

Faculty Excellence

Submitted by
NC State Task Force on Faculty Excellence

Great universities begin with accomplished people—students, staff, faculty, and administration. But in the end, it is the excellence of the faculty that determines the stature of the university and, more important, its impact on the workforce, on the economy, on the advance of knowledge, and on the human condition. The NC State Task Force for Faculty Excellence has been charged to make recommendations to achieve and maintain the excellence of the faculty.

The organizing principle for the task force's deliberations was its early recognition that an excellent university must be pervasively excellent. The standard of excellence applies to all NC State faculty across all departments, institutes, centers, and units, and it applies to their activities in every aspect of the university's core missions: scholarship, teaching, and service. To achieve pervasive faculty excellence, NC State must hire the best faculty and create and sustain programs that develop and support each faculty member's pursuit of excellence. The task force recognizes, however, that faculty cannot achieve excellence without outstanding administrative leadership at all levels. In other words, excellence at NC State must be both horizontal (pervasive across the university), and vertical (pervasive at all levels of the organizational structure). Pockets of excellence, either in the horizontal or vertical context, will not translate into excellence at the institutional level.

Themes of institutional excellence and individual excellence are interwoven throughout this report, which addresses two broad strategic goals: focusing for impact, and fostering a culture of quality.

Focusing for impact

At all times, and especially in times of severe budgetary restrictions, a strategic plan for faculty excellence entails directives to focus the work of the faculty. Although NC State supports curiosity-driven research, protects basic scholarship and creative expression, and allows every faculty member to achieve his or her full potential, the history and mission of this university call for us to address the major challenges that confront our state, our nation, and the world.

Two strategies that support this goal follow. One calls for selecting a small set of areas in which the university would invest selectively to achieve an international reputation for excellence and impact. The second calls for making our graduate degree programs broader, more flexible, and fewer in number; while allowing more specialized graduate education to be provided through

concentration areas, which could easily come and go, and which might appear under multiple degree programs.

Strategy: Focus areas

In order to exert significant impact on enduring societal problems or issues, NC State should define a set of university-wide focus areas. Framed around major societal problems or issues, these focus areas should be selected based on our current capabilities and targeted to capitalize on opportunities for partnerships within and beyond the university. We propose the strategic addition of "clusters" of ten to thirty new faculty positions across the university in each focus area. The areas should be sufficiently focused to promise rapid progress but sufficiently broad that we would be able to respond to unexpected findings. They should be evaluated at prescribed intervals to ensure such flexibility.

The focus areas should be defined and developed with input from advisory committees of research-active and expert faculty who would inform the skill sets required for the clusters of new faculty positions and who would identify (shared) infrastructure needs and recommend resource allocations. The task force anticipates that a majority of the focus areas will be interdisciplinary, but that they will draw on disciplinary expertise and will offer opportunities for participation broadly across the university. These areas will ultimately distinguish NC State nationally and internationally.

We recognize that to move forward in the current financial situation and to ensure that interdisciplinary focus areas are supported, funds for the new faculty positions will have to be assembled and managed centrally. One option is that positions created by vacating faculty would revert to the provost. Exceptions would include vacancies created by a tenure denial or where there is a case that could be made for some overriding college need. Positions returned to the provost would be reallocated to develop the focus areas, including cluster hires. This strategy would create incentives for excellence by encouraging collaboration, rather than competition, among departments and colleges and would ensure that the process of allocating new positions advances an agenda for focus and not simply reproduction of existing programs.

Metrics: The number of focus areas identified; the number of new faculty hired in support of each focus area; the numbers of graduate degrees with concentrations (see below) in each focus area; and the impacts of each focus area (contributions to solving the substantive problems; national media visibility; faculty, staff and student awards; external funding; refereed publications).

Strategy: Graduate fields of study

To strengthen recruitment, support, and retention of high-quality faculty, NC State should build an interdisciplinary web of graduate education and research layered strategically over the critical foundation of departments. Graduate study is driven largely by the continuously changing frontiers of research and scholarship and by the enduring problems that define the university focus areas proposed in the previous strategy. On the other hand, departments serve

to coordinate similar expertise and to meet the essential teaching mission of the university. We thus propose that graduate training be reorganized into flexible fields of study that, where appropriate, transcend departmental structure. In some cases, this might be achieved by merging existing degree programs under a broad umbrella, e.g. biological sciences, with a small set of core requirements that allow the student and graduate committee to tailor the program to suit the student's research and career focus.

Individual faculty members may belong to more than one graduate field, and the members of the field determine its degree requirements, admit students, and arrange for their support as appropriate. The student's graduate committee will make decisions on granting the degree, although the field will typically appoint a member to each committee to ensure that the field's requirements are met.

