


TO: Erika Weinthal, Chair of the Academic Council and members of ECAC

FROM: Jennifer Francis, Interim Provost and Robert Dickens Professor



DATE: January 3, 2023

RE: Change in tenured option in the visual and performing arts units

The Academic Programs Committee (APC) met on October 26, 2022 to discuss the May 2022 report from the Ad Hoc Committee on Tenure Pathways for Professors in the Creative Arts, presented by Professor William Johnson. After a lively and informative discussion and Q&A, the APC prepared the attached summary which includes their endorsement of the creation of a tenured option in the Visual and Performing Arts (VPA) units. The APC further recommended that if such a tenured option is approved by Academic Council, that further refinement of certain issues and policies be undertaken by the VPA units.

I support APC's recommendations and am now forwarding them to you for review by ECAC and Academic Council.

Thank you.

## Summary of APC Discussion on Tenure Pathways for Professors in the Creative Arts October 26, 2022

### Background

The Academic Programs Committee met on October 26, 2022 to discuss the May 2022 report from the Ad Hoc Committee on Tenure Pathways for Professors in the Creative Arts, hereafter described as “the Johnson report.”<sup>1</sup> Quoting from the report’s Preamble:

*Provost Sally Kornbluth has charged our ad hoc committee to “re-examine the potential establishment of a tenure track for faculty with a terminal Master in Fine Arts (MFA) degree,” in response to a request from the Executive Committee of the Academic Council. Our committee’s charge follows multiple efforts over the years to scrutinize the challenges and opportunities that granting tenure to arts faculty might create. Two earlier group efforts that are foundational for the work of our committee must be mentioned at once. In 2017-18, Provost Kornbluth charged a 22-member Committee on Tenure Standards to “to re-evaluate the criteria for tenure and promotion to clearly define criteria that reward the many scholarly activities we value as a community.” The committee report, delivered to the Provost in May 2018, contained an exemplary discussion of the background and substance to the specific question of tenure for arts faculty which we have taken as the basis for our work. 3 In 2018-19 the 22-member Arts Planning Group, established by President Price in collaboration with Provost Kornbluth, met with dozens of stakeholders within and outside the University to assess progress in the arts. In April 2019 the APG delivered a report that provided an overview of the current state of the arts at Duke and sketched out “a vision for the future.” With regards to the question of tenure for faculty in the arts, that report included this statement:*

**Goal:** *Over the next decade, strengthen leadership in the arts and the role of artists in faculty culture by appointing nationally and internationally recognized artists to senior faculty positions, preferably endowed chairs, in all departments and programs.*

**Action:** *Make appointments (external or internal) at the level of tenured full professor or professor of the practice, as appropriate, to secure the most outstanding candidates in a particular field, in keeping with the recommendations of the Provost’s Task Force on Tenure Standards. [end quotation]*

### Summary of APC Discussion

The APC found the report very helpful in detailing tenure standards applicable to the visual and performing arts (VPA) disciplines. Because the discussion involved frequent comparisons made to tenure standards for other units (i.e., traditional disciplines such as chemistry or political science), we will refer to the latter simply as non-VPA disciplines.

Comments and questions related to the report included the following, grouped by category below.

Is the MFA a required terminal degree for tenure? Specifically, must an individual have an MFA degree in order to be considered for tenure? There are at least two aspects to this question, and one note.

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<sup>1</sup> The Ad Hoc Committee consisted of Professors William Johnson (chair), Sheila Dillon, Douglas Jones, Ranjana Khanna, Kevin Moore and Philip Rupprecht.

First, it should be noted that for all the VPA disciplines identified in the report, traditional terminal (doctoral) programs exist – though there may be fewer in number relative to non- VPA disciplines. Certainly, an individual who held a doctoral degree, but not an MFA degree, would be considered as having a terminal degree requirement for the purposes of being considered for tenure.

