

## **Faculty Rank and Departmental Voting Rights at Central Washington University** By [Steve Jackson](#)

Students are often confused at the system of ranks and responsibilities that their instructors fit in. The average student will interact with a professor in a class, and possibly will meet and work with them as an advisor, but will never need to know what the difference is between a tenured full professor, and an adjunct instructor. In understanding academic governance, which students have a place in just as faculty do, it is important to understand the distinctions between rank are not merely pay grades but true changes in responsibility. This article attempts to address both the theoretical, normative “best practice” of rank, as well as understand how it is applied at one institution (Central Washington University) and the movement to change how rank is measured.

First off, Central Washington University, our example, actually provides very little guidance on how rank is operationalized. This does not mean it is not present, but much of how rank works in the university is based upon the assumption that everyone in the system pretty much knows the rules, which is often not the case. Thus a scholar of higher academia must look closely at how rank is operationalized to understand how it functions at Central Washington.

The first place to look is in Section II, Part A, Subsection 1 of the college guidelines which defines, for the purpose of the selection and removal of department chairs, the voting membership of departments. The department is the basic organization unit of the university, and thus this is an important point because it established “ownership” of the department. In a historic sense, ownership is the people who establish and maintain continuity in a department, hire and vet new members of the academic team, decide what work students must perform and what knowledge they must understand to gain standing in the field of instruction covered by the department, and are usually the final arbiters of academic questions about their field of study.

The department chair is the leader of these “owners” and is thus the first among equals. These chairs are the final point in the academic chain in many universities where the faculty - the workers who are directly involved with the education and research mission, and represented in the academic organization by a credentialed member of their field who has been chosen by them. They organize the faculty, make the abstract desires of the faculty concrete, assign tasks to faculty, and communicate faculty needs to the administration. In a real sense, the people who vote on the chair are the ones who run the mission of the university.

At Central Washington University, the people who can vote on the chair include, "tenured, tenure-track, and non-tenure-track faculty holding the title of assistant professor or senior lecturer." This is an important rule because it legally defines who the university sees as continuing employee. These are the plank owners who the university has assured (except for the senior lecturer, where CWU policy diverges dangerously from precedent of higher education) of continuing employment. The reason they are given the power to vote for a chair is three fold.

First, they will be present to benefit or suffer for their choice. As will be seen later, non-continuing faculty are hired for a single quarter, or a single year. There is no assurance that they will be working at the university the next year. For this reason their vote need not be based on the long term health of an academic program, but to meet short term goals within the horizon of their employment. Since academic thinking is usually long term - CWU is more than 100 years old and many universities are over 1000, and since even short-term curriculum thinking is done in 3-5 year cycles, there is a requirement in academics that decision making be equally long term.

Second, tenured and tenure track faculty have a basic job protection that prevents the university from arbitrarily firing them. With the exception again of senior lecturers, a chair cannot easily take revenge on faculty who vote against them, nor can fellow faculty individually make life that difficult for a tenured or tenure track faculty member who decides to vote in an unpopular way. Adjuncts and instructors, and to a large extent senior lecturers under the CWU system, can be punished simply by not renewing their contract. A department chair need not make any great effort to let them go, they are temporary employees only and lack any but the most basic job protections.

Third, instructors are not paid to vote. Tenure and tenure track faculty are paid a certain amount to work on committees, attend meetings, and vote at those meetings. Instructors, lecturers, adjuncts, and senior lecturers are paid by the class they teach, and rarely get administrative money. It is very difficult to have instructors required to participate to vote because when they are paid for their efforts they essentially become assistant professors who lack the requirement of research, calling into question why any assistant should do research when they can be paid nearly as much just for teaching. When voting is made optional for instructors, allowing them to vote or not as they see fit, quorum becomes extremely difficult.

Senior lecturer iare a special case at CWU and one that has to be addressed separately. It is poorly defined, but in practice, it is a lecturer who after five years of service voluntarily decides to take on some added duties in the department and gets to submit their resume, portfolio, and the like to peer review by the department to be accepted in as junior faculty. It is assumed that these faculty, and the CBA supports this, will be given first access to courses up to their maximum workload of 45 credits, but it is also assumed that these faculty may, in extremes, not be renewed, based on need of the department. This makes them subject to manipulation by unscrupulous department chairs who can use the threat of failure to renew to make these professors vote in a particular way, distorting the voting process. Senior lecturers are also not paid for service work.

At most universities that have senior lecturers, they are protected by either giving them rolling 3-year contracts, or by requiring them to move to the tenure track ranks in three years or loose their position. Central will likely keep senior lecturers until one or more sues the university and wins either tenure or a large monetary award, allowing for reform of the rank.

The University Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) 26.2.6(a) creates another category of faculty member, and that is member who is eligible to review and comment on personnel issues, and who must have access to the portfolios of their fellow faculty members (including adjuncts and instructors) during a review process. This category includes tenure track and tenured faculty but does not include senior lecturers and NTT assistants. Legally this group becomes the people who can advise and comment on the most serious issues of the department - promotion.

CBA 20.5.1 amplifies this by saying that the department's personnel committee will consist of "tenured and tenure-track faculty." It does create a caveat, that while tenure track (not untenured) faculty may labor on the personnel committee (and presumably perform tasks such as review classes, research, review adjunct and instructor performance, and the like) "only tenured faculty" may vote on "reappointment, tenure, promotion, and post-tenure review." Further, only full-professors may vote on promotion of faculty to full-professor, creating a third category.

Thus we see the first four categories of faculty in a department as operationalized at CWU, and they broadly match, with one exception, standard practice in academia:

- 1) Full Professor. These professors have the highest voting rights regarding promotion to the top rank of faculty.
- 2) Tenured Professors (including full professors). These professors can give faculty tenure.
- 3) Tenured and tenure track professors. These professors can review tenure documents, advise students, serve on required attendance committees, and vote to hire new faculty (including tenure track faculty).
- 4) Tenured, tenure track, and senior instructor. These professors can vote for chair, vote for curriculum and scheduling decisions, and vote for committee formation and leadership.

All other people not defined by these three broad categories are in the catch all of untenured faculty who serve at the pleasure of the department. This broad category is normally divided into five broad categories.

- 5) Instructors who have year long contracts that are usually full-time.
- 6) Adjuncts who are hired to teach on a class by class, quarter by quarter basis.
- 7) Staff members who hold non-faculty appointments but whose credentials allow them to teach.
- 8) Graduate students who teach as part of an assistantship.
- 9) Emeritus and retired faculty.

In general, the last five categories are contracted for a set duration to teach a small range of classes. Except for staff members, the university has no requirement to continue using these people in classes, and with staff / instructors the staff member may stop teaching without affecting the staff relationship. Instructors are generally hired by the year, while the other category of teachers are hired by the course.

Voting privileges among this final group are usually informational. When they vote the vote is recorded for informational purposes, but is not counted. In addition, none of these categories of instructor is paid (normally) for service, so

their absence or presence at faculty functions is not generally tracked. Adjuncts will sometimes be required to attend introductory sessions or meetings, but these are more to discharge legal and safety responsibilities of the university than to perform service, and are paid for by the money the faculty member is making as an instructor.