While graduate fields may include multiple concentrations (perhaps reflecting the university focus areas), the number of graduate fields should be dramatically fewer than in our current model. As noted above, some reduction might be achieved by merging existing degree programs. Broader fields will also serve to bring faculty together from across the university and create opportunities for faculty in departments without doctoral programs to direct students pursuing doctorates in these fields.

While graduate education and interdisciplinarity are the primary purview of two of the other strategic planning task forces, we commend for further study structures such as the cluster hiring initiative at the [University of Wisconsin-Madison](#). Such interdisciplinary cluster areas of scholarship—like the focus areas described in the previous section of this report—would be natural candidates for concentrations in one or more graduate fields. Such a structure provides a practical and transparent vehicle for both initiating and terminating areas of inquiry as knowledge and needs evolve.

Metrics: The number of graduate fields of study; numbers and quality of graduate students in each field; time to graduation in each field; impact of graduate programs on placement of graduates in the workforce; and publication metrics.

Demanding a culture of quality

NC State has many examples of academic excellence. That excellence is in evidence at a variety of institutional levels: individuals, groups, departments, colleges, centers, or institutes. The task force recognizes that excellence must be promoted, supported, and rewarded in all aspects of faculty responsibility: research, teaching, outreach, and service. The challenge is how to achieve that excellence at each organizational level by a combination of promoting and supporting excellence, reducing pockets of stagnation and mediocrity, and providing sufficient support for retooling towards excellence. The task force proposes four strategies.

Strategy: Pervasive excellence

Faculty excellence begins with good decisions on where to locate positions and how to recruit talent. Positions should not simply reproduce existing programs, unless there is measurable evidence of a program's quality and need. Requirements for membership on search committees and input for selecting new positions should include faculty who recognize and represent excellence and include membership from within and outside of the department. Searches with an insufficient number or quality of applicants should be postponed with the reassurance that the lines will remain available. This reassurance will eliminate the "use it or lose it" rationale for hiring in years when departments are unsuccessful in their bids for top candidates.

Metrics: Measures of successful recruitment should include the number of applicants (relative to some national benchmark for the field); the quality of their prior institutions and the reputations of their dissertation advisors for mentoring successful scholar/educators.

Success in tenure must demonstrate the achievement of a standard of excellence. We should review the process by which college RPT committees are selected to ensure they are staffed by highly productive faculty members who will insist on outstanding portfolios and recognize excellence in research. To ensure excellence in teaching, the protocol for reporting on teaching needs to be updated. There should be clearly stated requirements for describing the kind of course taught (lecture, lab, service, seminar, etc.) and for summarizing evaluation data (reporting the average against some relevant benchmark or showing improvement over time). Furthermore, more standardized protocols should be required for conducting and reporting the results of peer observations, and a range of types of observation instruments should be provided (such as was adopted recently in the College of Education).

A culture of mentoring will support new faculty members in their pursuit of professional success and career advancement. Both formal department programs and informal mentoring opportunities outside the department add value. Administrative leaders, normally the department heads, should be accountable for developing and sustaining excellent mentoring programs for faculty at all ranks.

A summary of the mentoring plan for an assistant professor should be included in the RPT file, and the university should evaluate tenure track faculty's and mentors' experience with mentoring. Outstanding mentoring practices that are identified should be disseminated in an ongoing way through the Office of the Provost.

Metrics: The number of departments with formal mentoring programs; and the number of mentoring opportunities outside of departments. Some measures of effectiveness are needed for departmental and other mentoring programs.

Care needs to be taken so that the letter of offer, statements of mutual expectations, annual reviews, and expectations by DVF members communicate consistent expectations and a

trajectory that will result in a strong application for tenure. Likewise, post-tenure review must be viewed as a recommitment to a culture of excellence across the professional career of faculty. We must recognize that the span of a career typically requires faculty to undertake multiple shifts in expertise. Thus, mechanisms must be in place to encourage retooling, and time and resources must be provided to master new areas of study.

Metrics: An annual report on tenure and promotion by college summarizing evidence that successful candidates have excelled in their scholarly activities and have established nationally and internationally recognized programs of research; evidence of excellence in teaching and notable service/outreach contributions.

Excellence in research and scholarship, teaching, and service should be evaluated not only at the level of individual faculty, but at the higher levels of departments, colleges, centers, and institutes. Progress towards excellence will require, in addition to current RPT policies, implementation of fair, independent internal and external review standards for pre-tenure and tenured faculty and for organizational units, as well as clearer metrics for evaluating department heads, deans, and directors of centers and institutes with participation by all involved faculty and staff.

