Preliminary Review of the Position Responsibility Statement

In fall 2014, the faculty senate president reviewed a selection of PRSs from across campus. This document describes the questions raised by that review, which revealed extreme variation in the format of the PRS, the level of specification, and the use of percentages.

Given the importance of the PRS, the Faculty Senate and Office of the Provost have established a Task Force to review extant procedures in the development of PRSs and their role in evaluations. The Task Force will develop recommendations concerning whether there should be more uniformity in PRSs and, if so, the nature of the uniformity.

As part of the information to be considered by the Task Force, several constituencies (Faculty Senate Councils, Faculty Senate Caucuses, Chair’s Cabinet, Provost’s Cabinet, AAUP) are invited to send responses/reactions to the questions and concerns that are relevant to the constituency. Responses/reactions should be sent to Sherri Angstrom, sangstro@iastate.edu. Also, if an issue has been omitted, constituencies should feel free to bring it up.

The Position Responsibility Statement
(Note: The full text from the Handbook can be found on pages 5-6.)

The Position Responsibility Statement (PRS) was introduced into the Faculty Handbook as part of the 1998 revision of Promotion & Tenure. The PRS is described as:

...a tool that allows for a flexible and individualized system of faculty review...
The position responsibility statement description itself should be general and only include the significant responsibilities of the faculty member that are important in evaluation faculty accomplishments in the promotion and tenure process for tenure-eligible/tenured faculty or for advancement for non-tenure eligible faculty.

(Excerpt from FH 5.1.1.5)

The PRS is the basis of promotion and tenure decisions.:

Evaluation of a faculty member for promotion and/or tenure is based primarily on evidence of scholarship in the faculty member's teaching, research/creative activities, and/or extension/ professional practice. ...

A key tool in the promotion and tenure review process is the position responsibility statement, which describes the individual's current position responsibilities and activities in the following areas: (1) teaching, (2) research/creative activities, (3) extension/ professional practice, and (4) institutional service. This statement is used by all evaluators to interpret the extent, balance, and scope of the faculty member's scholarly achievements.

(Excerpt from FH 5.2.2.1)

The PRS is the basis of annual performance evaluations.:

The evaluation is based on scholarship and contributions in teaching, research/creative activities, extension/professional practice, and institutional service as indicated in each individual’s position responsibility statement.

(Excerpt from FH 5.1.1.2)
Questions and Concerns

What areas must be part of the PRS?
Although the wording in FH FH 5.1.1.2 and FH 5.2.2.1 suggests that four areas should be explicitly addressed in all PRSs, the preliminary review showed that this does not occur in many cases.

- Should all four areas be included in every PRS, even if to state that no activity is expected?
- Should extension and professional practice be combined into one area or are they separate? (This question is also being addressed by the Task Force on the Scholarship of Engagement and Outreach.)

What other areas can/should be part of the PRS?

- PRS templates are provided by some colleges. Some mention collegiality & citizenship. Should this be part of the PRS? If so, is noncollegiality a basis for denying promotion and/or tenure or for an unsatisfactory annual performance review?
- Under which area, if any, do administrative activities fit? If it is a separate area, what role, if any, can/should it play in promotion? (This is relevant for associate professors who assume administrative roles as program directors and chairs).
- SEEC wants faculty involvement in student enrichment activities to be incorporated into PRSs so that the activities will "count" in evaluations. Is this a separate category or part of "teaching"?

Who actually develops a PRS?
FH 5.1.1.5 indicates that for initial hires, the PRS is developed by the chair and a new tenure-eligible/tenured faculty member based on the job advertisement.

- How is the new faculty member informed about the role of the PRS and his/her role in development of the PRS? If the PRS is included with the Letter of Intent, does the new faculty member have the option of signing only the Letter of Intent and waiting until arrival to negotiate the PRS?
- Can/should a department develop a "standard" PRS for new assistant professor hires?
- What are the strengths and weakness of having the PRS for each individual within a department be unique to that person (i.e., if a PRS is specific enough to be "unique" is it too specific)?
- What is the role, if any, of the dean in developing/reviewing/approving the PRS? Can a dean require specific components in a hiring PRS? Can a dean require specific components in a revised PRS? If the dean has a role, does the Handbook need to be modified to reflect that?

How is the placement of an activity into a PRS area determined (i.e., by the individual, the department, the college, the provost, the Handbook)?

- Several examples of activities that might fall under each of the four PRS areas are given in the handbook. What flexibility is there in placing activities under an area? Could a department, for example, decide that journal editorship should be counted as research and, if so would it need to be treated that way outside the department?
• How should DOGE (and similar) activities be categorized? Are they institutional service or teaching or something else? Can/should this be determined by the department, or is it a college or university decision?

Should percentages be required and, if so, what do they mean?
Not all PRSs have percentages, but percentages are part of several PRS templates.
• What do percentages mean in a PRS? Do they refer to proportion of effort/time or are they more symbolic, representing the relative weight or importance of the area in assessing performance?
• Annual performance evaluations and P&T review are done for different purposes and have different time frames. Which purpose should be reflected in the percentages? Can/should the same percentages be used? Could there be different percentages for the annual performance evaluation and for P&T review, e.g., effort for annual performance evaluations and symbolic weight for P&T?
• If percentages reflect effort, then should there be some uniformity across the university for the percentage associated with teaching a standard 3 credit course? The variability apparent in the PRS sample was considerable across campus ranging from 7.5% for each course (e.g., 30% in one Human Science PRS with 4 graduate courses and 30% in one Business PRS with 4 courses) to 15% for each course (e.g., 45% in an LAS PRS for 3 courses) and even 18.75% for each course (e.g., 75% in one Human Science PRS with 4 courses).
  o Related to the preceding question—How should supervision/mentoring of students be incorporated? Should it be combined with teaching of standard courses? Should it receive a separate percentage? Should departments be allowed to decide?

