This brief report addresses questions raised by Academic and Student Affairs Committee (ASAC) members about academic quality and organizational structure at the University of Oregon. It is intended to highlight the importance of faculty peer review at research universities and to promote discussions about how the University of Oregon can fulfill its mission of achieving academic excellence.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PEER REVIEW

Peer review is the primary method of quality control in the academy. Not only is faculty peer review the key to establishing the reputations of individual scholars, creative artists, and scientists, but the prestige of doctoral and other terminal degree programs depends on peer review, as do the overall rankings of colleges and universities. The peer review process, frequently blind to the identity of reviewers, governs the tenure and promotion system, the publication of academic journal articles and books, the awarding of federal and foundation grants to support individual and group research projects, election to prestigious professional associations and academies (such as the National Academy of Sciences or the American Academy of Arts and Sciences), and the awarding of individual academic awards (such as Fulbright and Guggenheim Fellowships). For creative activity, peer review occurs through juried exhibits and performances, juried competitions, juried commissions; grant submissions; and critical reviews in discipline-related publications.

Tenure-track and research faculty in all academic disciplines are expected to participate in peer review at multiple levels in their home institution, for other institutions, and for various professional organizations. They are expected to evaluate the work of others for scholarly journals, academic publishers, and grant agencies. Most tenure-related faculty members regularly present papers at international, national, and regional conferences organized by professional associations juried by peers, and in return, act as peer reviewers of potential papers, panels, and awards. As they move through the ranks, these faculty are expected to participate in a wide range of peer-review practices by serving on editorial boards, organizing conference sessions, serving on panels and committees, and eventually running for offices that oversee the core peer-evaluation processes that undergird the entire academic system.

TENURE-TRACK FACULTY AND PEER REVIEW

The success of a research university like the University of Oregon depends on the strength of the members of its tenure-track faculty (TTF) and their role in assessing and maintaining academic quality through peer review. Conducting research and mentoring graduate students are the primary activities of tenure-related faculty at all research universities. At the UO and many sister institutions, TTF are also strongly committed to teaching undergraduate students. In general, TTF are responsible for developing curriculum and overseeing the teaching and training of graduate students beyond undergraduate and professional degree entry levels. TTF make up the majority of principal investigators on research grants and generate the bulk of research publications, including books and peer-reviewed scientific and scholarly articles. TTF in the arts engage in creative activity disseminated through exhibits, performance, and publication that also have a peer-review component.

Each disciplinary field has specific requirements for certification and acceptance into the professorial ranks, but in general, a PhD (or other terminal professional degree such as JD, DEd, MA, MBA, MFA) is the minimal qualification, with additional postdoctoral research experience, teaching experience, and evidence of original professional accomplishment also essential to being hired as a TTF. Assistant professors are hired without tenure into tenure-track lines and evaluated annually on new research or creative activity, teaching, and service. Newly hired TTF undergo a
major contract review at three years, with evaluation for promotion to associate professor and tenure after six years. Similarly, after approximately six years in rank as associate professor, evaluation for promotion to full professor occurs and is granted only if there is evidence of continued high-quality original research, scholarship, or creative activity; national or international recognition; strong teaching; and service to the profession, the department, the school, and the university. Full professors, like assistant and associate professors, are evaluated annually to be eligible for salary increases based on merit and as part of setting teaching and committee assignments or receiving research support. Full professors also undergo a review at three years post-promotion, and a thorough promotion-like review at six years.

