



# UNC Task Force on Future Promotion and Tenure Policies and Practices

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Provost Bernadette Gray-Little's appointment of a task force to review tenure and promotion policies was prompted by "(1) calls for increased engagement with the public, (2) new forms of scholarly work, and (3) increased scholarly activity across disciplinary lines." The 10-person task force was chaired by Professor Jane Brown (Journalism and Mass Communication) and it created five subcommittees comprised of 38 faculty members. [The task force report](#) was completed in May 2009. It is a thoughtful and forward-looking piece of work, and Interim Provost Bruce Carney is soliciting feedback about the recommendations and moving forward with implementation. [I blogged earlier](#) about the report's recognition of new forms of scholarship, and I am focusing now on the engagement recommendations.



The task force recommends that “[t]he University’s personnel reviews should include consideration of the faculty member’s interactions and engagements with communities outside the traditional scholarly community.” That sounds a lot like the School’s mission, which is a good thing. The report goes on to define ‘engagement’ as “scholarly, creative or pedagogical activities for the public good” and it recognizes two broad categories—(1) engaged scholarship and (2) engaged activities.

Engaged scholarship. To be considered scholarship, faculty work “must meet a rigorous standard such as external funding, peer reviewed publications and evaluations.” Engaged scholarship differs from regular scholarship by focusing on “public practices and public consequences.” The report is clear that original scholarly research will continue to be required for tenure and promotion, and each school will “determine the criteria for evaluating the excellence of engaged scholarship.” The School’s research and writing satisfies the requirements for scholarship and it meets the definition of engaged scholarship. In other words, our current tenure and promotion policies already recognize engaged scholarship and are consistent with the task force recommendation. I view the engagement recommendation as an affirmation of our faculty work—it explicitly incorporates our long tradition of engaged scholarship into the campus promotion and tenure standards.

Engaged activities. The basic idea is that faculty should be encouraged to apply their academic knowledge through “work that influences, enriches and improves the lives of people in the community.” This can be important work that draws on the expertise of faculty members, but it does not necessarily involve the rigorous creation of new knowledge. Thus, it is an engaged activity rather than engaged scholarship. For example, a philosophy professor works with a public school teacher to develop a curriculum for teaching basic philosophical concepts to her students. The work of the faculty member is not engaged scholarship, but it is a worthwhile engaged activity that should be encouraged.

Much of our advising work for public officials could be classified as an engaged activity. The telephone calls and emails that we answer likely will fall into that category. It draws on our subject-matter expertise but usually it involves the application of existing knowledge rather than the development of new knowledge. Long-term advising with a community about economic development or work with a legislative study commission, however, might qualify as engaged scholarship depending whether it involves original research. It will be up to each school to define what it means by engaged activities—including how much they will be counted toward tenure and promotion.

I recently attended a forum at the Institute for the Arts and Humanities to discuss the task force recommendations. Interim Provost Carney participated and made it clear that he will be working to implement the recommendations. Members of the task force participated, along with a number of other faculty members from across Carolina. For people who value engagement and want to see it rewarded, this report and the comments at the forum are highly encouraging. Not surprisingly,



though, there are a number of open questions. How will the Provost's Office encourage schools and departments to recognize engagement in their policies? May a department decide not to recognize any engaged activities by its faculty members? A faculty member will not be given tenure solely on the basis of engaged activities—in other words, some amount of engaged scholarship will be required. How much can engaged activities be counted toward tenure and promotion? How will engaged activities be measured and evaluated?

Obviously engaged scholarship and engaged activities are “part of the clearly articulated core mission” of the School. Other academic units on campus, especially the College of Arts and Sciences, may struggle with how much to recognize engagement by their faculty members. That is not true for us. The task force recommendations will require adjustments in how we report different activities, but otherwise it reinforces our current promotion and tenure policies. These recommendations are designed to shift the culture of Carolina in the direction of valuing greater engagement with North Carolina and the world. That is a significant long-term challenge, but Jane Brown and her colleagues have done a terrific job of moving us in that direction. In the meantime, any progress by the campus in recognizing and valuing engagement is good for the School of Government.

Interim Provost Carney will bring these recommendations to the Deans Council for feedback and advice. If you have a chance to look at the report, please let me know if you have questions or comments.