highlight particular aspects of policies to focus on for changes or additions.

3. Educate and engage campus stakeholders throughout the process.

On most campuses, making changes – of any type – to the tenure code is an arduous process. This reflects the high stakes involved in terms of individual faculty members’ careers, and the importance of institution-wide (or unit-wide) support for and compliance with the policies set forth. Typically, there is a **set procedure for proposing and approving changes that involves multiple layers of discussion and review**; though the specifics vary from campus to campus (and potentially by school or department for unit-level policies), the actors involved are likely to include the provost or chief academic officer, the faculty senate, various faculty committees, deans, the board of trustees, and the president.

Internationalization-related changes to the tenure code might be initiated by any of these actors, or by the senior international officer or another administrator with significant responsibilities in the international realm. From the outset of discussions, **outreach to all parties involved in the decision chain** – and to the faculty at large – is crucial. Messages should highlight the importance of



internationalization and explain why changes to the tenure code are needed, and how they will advance the institution's goals in this area.

4. Align criteria with internationalization goals.

As discussed above, changes to the tenure code are best tackled once the process of internationalization is already well underway on campus; at that point there are likely to be multiple goals spanning the full array of academic functions. **Taking stock of these goals** – at both the institutional and unit levels – at the outset of discussions about tenure and promotion policy changes will help ensure that what faculty are rewarded for matches what the institution is hoping to accomplish through internationalization.

ACE's 2011 *Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses* study found that institutions' top motivations for internationalizing included "to improve student preparedness for a global era," and the "institution's emphasis on a more globally oriented curriculum and pedagogy." Yet in the tenure codes analyzed for the follow-up study, few included internationally-focused criteria related to teaching, favoring instead research, reputation, and service.

Using internationalization goals as a starting point in developing tenure indicators and criteria will **ensure that such disconnects are minimized**, and that the criteria incorporated will encourage faculty to contribute to key initiatives and advance internationalization in a direction commensurate with overall objectives and priorities.

5. Be realistic about "required" vs. "desired"

Reflective of the high value American higher education places on faculty autonomy, while tenure codes provide guidelines, in general they are not prescriptive; typically **they present a "menu" of indicators that faculty can draw upon to present their case**. Ultimately the constellation of activities and focus areas that comprise the working life of faculty varies from individual to individual. Even at an institution with a strong international orientation overall, the appropriate level – and types – of international engagement will vary from one faculty member to another.

"And/or" phrasing allows for this variation (e.g. "service to local, national, and/or international professional organizations" as an indicator). It does not force



faculty to do something that is not appropriate or reasonable for them, but at the same time, it ensures that work with an international scope or focus is possible – and valued – for faculty for whom it makes sense. The inclusion of “blanket” statements that emphasize the importance of contributions to internationalization can mitigate the “optionality” factor in individual criteria and indicators, and reinforce the message that such activities should be viewed positively in tenure and promotion decisions.

6. Make it easy for faculty to showcase their internationalization-related work.

Because internationalization and international engagement are broad terms and can encompass such a wide range of activities, is it important to allow for – and encourage – substantial variation in terms of their interpretation. Giving faculty an **opportunity to think through and articulate *themselves* how particular aspects of their work contribute to internationalization** – while at the same time providing concrete examples of applicable activities that they can reference – is an approach that seems to make sense in terms of balancing specificity and inclusiveness. How, exactly, to do this will depend on the format of the dossier; some institutions or units require a brief narrative to this effect as part of the tenure dossier, while others by ask candidates to address contributions to internationalization as part of a “personal statement.”

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

While internationalizing the tenure code is not an easy process, for those institutions that are deeply committed to internationalization, it is an important way to build momentum. ACE’s 2016 *Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses* survey is currently underway – we are eager to find out whether more institutions have taken this step in the last five years. Keep an eye out for the report in the spring of 2017.



The **Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA)**, a membership organization formed in November 1982, is composed of institutional leaders engaged in advancing the international dimensions of higher education. The purposes of the Association are to:

- Provide an effective voice on significant issues within international education at all levels,
- Improve and promote international education programming and administration within institutions of higher education,
- Establish and maintain a professional network among international education institutional leaders,
- Cooperate in appropriate ways with other national and international groups having similar interests.

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