The quintessential element in faculty evaluation at the institutional level, peer review is designed to ensure that only truly original and outstanding academic contributions are recognized and rewarded. Every campus has a set of procedures for evaluating TTF for purposes of hiring and promotion and for rewarding meritorious performance. Department heads, deans, and provosts organize the reviews, but the primary input into the process is evaluation by one’s faculty peers. Typically, a faculty committee within a subfield (appointed by a department head or program director or elected by a department) reads and evaluates all the publications and activities of a candidate for promotion. Those materials are also sent to leading scholars in the field from other institutions—some recommended by the candidate, but most recommended by the department. All TTF in the department or program at or above the rank being considered vote on the promotion case and the committee writes an assessment, as does the department head. The promotion file is then reviewed at the dean’s level, with peer review and written assessment by an elected faculty personnel committee with representation from across the school or college, and an evaluation letter from the dean. Finally, a similar process occurs at the provost’s level with another elected faculty personnel committee with even broader representation reviewing the materials and making a written recommendation to the provost, who makes the final promotion decision. Peer review also governs the hiring of faculty members with tenure, including review and voting at each of these levels (department or program, school or college, and university). A detailed overview of the process is available on the Office of Academic Affairs website at https://academicaffairs.uoregon.edu/promotion-tenure.

PEER REVIEW AND GRADUATE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Although peer review is essential to developing the faculty and the quality of the research at the university, it is also essential to educational programs, especially at the graduate level. There are two broad kinds of graduate education at the UO. One is primarily professional and applied while the other is focused on producing new generations of researchers, scholars, and faculty. For the former, peer review is part of the evaluation of program quality through the accreditation processes of the various professions (law, business, architecture, and education, among others) and involves standards designed by working professionals and scholars who study the field.

For research degrees (primarily PhD degrees), peer review is necessary to determine both the quality of the degree program and the success of its graduates. PhD degrees—“doctorates of philosophy”—are intended to mark students who have acquired a deep knowledge of what has been done in their field. The degrees also recognize that recipients understand the “philosophy” of a field, the theories that frame it, and the critical perspective required to make innovation possible. To receive a PhD, a student must also demonstrate the ability to make an original contribution to the field from the perspective of not only the student’s teachers, but also from the perspective of the field as a whole. To be effective, faculty members (primarily TTF) who teach graduate students must stay current with developments across their fields, make ongoing contributions, and have the ability to help students learn to be independent, productive scholars in their own right.
In addition to the review of individual faculty members as summarized above, universities, colleges, schools, programs, departments, institutes, and centers are periodically reviewed according to fixed schedules of review mandated by local, regional, or disciplinary professional or accrediting organizations. Such reviews typically entail the internal assessment of curricular and research practices and accomplishments, followed by a campus visit of a committee of distinguished faculty members, and a final report that is delivered to the reviewing authority and the central administrative unit. At many universities these reviews focus primarily on reviewing the structure and performance of graduate educational programs. Historically, the UO has reviewed each program (both graduate and undergraduate) at least once every 10 years to assess the ongoing health and quality of the program. Reviews are governed by the same peer review principles that govern evaluation of individual faculty accomplishments.

**PEER REVIEW SHAPES ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES**

In addition to the practical constraints of budgets and student enrollment demands, the development and maintenance of peer-review processes and procedures have shaped organizational structures in professional associations and at academic institutions. Processes of peer review differ depending on historical circumstances and specific concerns of disciplines or institutions, but the basic process is the same across the academy: one’s creative contributions are judged by a jury of peers. This general approach to quality assessment by peers has led to the development of relatively flat institutional arrangements and overlapping spheres of influence within the academy. For example, universities rely on faculty members to propose and approve courses and programs of study through committees that operate at different levels (program or department, school or college, and campus-wide), with administrators often providing budgetary or staffing support, but faculty members reviewing and approving the actual programs and courses as well as taking an active role in hiring and evaluating instructors who teach in them. This system of shared governance is a critical expression of peer review and faculty oversight over academic excellence.