Second, the Johnson report and the APC discussed a variety of scenarios where an individual might not, for example, possess even a bachelor's degree, but have attained international excellence in their field. It was further noted, that while rare, individuals who lack a terminal degree in their field (typically a PhD) have attained tenure in non-VPA disciplines. Thus, existing exceptions indicate that the terminal degree is not a necessary condition for tenure. While it is possible VPA disciplines might see more such exceptions than observed for non-VPA disciplines, the APC committee did not believe it was useful to try to predict the frequency with which consideration of such exceptions might occur.

The general sense of the APC was that an MFA or PhD degree would typically serve as the terminal degree in an VPA discipline, but that exceptional cases would arise in which an individual had neither terminal degree but was still deemed eligible to be considered for tenure.

Note: Accreditation policies require that persons who teach undergraduate students have at least a master's degree, and those that teach masters students have a PhD degree. There are exceptions that can be, and are, made regularly to these requirements, particularly for individuals who possess experiences and/or achievements from their respective field or industry that demonstrably substitute for the academic credential.

How do the proposed tenure standards relate to the expectations and responsibilities for regular rank, non-tenure VPA track faculty? Specifically, is it possible to distinguish between the roles of Professors of the Practice and tenure track positions?

The APC discussion identified several themes or conclusions regarding the tenure standards articulated in the Johnson report.

The committee did not feel qualified to comment directly about the standards for the VPA disciplines, in much the same way any group of faculty from across disciplines would have difficulty defining standards for any non- VPA discipline. The APC felt that the tenure standards for VPA disciplines should be – like their non- VPA counterparts – left to the VPA disciplines, subject to the standard engagement with the relevant divisional dean and the Office of Faculty Advancement.

Nonetheless, the committee notes that the articulated VPA tenure standards to the rank of associate professor seem to emphasize teaching excellence more than would be expected in non- VPA cases. The APC suggests consistency in the description and weight that teaching should bear in determining tenure.

With regard to differential responsibilities of regular rank, non-tenure track and regular rank, tenure track, the initial descriptions of potential tenure standards provided by the Johnson Report tended to emphasize that responsibilities were generally quite similar across these two groups. In particular, teaching loads, advising, mentoring, research and service, were all about the same in terms of effort. Based on this similarity, the APC felt that it is very important that at the hiring of an individual, the rank,

tenure track status, and roles are clearly defined so that individuals had a clear understanding of position trajectory and pathway to success.

Grandfathering: in light of a recommendation to consider the MFA as a terminal degree, how do we propose to consider or apply this change to those individuals currently in regular rank, non-tenure track positions in the VPA disciplines?

It is expected that between 10-15 persons currently in regular rank, non-tenure track positions in VPA disciplines might be eligible for tenure, if the recommendation to consider the MFA as a terminal degree in the VPA disciplines were applied to this group.

While the APC committee discussed the pros and cons of grandfathering such individuals, the overall conclusion was this was a matter of implementation of the recommendation, and should be left to a future group to understand and debate the implications of applying the recommendation to new hires only or to apply retroactively.

Importantly, the APC noted that the introduction of tenure track faculty in VPA disciplines had the ability to create “classes” of faculty which had not previously existed and which could cause stress, disappointment and unhappiness if departmental and school leaders did not carefully handle the implementation of any new policy.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the discussion and the reports prepared about the topic of tenure pathways in the creative arts, the APC endorses the creation of a tenured option in the VPA units.

APC further recommends that if and after this tenured option is approved, there be a refinement of standards at the unit level, encompassing both 1) the grandfathering issue and 2) distinctions between tenure track regular rank and non-tenure track regular rank within the unit, including in terms of promotion standards 3) field-specific consideration of innovation, significance and impact of intellectual, scholarly and creative output (as opposed to relying on “prestige” metrics). We suggest these standards be reviewed by the Divisional Dean of the Humanities and the Vice Provost for Faculty Advancement, with particular attention to consistency with respect to teaching and service standards in non- VPA disciplines (e.g., expectations for teaching excellence).

## **Voting**

**14 voted yes; 3 abstained**