

Full-time Non-tenure-track Research Faculty Positions at the University of Iowa

Comments from

Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure
University of Iowa Chapter
American Association of University Professors (AAUP)

James Andrews, David Baldus, Samir Bishara,
Beth Pelton, Ruth Wachtel, Ekhard Ziegler

with assistance from others

September 10, 2002

SUMMARY

1 Although adoption of a non-tenure research track may bring some benefits to the
2 University, its creation would also result in numerous adverse consequences for the faculty
3 members involved, for existing tenure-track faculty, and for the institution as a whole. The
4 University must carefully weigh these potential costs, both tangible and intangible, against the
5 possible benefits. Since a non-tenure research track would represent a dramatic change in
6 faculty standards away from our tenure track tradition, those who advocate creation of such a
7 track carry a heavy burden of justification and a keen responsibility for demonstrating that the
8 benefits of this track outweigh its likely costs. We do not believe that creation of a full-time
9 non-tenure research track can be justified.

1 **I. Working assumptions**

2 We are assuming that a non-tenure research track would consist mostly of Ph.D.s who
3 would be expected to support their salary with external grant funding. The majority would
4 probably be in the sciences, especially the health sciences, because of the greater availability of
5 outside funding. Continued employment would in some way be tied to grant funding and
6 salaries would be contingent on “soft money” generated by external grant support. Such
7 research faculty would perform only limited classroom teaching and would have minimal service
8 responsibilities.

9 We do not know how many current University employees would be eligible for such
10 positions or how many new researchers might be hired. It is not clear whether new research
11 track positions would supplement or eventually replace existing tenure-track faculty lines.

12 **II. Potential advantages of a research track**

13 A non-tenure research track could potentially bring some benefits to the University,
14 especially in scientific disciplines that have traditionally been able to attract significant external
15 funding. One might argue that 1) Additional numbers of research personnel would enhance
16 research productivity, expand the amount of research that could be accomplished, and increase
17 the University’s capacity to attract external funding; 2) “Promoting” personnel who are currently
18 Professional and Scientific (P & S) Research Scientists to faculty positions as Research Assistant
19 Professors could enhance their grant writing leverage by creating the appearance of greater
20 institutional commitment to them and their research programs; 3) The option of a faculty title
21 provides a means for rewarding and recognizing the accomplishments of P & S scientists who
22 maintain independent research programs; 4) A research faculty title for postdoctoral fellows who
23 have already secured independent grant funding might aid in their search for permanent positions

1 at other institutions; 5) Full-time research faculty may provide greater opportunities for
2 collaboration with clinicians, both tenure-track and clinical-track, who want to engage in
3 research but do not have sufficient protected time away from clinical responsibilities; and 6)
4 Non-tenure-track faculty would allow the University greater flexibility to adjust the number of
5 faculty in the face of changes in external funding.

6 **III. Potential costs of a research track**

7 Although a research track may have benefits, these benefits do not come without
8 significant costs to both the faculty and the institution.^{1,2}

9 **A. *Adverse effects on non-tenure-track faculty members***

- 10 1) Non-tenure-track positions create tremendous potential for exploitation of the faculty
11 members involved. Such faculty retain perpetual probationary status and serve with
12 the understanding that their positions are temporary.
- 13 2) Faculty whose positions depend solely on their ability to attract grant support are
14 vulnerable to chronic emotional distress arising from the insecurity of their positions.
15 Of course, probationary tenure-track faculty suffer similar pressures and insecurity,
16 but only for a maximum of 6 years.
- 17 3) Without even the prospect of tenure, research faculty members may be faced with
18 threats to their academic freedom. They may feel compelled to avoid disagreements
19 with deans and department heads who control their job security.
- 20 4) Non-tenure-track faculty are likely to suffer from a general perception that they are

¹ "Statement from the Conference on the Growing Use of Part-Time and Adjunct Faculty." *Academe* (official publication of the AAUP) 84:54-60 (1998).

² "On Full-Time Non-Tenure-Track Appointments." *AAUP Policy Documents & Reports*, pp 64-71 (1995).

1 inferior to their tenure-eligible and tenured colleagues. They may not receive the
2 respect normally associated with their level of achievement because others often
3 assume that faculty who accept non-tenure-track appointments are somehow less
4 competent academically. They are frequently at the margins of departmental and
5 institutional life and are unable to participate fully in departmental or University
6 functions.

7 5) Other investigators may be hesitant to enter into collaborations with a faculty member
8 whose presence is temporary and who may not be here in another year.

9 6) Potential graduate students may be hesitant to begin their thesis research in the
10 laboratory of a faculty member whose presence is temporary and who may not be
11 here in another year.

12 In our judgment, creation of a faculty position that disappears as soon as grant funding is
13 lost would be exploitative of the faculty member and would be inconsistent with long standing
14 traditions of this University calling for fair and humane treatment of employees.