Academic institutional arrangements differ from common structures and employee performance evaluation in business or government, but are generally understood to have evolved in response to the need to protect academic freedom and to promote academic excellence through peer review. Professional associations such as the Association of American Universities promote peer review because it is the chief mechanism through which research universities have fostered creative inquiry, maintained intellectual independence, and championed American ingenuity and discovery.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF NON-TENURE-TRACK FACULTY**

All universities depend on additional faculty members to fulfill academic missions. The two basic types of **non-tenure-track faculty members (NTTF)** at Oregon and other research universities are instructional faculty and research faculty members, with duties primarily limited to those specific pursuits. **Instructional NTTF** typically include instructors, lecturers, and librarians. **Research NTTF** carry titles such as assistant, associate, or full research professor, and can serve as principal investigators on research grants. NTTF are further differentiated by contract status: at the UO, those with longer contracts are designated as **career NTTF** and those with shorter limited duration contracts as **adjunct faculty** (or pro tem faculty) **members**. NTTF often have the same terminal degrees as TTF (e.g., a PhD, JD, or MFA), but over the course of a career focus their activities primarily on teaching or research, but not both. In the case of career NTTF librarians, the focus is on the provision of library programs, teaching, services, and resources to support the UO’s educational and research mission. NTTF are also reviewed annually and at contract renewal (one-, two-, or three-year intervals, depending on rank). Evaluation of instructional performance for both NTTF and TTF includes peer evaluation of teach-
ing. NTTF are also eligible for promotion following rigorous multiple internal peer reviews at different points in the process.

Additional NTTF faculty designations include visiting faculty, who typically have an ongoing tenure-related appointment at one institution while serving in residence at another institution for a specified period of time, and affiliated faculty, signaling that a faculty member has an ongoing role in the activities of a department, program, institute, or center, regardless of the location of their primary academic appointment. Courtesy appointments to the faculty may be offered to persons who visit the university from another institution or work outside the university, and who contribute without compensation to the appointing department’s program. Each of these faculty appointments requires peer assessment and departmental or program faculty votes based on positive evaluation of the research or creative activity of individuals. Finally, there is a category of TTF who teach at the UO near the end of their careers in the Tenure Reduction Program (TRP), typically teaching on a half-time basis for three additional years, but still having their teaching reviewed by their peers on an annual basis to ensure high quality.

ACADEMIC ORGANIZATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

The following listing of central academic administrative positions and organizations is intended to illuminate how reporting lines and collaborations are currently organized at the University of Oregon. Our goal in presenting this information is to examine how we currently coordinate faculty efforts across internal units to enhance the university’s mission and to help us understand how we might maximize chances for future academic success of both individual faculty members and the institution. Ours is not the only model for organizing academics, though it is very similar to that of other public research universities.

Depending on titles and job duties, faculty members at the University of Oregon can have appointments within various UO organizational units, including colleges, schools, departments, programs, institutes, and centers. TTF lines always reside within schools or colleges, with some also reporting directly to a program director or department head, and many also affiliated with institutes, centers, or smaller faculty groupings organized around specific areas of academic inquiry. Most TTF have multiple affiliations, but primary responsibility for assignment of teaching duties and committee work is exercised by a dean, often through associate deans, department heads, or program directors. NTTF whose primary duties are instruction and advising generally report to deans, department heads, or instructional program directors, whereas NTTF who focus on research generally report to other faculty members who serve as principal investigators (PIs) on grants or contracts, or to administrative personnel in various research units.