What types of limiting statements are permissible in the PRS?
• To what extent can a research domain be specified?
• Can/should specific courses be mentioned?
• Can/should the nature of courses be specified (e.g., large lecture, lab, writing intensive)?

What role does/should the PRS actually play in evaluations, especially P&T evaluations?
The PRS is supposed to be a general description of activities for which the faculty member is responsible; it is not a checklist. Yet, evaluations are to be based on the PRS.
• Does inclusion of an area/activity in a PRS mean that it will/must be considered in an evaluation?
• If an activity in which a faculty member engages is not part of the faculty member’s PRS, can/should it be considered in an evaluation?
• If there are percentages in a PRS, how should they be applied in making an overall decision?

What role do NTE faculty have in determining their PRSs?
FH 5.1.1.5 explicitly states that NTE faculty should have a PRS. It is less clear about the role of the NTE faculty member in determining the nature of the initial PRS, but FH 5.4.1.2 indicates that the NTE faculty member does have a role in any change to the PRS.
Review of individuals in these positions will be based on the Position Responsibility Statement (PRS) derived from the advertised position. At each renewal time, the Position Responsibility Statement may change, depending on the continuing and/or changing needs of the unit. The PRS will be discussed and disagreements negotiated at that time as a part of the renewal agreement. The agreed upon PRS will be signed by both parties and dated. (Excerpt from FH 5.4.1.2)

Some NTE PRSs simply name classes. Others list general statements about expectations related to teaching (e.g., providing a syllabus, being on time to class). Clinician PRSs in CVM provide detailed descriptions of activities and include percentages.

- What level/type of input into the PRS is available to NTE faculty? Should the level/type of input vary as a function of the percentage FTE and/or as a function of the number of years of the contract?

*Who has access to an individual's PRS?*

Both annual performance evaluations and Promotion and Tenure decisions must refer to the PRS, so the PRS is available to persons involved in those evaluations.

- Is the PRS available to anyone in a department or is it confidential, restricted only to those involved in evaluation?
5.1.1.2 Annual Performance Evaluations
All faculty members (tenured, tenure-track, non-tenure-eligible, whether fulltime or part-time) will be evaluated annually (January 1 to December 31) for performance appraisal and development on the basis of their position responsibility statement (FH section 5.1.1.5). The evaluation is based on scholarship and contributions in teaching, research/creative activities, extension/professional practice, and institutional service as indicated in each individual’s position responsibility statement. Each faculty member’s overall performance shall be evaluated as either satisfactory or unsatisfactory (FH section 4.1.1). The annual evaluation will serve as a basis for determining merit salary increases.

5.1.1.5 Position Responsibility Statement
It is the policy of Iowa State University that evaluations of tenure-eligible/tenured faculty are based on the position responsibilities of faculty members and other activities that relate to faculty appointments. The results of all reviews must be shared with the individual faculty members.

A position responsibility statement is a tool that allows for a flexible and individualized system of faculty review, particularly within the promotion and tenure process of tenure-eligible/tenured faculty or for advancement of non-tenure-eligible faculty. The position responsibility statement description itself should be general and only include the significant responsibilities of the faculty member that are important in evaluating faculty accomplishments in the promotion and tenure process for tenure-eligible/tenured faculty or for advancement for non-tenure-eligible faculty. The position responsibility statement shall not violate the faculty member's academic freedom in teaching, in the selection of topics or methods of research, or in extension/professional practice.

The statement will be subject to regular review by the faculty member and his/her chair, and allow for flexibility in responsibilities over time and for the changing nature of faculty appointments. The statement should allow both faculty members and their administrative and peer evaluators to understand the basis of the academic appointment and to place that into context with the promotion and tenure criteria. The descriptions should be brief but may include detail important to the department and/or faculty member. The position responsibility statement cannot be changed unilaterally by either the chair or the faculty member. The governance document in each department may specify the procedure by which a position responsibility statement can be changed. The policy for changing the PRS for a non-tenure-eligible faculty member is found in FH Section 5.4.1.2 henceforth, the statements in this section will relate only to tenure-eligible and tenured faculty.

At the time of appointment or within the first semester of the appointment, the chair and the new tenure-eligible/tenured faculty member will agree on a position responsibility statement that should be based on the job advertisement. This document will be signed and dated by both parties. The signed and dated copy will be on file in the faculty member's personnel file and in the dean's office. This PRS should stand for the first three years of appointment. In most cases, this initial statement will remain in effect until the tenure review, unless the new faculty member
is already tenured. Any changes in the expectations for the tenure-eligible/tenured faculty member must be made in consultation between the chair and the faculty member.

When tenure is granted, the faculty member and his/her chair will review the details of the position responsibility statement and make any necessary changes.

At least every five years as part of the annual review process, tenured faculty members will re-evaluate their position responsibilities with their chairs. The statement may be reviewed and/or changed more frequently as part of the annual review process, but this is not mandated. Any changes in the statement must be made in consultation between the chair and the tenured faculty member and signed and dated by both parties. The signed and dated copy will be on file in each faculty member's personnel file and in the dean's office.

In the case of faculty members who have appointments in two departments (or a department and a program), a position responsibility statement will be written by the faculty member and the two chairs and signed and dated by all three parties. Each department and college involved will receive copies of those statements as indicated above.

Department chairs will have a position responsibility statement, written by the department chair and the dean, describing the administrative and other departmental responsibilities of the position.