

Emeritus/Emerita Faculty Procedures

a report by the Professional Affairs Committee

to the

Faculty Senate of Southeast Missouri State University

April 2018

Introduction: During the Spring 2018 semester, it came to the attention of the Professional Affairs Committee that some sources had been raising questions about the traditional procedures used on the Southeast campus to recommend and award emeritus or emerita status to retiring members of the faculty. Following study and discussion and deliberation, the Committee has prepared this report to the Senate to address the issues raised.

Background: For at least three, and possibly four or more decades, the Faculty Handbook has included provisions concerning eligibility for emeritus/emera status, and the procedures by which it was to be recommended and awarded. During this time period, those who had "...qualified according to the statutory laws of Missouri..." to retire from the University and who had at least fifteen years of service were eligible for this status. In fact, according to a version of the Handbook from the 1980s, "Emeritus status shall be granted to those who have qualified..." (emphasis added). The procedures for that time period stipulated that each year the Professional Affairs Committee would obtain a list of those who were retiring and recommend to the Faculty Senate those retirees eligible for emeritus or emerita status. The Senate was directed to forward that list to the Provost, President, and Board of Regents. The Handbook stated that emeriti faculty would be recognized by one or more of the following: 1) a spring reception, 2) a token such as a key or medallion, 3) courtesies such as a parking permit, library privileges, and concert and sporting event privileges as extended to active faculty. In addition, emeriti faculty who were interested in doing so were to be encouraged to present special lectures.

The Handbook content has been modified over the years. By the time a 2001 Faculty Senate bill was added to the Handbook, it included a lengthier, more specific list of recognitions or benefits for emeriti faculty. It also specified that RNTT faculty were to be eligible for emeritus/emera status. By virtue of two 2015 Senate bills, the Handbook content was split into separate policy and procedure sections, though the substance was essentially unchanged from the 2001 version.

In practice, over at least the past 25 years, the recommendation of emeritus/emera status for retiring faculty members who met the stated eligibility requirements was fairly automatic. There was one case during that time period where the Senate engaged in a lengthy debate about one particular candidate and whether that person might have had sufficient character flaws for the Senate to justify not recommending emeritus/emera status. In the end, that person did receive emeritus/emera status, and many of the Senate members expressed their feelings that the

judgement should be based solely on the criteria in the Handbook. (Those criteria include faculty status, a minimum of fifteen years of service, and eligibility to retire according to the office of human resources.)

Since that time, the Professional Affairs Committee has routinely processed the list of names of retirees received from the human resources office by doing two things. One has been to verify with the retiree his/her preferred name for the listing. (Some faculty have preferred to be listed by a nickname or a middle name.) The other has been to verify the candidate's preferred discipline/department listing. (In the case of a faculty member retiring from a merged or multidisciplinary department, the Committee has extended to the candidate the courtesy of being listed either by the name of the department or by that person's actual discipline.) With this information, the Committee has then prepared bills for the Senate's consideration that recommend extending emeritus/emerita status to the retirees listed therein.

Issues That Have Come to the Attention of the Committee During the 2017-2018 Year

Following are some of the comments that have been relayed to the Committee, along with the Committee's response to those comments:

“We shouldn't make the emeritus/emerita process automatic.”

There are places where the designation of a retiree as an emeritus or emerita member is an automatic process. At the beginning of the Wikipedia entry on “Emeritus,” the term is described this way:

Emeritus, in its current usage, is an adjective used to designate a retired professor, pastor, bishop, pope, director, president, prime minister, or other person.

In some cases, the term is conferred automatically upon all persons who retire at a given rank, but in others, it remains a mark of distinguished service, awarded to only a few on retirement.

The Southeast Board of Regents has adopted an emeritus/emerita designation for former Regents. Though the guidelines refer to the designation going to those “...the quality of whose service is deserving of this distinction,” it appears that the designation may be de facto automatic. The guidelines state that upon their adoption, “...all living former members of the Board of Regents shall be designated Regent Emeritus or Regent Emerita...” Under the “Requirements” section of the guidelines, it states that the emeritus/emerita title “...shall be conferred upon those who have retired from the Board or resigned after completing at least three years as a Regent.” The list of benefits that accompany the designation are similar to those extended to Southeast faculty retirees.

“We shouldn’t give away something for nothing”

Those who would say something like this probably do not know what actually is involved in the way of benefits to emeriti faculty. In reality, receiving emeritus/emerita status provides a retired faculty member two benefits: 1. the authorization to use that title on future professional correspondence (for example, “Professor Emerita of Music”), and 2. being listed in the back pages of the Bulletin in the “Emeriti Faculty” section until that person’s death, upon which that listing is removed.

There is a one-page document maintained by Human Resources that lists other benefits provided to retired faculty and staff, including such things as a parking permit, continued use of University e-mail, reduced costs for certain athletic and cultural activities, etc. However, these benefits are provided to any retired member of the faculty or staff. They are not benefits that go to emeriti faculty because of their emeritus/emerita status.

Therefore, the “something” that is being provided is relatively modest. The Professional Affairs Committee feels that the “nothing” is also incorrect. Emeritus/emerita designation goes to faculty members who have contributed at least 15 years of service to the institution, often many more, and the Committee feels that this is not “nothing.”

