

Non-Tenure-Eligible Research Faculty Review Committee Report

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Summary: Non-Tenure-Eligible Research faculty positions (assistant research professor, associate research professor, and research professor) were created in 2008. The purpose of creating this category of positions was to enhance the research mission of the university by increasing grant activity and the research visibility of ISU by establishing a group of faculty-level researchers that would be funded outside of the general fund. It was envisioned that these NTER faculty would become independent researchers who would work toward becoming PIs able to fund their positions and research efforts through grants. ISU would benefit from an increased number of independent researchers, increased grant funding, and the ability to expand areas of expertise independent of limitations from the general fund.

Since that time, 25 individuals have held NTER positions, with 13 of them currently in those positions. Of those 25 individuals

- 21/25 were ISU employees immediately before taking the NTER position
- 12 of the 21 former ISU employees were postdocs
- 6 of the 21 former ISU employees were in P&S positions
- 3 of the 21 former ISU employees were faculty (1 tenured, 1 affiliate, 1 lecturer)

Of those who were not former ISU employees, one had retired from another university, one had been a “visiting scholar” at another university, and one was employed by a federal research center. The previous situation for one individual is unknown.

Based on the numbers presented above, the discussion within the committee, and the information that the committee members brought back from their colleges and departments, it is not clear that the implementation of these NTER appointments have met the original objectives of this class of positions. In most, but not all, cases it appears that the individual continued to function as a postdoc or P&S employee and made little progress toward becoming independent researchers. It was the committee’s consensus that this was not a problem with the nature of the NTER positions or even with the formulation of these positions within the Faculty Handbook. Rather the problem seems to have arisen from a failure to implement the existing policies. The committee unanimously supported the continuation of the NTER positions but also recommended that steps be taken to insure that future appointments conform more to the original expectations of these positions. We were encouraged that some of the more recent appointments seem to conform more closely to the intent of the established policy.

Recommendations: In order to improve understanding of the current NTER policies, , the committee suggests the following “best practices” to communicate the key features of the NTER policy.

Overview: NTER faculty members are independent researchers who improve the research reputation of ISU by raising additional research funding and by providing expertise in areas beyond what can be

accomplished using the university's general fund. While the capacity may vary in different units of the university, these individuals are expected to work toward generating grant funds to pay for their salaries and research expenditures. NTER faculty are faculty members and, as such, their hiring, evaluation, and promotion processes would be very similar to those for tenure eligible faculty in their departments.

Creating an NTER Position: NTER positions are faculty positions within the department. As such they are under the jurisdiction of the faculty of the department. So, while such positions may be proposed by an individual PI, a research group, or a center, it is up to the departmental faculty to approve the creation of such a position. It is important that the faculty approve how this position fits within the strategic plan of the department and the independent role of the NTER faculty member.

Sometimes a PI or group leader will suggest creation of an NTER position to bring new expertise to their program that will be funded from their grants. In these cases, it is important for the PI and the chair to come to an understanding about how the NTER faculty member will meet the fiduciary responsibility of the PI while satisfying the mission of the department as an independent researcher. This understanding should be reflected in the NTER faculty member's PRS. NTER positions should be approved by the college and SVPP office before a search is opened.

The potential funding sources for NTER faculty seems to be a major source of confusion. While NTER faculty are often funded from grant funds (sponsored funding) they can also be funded by return on indirect (F&A or Facilities and Administration) costs and fee accounts (4.1.3). This includes the salary of the NTER faculty member as well as startup and operating costs. The only exception is when the NTER faculty member is a partner accommodation, in which case general funds can be used for up to three years, as described in policies for partner/spousal accommodations (4.1.3).

NTER Selection Process: Once the department has agreed on the description of the NTER position, the selection process should be guided by the departmental governance document and should in general follow that for tenure eligible faculty. The position should be nationally advertised in an attempt to get a diverse, high quality pool. The screening and selection committees should have strong departmental representation, the interview process should be open, and the final selection made by the department or a designated committee. Final approval of the position and the individual selected should go through the dean's and SVPP offices.

NTER Evaluation: NTER faculty should be evaluated annually by the chair (or designate) as determined in the departmental governance document. The evaluation should follow the same procedure as for regular faculty with the responsibilities laid out in the individual's PRS. In some cases the NTER faculty member is funded by a grant of which another faculty member is PI. In those cases, the PI should meet with the chair to provide input into the evaluation report. In addition to the annual evaluation, the handbook (5.4.6) requires a peer evaluation every three years equivalent to the preliminary evaluation of tenure track faculty. Given that NTER appointments can be for up to five years, this peer evaluation should occur one year before the NTER reappointment. NTER faculty can be promoted through the research faculty ranks. The process for doing this should be very similar to the process for regular faculty and should be based on the PRS.

Committee Recommended Changes

1. The NTER category should be continued. There is a substantial history of misuse of the positions and, as a result, it is not possible to evaluate if they have contributed significantly to

ISU's research effort. The committee suggests that there be an effort to explain the nature of the NTER positions to the faculty and administrators and to begin directing new positions to their intended purpose.

2. The portions of the Faculty Handbook discussing the NTER positions are rather difficult to find and follow. We suggest that a fact sheet be put together to bring all of the NTER best practices into one place. A draft is attached.
3. The committee is concerned that the funding requirements for the NTER positions may conflict with the activity reporting requirements (EASE forms) rules on federal funding. If an NTER faculty member is paid 100% from federal funds, it is not possible for that individual to write new grants, work with graduate students, etc. This conflict could be alleviated by allowing 10% to 20% of the NTER faculty member's salary to come from the general fund.
4. NTER faculty are often hired because they bring a unique expertise to campus and it may be desirable to share that expertise with advanced students. In addition, it may be in the best interest of the NTER faculty to have an opportunity to gain some teaching experience in preparation for seeking a tenure track position. Towards this end, the committee recommends that NTER faculty members might do a limited amount of upper division teaching and that this portion of their salary (less than 20%) could come from general fund dollars.
5. The faculty handbook does not seem to exclude mixed NTER/lecturer appointments. For example an individual could have a 50% appointment as a research assistant professor and a 50% appointment as a lecturer. This is related to but different from the situation in #4 in which a faculty member would be 100% assistant research professor but allowed to spend some time teaching with a part of their salary from state funds. The committee did not necessarily support these mixed appointments but noted that they do not seem to be forbidden.
6. Some of the committee disliked the expressed exclusion of NTER faculty from the general faculty of the university. It is our impression that this policy was instituted to prevent a large influx of NTER faculty from diluting the representation and funding for tenure track positions. Right now there are only 13 NTER faculty on campus (<1% of the total faculty). It might be time to recognize that this worry is unlikely to ever come to fruition and thus remove this exclusion from the general faculty.
7. The peer review at three years does not work very well with a five year appointment. It would make more sense if the peer review occurred one year before the renewal of a multi-year contract. This would be the fourth year of a five year contract.
8. Unified NTE Faculty Policy - One of the issues raised during the discussion of the NTER review committee was the unified NTE policy at North Carolina State University (<http://policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-05-20-34#THREE>). NC State has a sophisticated system of NTE faculty that includes individuals with appointments in clinical, extension, research, teaching, practice, and lecturers. The NTE faculty have at least 75% appointment in their area of focus. The committee was intrigued by this system and particularly the career path that it afforded for teaching faculty. While we determined it was outside of the scope of this committee and would require substantially more time to investigate than we had, there seemed to be some very positive aspects of the system that would justify more thorough consideration.