The University of Oregon is currently organized into nine academic schools and colleges with the authority to oversee faculty teaching, research, and service. Our structure is similar to that of other public research universities, though we lack some of the larger schools and colleges that exist at most AAU institutions, including those focused on medicine, public health, engineering, and agriculture. The national norm is for colleges to be larger than schools and to house multiple disciplines with multiple degree offerings. However, some “schools” at Oregon (e.g., Architecture and Allied Arts) are composed of multiple departments and contain a larger faculty than some “colleges” that have no departments and a comparatively smaller faculty (e.g., Clark Honors College). Following national norms, schools and colleges with more faculty (e.g., College of Arts and Sciences, College of Education, Architecture and Allied Arts) are divided into departments, whose heads exercise control over their own staff and budgets, subject to oversight by deans and associate deans. Departments are usually larger than programs within the same college, but some programs have more faculty members or students than some departments, and educational programs typically exercise many of the same functions as departments, including oversight of curriculum and delivery of instruction.
Academic units that conduct research or support faculty members in scientific, scholarly, or creative work also vary widely in organizational structure and placement within the university. Some of our largest research centers and institutes (n = 19) report to the vice president for research and innovation, who also oversees core facilities (n = 10), and four major service units focused on research development, compliance, sponsored projects, and innovation. Other campus-wide research, outreach, and educational support centers (n = 10) report to a senior vice provost for academic affairs (e.g., Wayne Morse Center for Law and Politics, Museum of Natural and Cultural History), or to a vice provost (e.g., eight international centers and programs under the Global Studies Institute report to the vice provost for international affairs). Centers and other research and outreach or education units with a slightly narrower focus, and typically with less participation from multiple colleges (n > 50), report directly to deans (e.g., Community Services Center, Center for Educational Policy Research) or through individual department heads to deans (e.g., Pine Mountain Observatory, Computational Science Institute). Faculty affiliation with research centers is voluntary and subject to approval by core TTF faculty in the unit. Faculty participation in centers and related units is undertaken in addition to required participation at the department, school, or college level.

The range of variation in organizational structure at Oregon is typical of all research universities and is an outgrowth of historical circumstances and localized preferences. Variable reporting structures and overlapping organizational authority have served our university (and others) relatively well, insofar as they have preserved the ability to maximize the advantages of peer review, and have assembled members of the relevant faculty into appropriate units to propose or review different research projects and academic offerings.

Campus-wide strategic planning processes and periodic self-studies or accreditation reviews can suggest reorganization or renaming possibilities, and like other institutions, the UO has experienced these with some regularity. We will continue to consider such opportunities as we develop strategic plans and focus on administrative efficiencies.

The following listing of administrative positions and structures provides a condensed overview of the UO’s internal academic organization. The chief academic officer is the provost, who has authority over all academic and faculty appointments and is served by the Office of Academic Affairs with various vice provost–level appointments who work with schools and colleges to implement central policies and oversee academic operations. Two other central academic units report to the provost and exercise functional authority across campus; the Graduate School and the Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation. Academic deans report to the provost, but also have reporting obligations to central administrators in these two units, and in turn, have department heads and program or center directors reporting to them, sometimes through associate deans organized functionally or via divisions.
UO ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

Provost
Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs
Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education
Vice Provost for International Affairs
Vice Provost for Information Services and Chief Information Officer

Academic Deans—Schools, Colleges, and Libraries

Associate Deans
Department Heads
Program Directors
Center Directors

COLLEGES

CAS 451 TTF, 383 NTTF, 37 TRP
Natural Sciences: eight departments and one program
Social Sciences: nine departments and six programs
Humanities: 10 departments and seven programs

COE 37 TTF, 207 NTTF, 15 TRP
four departments

LCB 39 TTF, 50 NTTF, five TRP
five program areas

CHC 13 TTF, six NTTF, four TRP
No departments or separate programs

SCHOOLS

A&AA 85 TTF, 93 NTTF, 10 TRP
five departments and three programs

SOMD 45 TTF, 38 NTTF
two departments

SOJC 33 TTF, 47 NTTF, two TRP
four programs

Law 28 TTF, 35 NTTF, one TRP
three programs (and legal studies undergraduate program in progress)

GRADUATE SCHOOL

81 graduate degree programs (79 in schools or colleges) and 18 graduate certificate programs (all in schools or colleges)

LIBRARIES

56 NTTF librarians at six on-campus and two off-campus locations.
Includes research collections and resources, instructional technologies, learning management system, content production services, and so forth.

OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

19 Research Centers and Institutes; 10 Core Facilities
Sponsored Project Services, Research Development Services, Research Compliance Services, Innovation Partnership Services

ENDNOTES

1 Tenure-track faculty headcount (not FTE)

2 Non-tenure-track faculty headcount (not FTE) includes career, adjunct, and visiting

3 Tenure Reduction Program faculty members who are retired (headcount, all part-time)