Metrics: A report on the number of unsatisfactory post-tenure reviews and subsequent professional development and re-reviews; implementation of professional orientation and leadership plans for new department heads/chairs; a biennial review of department heads/chairs by deans that include confidential interviews with a range of faculty levels; a protocol for independent review of program units (beyond that embodied in unit comprehensive leadership reviews) every five years, with assurances of appropriate degrees of anonymity and a means to require a set of appropriate actions (rewards and sanctions) to follow the recommendations in program reviews.

To promote and support excellence, concrete incentives and rewards must be tied to evidence of outstanding performance along with consequences for less than stellar performance by individuals or organizations. We propose for tenured faculty who have at least 40 percent scholarship appointments and who are currently in good standing in their post-tenure review, that every six years they may apply for a Scholarly Reassignment (SR) in the following academic year to pursue intensive scholarship or an opportunity for retooling. The success of this application will depend on the department's ability to cover the applicant's normal instructional and service responsibilities, and on the quality of the proposal. A successful proposal should be specific as to the intent of the study, how it will be facilitated, and how it will be evaluated. The quality of the proposal would be judged by highly qualified faculty in the relevant academic field, in addition to the head or chair of the department. Those who have had an SR within a certain period and those who did not show evidence of accomplished work on a previous SR will be disqualified.

Metrics: Review by faculty committees of reports submitted following scholarly reassignments; an annual report of the accomplishments of faculty granted scholarly reassignments.

We should sunset or merge entire units when they become less relevant to the evolving mission of the university. For example, mergers should be considered for departments that are too narrowly focused or too small in size to efficiently support the infrastructure required to promote excellence or where they create redundancy in teaching efforts. To shift the culture at NC State toward increased excellence, the improvement strategy must be accompanied by opportunities to retool and incentives or assistance to pursue highly productive avenues for tenured faculty who do not currently meet excellence goals in scholarship.

Metric: An annual report by the provost on programmatic and organizational changes, with supporting data on the rationale for changes and plans for assisting affected faculty and staff to retool or pursue other avenues.

Strategy: Fostering diversity and inclusion

Faculty excellence depends on having a diverse faculty and administration. The usual answer to the question of why we must diversify the university is couched as a moral imperative, but there are also economic and academic imperatives for fostering diversity and inclusion. The economic imperative concerns the looming crisis in many workforce arenas including science, engineering, education, and management, where there is an underrepresentation of women and/or people of color, who make up two-thirds of the U.S. population.

The academic imperative applies to all fields and to diversity in its broadest sense. A long history of educational research demonstrates that diverse learning communities are associated with positive learning and social outcomes for all students. Other research in group dynamics provides evidence that heterogeneous groups can yield better problem solving than homogeneous ones. Since modern research environments often involve collaboration and group dynamics in problem solving, diverse research environments can produce better research.

The first step in establishing key strategies to recruit, promote, and retain diverse faculty (including, but not limited to, race, sex, gender, and ethnicity) is to examine current policy and practices in all parts of the university. NC State should conduct an analysis to gather information about the allocation of resources, targeted hiring practices, structures to reward departments/colleges achieving faculty diversity goals, and processes for accountability for administrators/departments/colleges.

A second step is to identify and expand exemplary diversity programs that are already in place at NC State. Examples of existing NC State initiatives include the Building Future Faculty Program, the Target of Opportunity hiring initiative, and the NSF-sponsored ADVANCE grant. Best practices, wherever they are found, should be disseminated across the university.

A third step is to develop new approaches to increase the number of women and faculty of color in tenured, tenure-track, and administrative positions. Such approaches could include mentoring programs for diverse faculty members; a post-doctoral fellows program to target diverse groups; mechanisms for "growing our own" diverse faculty members and administrators; and more intentional, less risk averse, search processes. For each hiring unit, we should establish "targets" (not quotas) for demographic diversity that have clearer rewards and consequences than the current OEO Equal Opportunity Plan. We should also require that every search committee receive training in unconscious bias as well as in other EEO hiring policies and best practices. Ultimately, the recruitment, hiring, and retention of diverse faculty will enhance the pursuit of faculty excellence by actively engaging academic leadership and faculty in providing a robust, collaborative, and diverse community.

Metrics: Progress toward targets for recruitment and promotion for demographic diversity; measures of turnover of faculty by demographic category.

NC State wants to be inclusive as well as diverse, i.e. to provide a welcoming, supportive, and stimulating work place for all. One might argue that inclusion is a business imperative. The desire and goal of faculty excellence should not override the need to provide a family-friendly atmosphere, which nurtures both the professional and the personal development of every faculty member. The task force recommends the continued periodic surveys of faculty as to their perceptions of their work-life balance, and the provision of family-friendly facilities and policies, such as the University Child Care Center, tenure clock extensions for illnesses or parenting, and flexible work schedules, when appropriate.