15 ***B. Adverse effects on tenure-track faculty members***

16 1) Tenure-track faculty would see enhanced competition for scarce institutional
17 resources such as laboratory space, bridging funds, and graduate students, possibly
18 compromising their own research programs.

19 2) Tenure-track faculty may, in fact, even be disadvantaged when competing for scarce
20 institutional resources. Tenure-track faculty have significant responsibilities in
21 addition to research, such as teaching, service, and possibly clinical care, and certain
22 aspects of their research programs may not be able to compete favorably with those
23 run by investigators focusing solely on research.

- 1 3) More widespread use of the term “professor” to refer to researchers rather than
2 teachers is inappropriate. It detracts from the meaning of the term and misrepresents
3 the true essence of what a faculty member should be.
- 4 4) New hires may be offered research track positions when they would otherwise receive
5 tenure track positions, thus circumventing tenure and the protections it affords.

6 **C. *Adverse effects on the institution***

- 7 1) Another non-tenure-track would further diminish the proportion of tenure-track faculty
8 positions in the University and may represent a “back door” approach to the elimination
9 of tenure or a reduction in the number of tenure-track lines. We strongly believe that
10 tenure is an essential ingredient in maintaining and enhancing academic freedom and
11 academic vitality at any first-rate institution of higher education. University policy,
12 which is clearly articulated in the Operations Manual, supports this concept:

13 The basic assumptions on which The University of Iowa proposes to
14 function over the next several years are: First, tenure will continue as a
15 cornerstone of the University's relationship with faculty members. Tenure
16 is not only consistent with academic vitality but essential to it. Second,
17 consistent with the University's educational needs and as permitted by its
18 resources, faculty members in probationary status will be given the
19 opportunity to acquire tenure if their performance merits tenure. No
20 system of tenure quotas is contemplated...

21 ...The University of Iowa's consistent goal is excellence; and the tenure
22 system must continue if the University is to recruit and maintain a
23 distinguished faculty. While tenure would be an integral part of the
24 University's relationship with the faculty without regard to the competitive
25 situation, it also is important to note that the outstanding universities
26 throughout the country have tenure systems and that The University of
27 Iowa's competitive position as it attempts to recruit and to retain
28 outstanding faculty members would be damaged beyond repair if tenure
29 were abandoned or seriously weakened.³

³ "Statement on Tenure and Academic Vitality at the University of Iowa," *Operations Manual*, Section III. 10.1a.(2), pp 140-141 (2000).

1 AAUP also believes that tenure is crucial and does not sanction the use of renewable
2 term, non-tenure-track faculty appointments: "With the exception of special
3 appointments clearly limited to a brief association with the institution, and
4 reappointments of retired faculty members on special conditions, all full-time faculty
5 appointments are of two kinds: (1) probationary appointments; and (2) appointments
6 with continuous tenure."⁴

7 2) A substantial portion of non-tenure-track faculty may change the overall climate on
8 campus from one of freedom of expression to one of guarded communication.

9 Without the prospect of tenure, long-term faculty members serve with their academic
10 freedom in continuous jeopardy and may not be able to speak freely and openly on
11 issues affecting them or their research pursuits. According to the Operations Manual:

12 A good university must create an atmosphere which, in a positive way,
13 encourages faculty members to express new ideas and divergent
14 viewpoints and to make inquiries unbounded by present norms. Such an
15 atmosphere currently exists at The University of Iowa; and tenure has
16 contributed substantially to the creation of this atmosphere and to its
17 continuance. Put simply, free inquiry and expression are essential to the
18 maintenance of excellence; tenure is essential to free inquiry and
19 expression.⁵

20 The importance of tenure was reinforced by the Ad Hoc Committee to Review the
21 Clinical Track Policy in their report of March 24, 2000:

22 This Committee strongly reaffirms the importance of a tenure/tenure-track
23 professorate at this University. Tenure is designed to assure more than
24 some form of job security. It is absolutely essential if faculty are to be
25 free, and to feel free, to present their ideas in their ongoing search and
26 dissemination of knowledge, even unpopular ideas, through their teaching
27 and scholarship. It is also essential to assure robust faculty participation in

⁴ "Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure." *AAUP Policy Documents & Reports*, Section 1(b).

⁵ "Statement on Tenure and Academic Vitality at the University of Iowa," *Operations Manual*, Section III. 10.1a.(2), p 141 (2000).