In fact, it is very likely that the emeriti faculty are actually giving something to the University as they depart. It has been estimated that 20 or 25 percent of retiring faculty and staff donate to the Foundation. It appears that the percentage of emeriti faculty donating may be even higher. It may be possible that their perception of a continued relationship with the institution signified by their emeritus/emerita designation and the positive feelings that accompany that could enhance their willingness to contribute financially.

“We should make it mean something”

In the Committee’s experience this semester, those who have said this have done so while suggesting that the emeritus/emerita status be made more rigorous or competitive, not that the reward for achieving the status be made more generous. The Committee believes that meaning or significance of emeritus/emerita status for the recipient comes largely from the fact that it is an official “Thank You” from the University for being loyal enough to this institution over a long enough period of years that one is likely completing one’s career here.

The Committee also believes that many of our other institutional processes, such as those awarding tenure, promotion, post-professorial merit, sabbaticals, grants, and annual merit, already put most faculty members through numerous rigorous and competitive processes, and that asking them to go through yet one more in order to simply be listed in the back of the Bulletin and be able to sign one’s name with the emeritus/emerita designation would be unwarranted.

“Having more stringent requirements and procedures for emeritus/emerita status would increase the prestige of the institution”

The committee largely believes that a person who says this has likely inadvertently reversed the direction of causation. It is true that some very prestigious universities have more involved and rigorous emeritus/emerita criteria and procedures. Many of these institutions are larger “Research I” universities, or other heavily-endowed universities that have the financial means to extend to emeriti faculty costly benefits such as the use of a dedicated laboratory, research support, a personal office, etc. In these cases, it is the prestige and corresponding funding of the university that enables it to extend these more tangible and expensive benefits to emeriti faculty. Because of the finite amount of that funding, the awarding of emeritus/emerita status to those faculty recipients is almost of necessity more involved and more competitive. In these cases, it is the prestige of the institution that leads to the more competitive processes, not the more competitive processes that lead to the prestige of the institution.

Following a brief examination of the emeritus/emerita criteria and procedures at other four-year, public universities in Missouri, the Committee found that several of those institutions had, at least on paper, more involved and potentially more competitive processes. It is unclear, however, whether those processes are actually rigorous re-evaluations of a faculty member’s record of service, or whether they are pro-forma exercises of moving documentation up the institution’s hierarchy. The Committee found, for example, that on paper Missouri Southern, Northwest Missouri, and Lincoln universities all had procedures or criteria that would appear on their face to be more rigorous than those used here at Southeast. However, the Committee is not willing to concede that any of those institutions should be seen as “more prestigious” than Southeast.

“Emeritus/Emerita faculty status should only be extended to faculty of certain ranks”

It is not uncommon for peer institutions in Missouri to require a rank of either associate or full professor for emeriti faculty. At Southeast, a retiring tenure track faculty member with at least 15 years of service will obviously hold tenure, and because with tenure comes an automatic reclassification to associate professor, the faculty member will by definition hold at least that rank. Therefore, though specific rank is not a stated requirement of Southeast’s policy and procedures, all retired faculty with tenure will hold one of the upper two ranks.

At Southeast, the gist of the emeritus/emerita policy and procedures long pre-date the creation of the RNTT category of faculty. When at the urging of the Administration, the Faculty Senate proposed revisions to the Handbook establishing the designation of Regular Non Tenure Track (RNTT) faculty, there was no additional distinction inserted into the Emeritus/Emerita Faculty to state that RNTT faculty would not be eligible. In fact, the emeritus/emerita faculty Handbook policy was eventually revised to specifically include RNTT faculty. Beginning in 2001, a series of President-approved and Board-approved Faculty Senate bills (01-A-07, 08-A-02, and 15-A-9)

continued to specifically state that retiring RNTT faculty members are eligible for emeritus/emerita status in the same way that retiring tenured faculty are.

The Committee feels that RNTT faculty are a vital and valued component of the faculty at large, and should not be excluded from receiving emeritus/emerita status. Their heavier teaching responsibilities are directly aligned with the teaching mission of the University and its history as a “Normal School.” To de-emphasize their significance by use of the emeritus/emerita process would also be to de-emphasize the stated importance of teaching at Southeast.

After serving at Southeast for at least 15 years, RNTT faculty members are as worthy of an official “Thank You” as any other retiring faculty member. Rather than diminishing the significance of the emeritus/emerita designation, the Committee feels that extending that designation to RNTT faculty demonstrates that the institution truly does value those faculty in a personal and humane way.

Conclusion:

Based upon its study, consultation, and deliberation, the Committee has concluded that there are no significant flaws with the current policy and procedures by which Emeritus/Emerita status is recommended and awarded to retiring faculty. The Committee acknowledges that there could be a hypothetical case where the serious misconduct of a faculty member (for example, the commission of a criminal act by which the reputation of the University is besmirched) might justify a decision by the institution not to publicly acknowledge a relationship by conferring emeritus/emerita status upon that person. The Committee believes, however, that the existing processes by which the Committee and the Faculty Senate review and forward recommendations would be sufficient to deal with such an extreme hypothetical case. For the real-life situations involving virtually 100% of retiring faculty whose loyal service to the University has extended for many years, we feel that the official “thank you” of emeritus/emerita status is well-deserved and the process of awarding it should not be made more cumbersome.