Metrics: Responses to surveys that reflect satisfaction with university policies, procedures, and practices to support work-life balance. Outcomes of salary equity studies to be conducted at least every two years by demographic category.

Strategy: Fostering collegiality and community

Collegiality among faculty is a necessary factor in attracting and retaining excellent faculty. The current campus climate is not what it should, or could, be. The task force recommends that NC State develop various programs and physical spaces that promote, facilitate, and support collegiality and a sense of community among faculty across disciplines and colleges and that inspire innovation and enhance productive serendipity. Examples include community-of-interest discussion groups; programs for faculty cohorts that are promoted/tenured in the same cycle; summer programs to avoid a "shut down " atmosphere; and faculty-hosted "salons," think tanks, or "skunk works" focused on cross-disciplinary problems. In addition, we envision informal socializing spaces, perhaps in the new Talley Student Center, or in D.H. Hill and Hunt Libraries, about which we have had encouraging conversations with those responsible for their planning and management.

These programs and spaces are envisioned not as merely faculty meetings or conference rooms, nor as old-fashioned faculty clubs or lounges. Physical spaces located in each of the campus neighborhoods should be designated and provisioned as faculty-centric places

(environments that are expressly identified as faculty-focused, while not faculty-exclusive). Such spaces might provide varying options for size of group, privacy levels, etc., and each space should have convenient access to amenities that encourage and facilitate informal gathering and sharing of scholarly ideas—from coffee and whiteboards at one end of the spectrum, to full meals and HD projection screens for laptop hookups.

Metrics: Comparison of trends over time of faculty perception of sense of community as captured by the triennial Faculty Satisfaction Survey or other, more frequent, surveys; establishment and popularity of faculty-centric spaces.

Strategy: Fostering careers for tenure-track and non-tenure track faculty

The Task Force for Faculty Excellence has discussed, but not seriously investigated, some questions about the current model for tenure. One is that while sustained excellence in the creation of knowledge (original research and creative scholarship) is tenurable, sustained excellence in the dissemination of knowledge (high-impact teaching or outreach) is usually not sufficient. In a September 2010 report, AAUP recommends that teaching-intensive appointments should be eligible for tenure. NC State should undertake a careful study of this recommendation.

Non-tenure track faculty bring value to the university, primarily in the realm of undergraduate education, but also in terms of research, scholarship, advising, outreach and clinical activities. Although universities vary in how they count their NTT faculty FTEs, NC State (78 percent TT) seems to be about in the middle of its peer institutions (70 percent TT average among seventeen institutions) in terms of TT/NTT faculty ratio. We recognize a natural tension between NTT faculty, who want more stability in their positions, and the administration, which values the flexibility to address changing student populations and budgets that NTT faculty positions allow.

Recognizing that peer benchmarks for percent NTT faculty FTEs must be discipline specific, the university should strive as a matter of principle to allocate resources that allow staffing in each discipline to be consistent with those benchmarks.

The Faculty Well Being Committee Administrative Advisory Committee has developed a set of best practices for the treatment of NTT faculty. These practices ensure that NTT faculty members are appropriately valued, and enhance the development of a sense of community both within the NTT ranks and among NTT faculty and TT faculty members, and the Task Force for Faculty Excellence supports them.

Best NTT practices include appropriate titles for all full-time NTT faculty; up-to-date contracts that clearly define responsibilities and expectations for scholarship; annual written and face-to-face evaluations; appropriate support for teaching supplies, office space, administrative support; TAs and funds for professional development; access to awards; commensurate salaries; participation in faculty governance, such as NTT hiring and promotions; service on departmental committees; and multi-year contracts, based on time-in-grade and performance.

Because cultures and histories in individual departments vary, implementation of these recommendations should be left to departments and colleges.

If NC State is to develop more intentional academic goals and organizations, such as focus areas for research and teaching and interdisciplinary functional and administrative units, faculty hiring, both TT and NTT, should also be more intentional, to ensure that the mix of faculty appointments is appropriate to carry out the university's multiple responsibilities. The responsibilities now filled by NTT faculty may actually increase in the short term, as new patterns of faculty hiring, opportunities for faculty development, and new efforts to increase student success are implemented as part of the strategic plan. Rather than setting arbitrary goals for decreasing the proportion of NTT to TT faculty, the university might ask that each department and program develop more intentional staffing plans that identify the research/scholarship/teaching/outreach responsibilities of the unit, the types of appointments (TT/T/NTT faculty/graduate assistants/post-docs) most appropriate to these responsibility, and short- and long-term goals for recruiting and retaining a mix of faculty appropriate for their needs.

Metrics: The Faculty Well Being Committee should continue to review the COACHE or other surveys of both TT and NTT faculty at NC State to measure changes in level of satisfaction by department, and report these to the provost.