1 the governance of an institution without fear of reprisals.⁶

2 According to AAUP:

3 The increase in non-tenure-track appointments affects the quality of
4 education as a whole and the stability of the profession in particular. The
5 growth of non-tenure-track faculty erodes the size and influence of the
6 tenured faculty and undermines the stability of the tenure system. The
7 large numbers of faculty who now work without tenure leaves academic
8 freedom more vulnerable to manipulation and suppression. The
9 professional status of faculty suffers when so many are subject to
10 economic exploitation and demeaning working conditions inconsistent
11 with professional standards. And the quality of education is at risk when
12 curriculum, advising, and instruction are not in the control of faculty to
13 whom the institution has made the kinds of commitments that ensure
14 scholarly development and recognition of performance.⁷

- 15 3) The establishment of a research track would expand the present two-tiered system of
16 University faculty that already erodes collegiality and compromises sound
17 governance practices. It would exacerbate the divisiveness that currently exists and
18 further strain relationships between individual faculty members and between different
19 units within the University. Research faculty would further fragment the faculty into
20 distinct groups.
- 21 4) The problems, worries, and anxieties of non-tenure-track faculty tend to be
22 contagious. As faculty members suffer with the uncertainties of their status within
23 the institution, they also demoralize their colleagues.
- 24 5) Research track positions heavily dependent on external funding would encourage a
25 type of research focused on short-term goals for which the possibility of funding
26 would be greatest. Such a system would encourage conformity and discourage
27 disagreement with established norms in a given field. Researchers may feel they

⁶ "Report of the Ad Hoc Committee to Review the Clinical Track Policy," to Provost Whitmore and Faculty Senate President Jonathan Carlson, (the "Kurtz Report"), March 24, 2000, p 7.

⁷"The Status of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty." *AAUP Policy Documents & Reports*

- 1 should avoid more risky topics and may find that long-term creativity is frowned
2 upon rather than promoted.
- 3 6) Appointments that are contingent upon external funding create a revolving door of
4 faculty who come a few years and then go. Such turnover is characterized by a lack
5 of institutional continuity, coupled with high start-up costs and diminished returns on
6 institutional investments in research programs.
- 7 7) Faculty would have limited institutional loyalty, mainly because the institution would
8 be perceived to have only limited loyalty to them.
- 9 8) If appointments were to depend heavily on external funding, then the institution
10 would, in essence, be allowing 3rd parties - the granting agencies - to decide who
11 should and who should not be faculty. Such decisions should be the primary
12 responsibility of faculty; the institution should not delegate control to funding
13 agencies.
- 14 9) The concept of a "research faculty" whose primary role is to perform research is not
15 compatible with the teaching mission of this University. Qualifications for all
16 existing faculty ranks, both tenure-track and clinical-track, include ability as a
17 teacher.^{11,12} At this institution, teaching is essential to the concept of a "faculty
18 member."
- 19 10) The role of research faculty in faculty governance would be unclear. Non-tenure-
20 track faculty will feel further marginalized and ostracized if they are not permitted to

⁸ "Statement on Tenure and Academic Vitality at the University of Iowa," *Operations Manual*, Section III. 10.1a.(2), pp 140-141 (2000).

⁹ "Statement on Tenure and Academic Vitality at the University of Iowa," *Operations Manual*, Section III. 10.1a.(2), p 141 (2000).

¹⁰ "Report of the Ad Hoc Committee to Review the Clinical Track Policy," to Provost Whitmore and Faculty Senate President Jonathan Carlson, (the "Kurtz Report"), March 24, 2000, p 7.

¹¹ "Qualifications For Specific Ranks," *Operations Manual*, Section III. 10.4, pp 146-147 (2000).

1 participate in governance or if their role in the promotions process is diminished.

2 However, we must also consider the extent to which research track faculty can render
3 truly independent judgements if they are not eligible for tenure and serve only at the
4 pleasure of their DEO. The Kurtz Report recently recommended limitations on the
5 role of clinical faculty in faculty governance because of concerns over academic
6 freedom and differences in professional expectations.¹³

7 **IV. The University's burden of justification**

8 Implementation of a research track is likely to extract high costs in terms of institutional
9 vitality and the quality of academic pursuits. The University must carefully weigh these
10 potential adverse consequences, both tangible and intangible, against the possible benefits of a
11 non-tenure research track.

12 A non-tenure research track would represent a dramatic change in faculty standards away
13 from our tenure track tradition. We believe that those who advocate creation of such a track
14 carry a heavy burden of justification and a keen responsibility for demonstrating that the benefits
15 of this track outweigh its likely costs. If the goal of this track is to benefit P & S scientists, other
16 options are available to help recruit, retain and reward high-quality, successful, research
17 investigators.

18 Committee A of the UI chapter of AAUP believes that the individual and institutional
19 costs that are likely to be associated with the proposed non-tenure research track heavily
20 outweigh its potential benefits. For this reason, we urge you to recommend against the
21 establishment of a non-tenure research track.

¹² "Clinical Track Policy," *Operations Manual*, Section III., 10.9d, pp 152-153 (2000).

¹³ *The Kurtz Report*, pp 4, 6, 7, 9.