

Rewarding Faculty Work: The Reality of Merit Distribution at Temple University

by Art Hochner

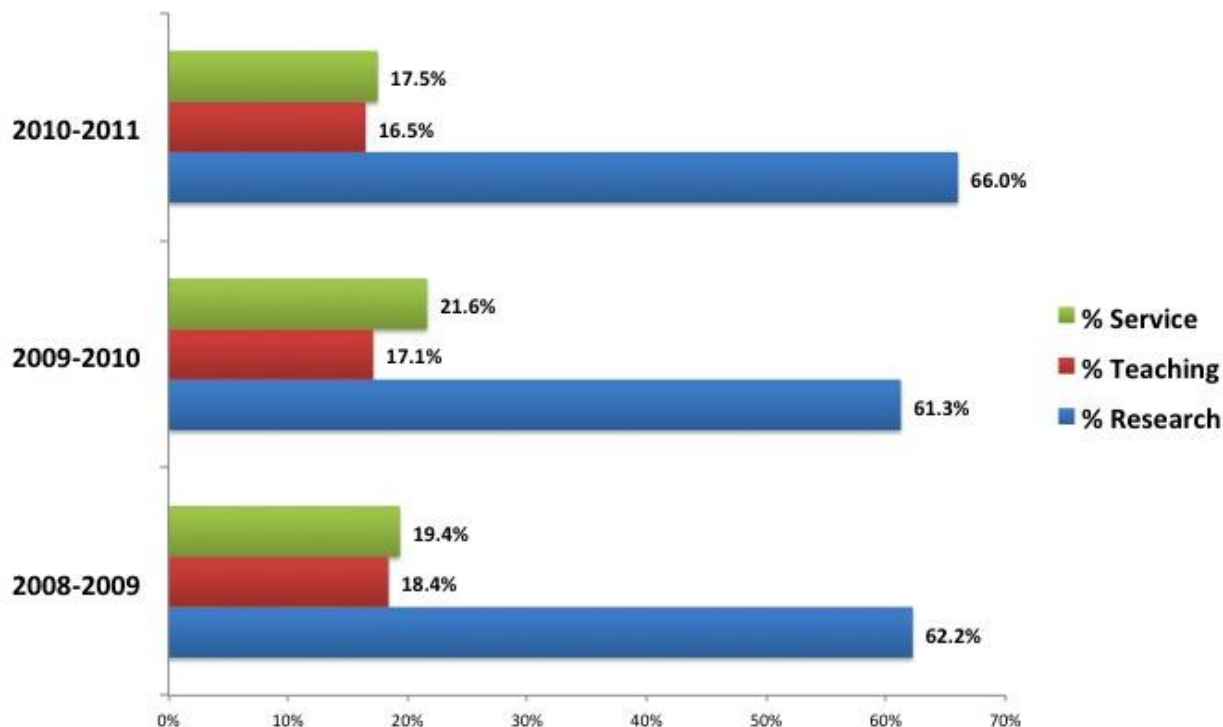
Employees appreciate the acknowledgement of outstanding job performance, especially in the form of remuneration. The type of work that an employer rewards shows what the organization values. When it comes to faculty merit pay, it is clear that Temple University values research because about two-thirds of the merit units are awarded in that category. Honoring the research mission is very important for our hard-working faculty. Fostering research productivity is crucial for Temple's status as a major research university.

Temple's mission, however, involves a good deal more than research. Indeed, the faculty is charged with the tripartite responsibility of research, teaching and service. If you go by the tenure and promotion standards for tenure-track faculty, outstanding research and outstanding teaching go hand in hand (see endnote), though service takes on secondary importance.

You would not know that from the merit award distribution. Take a look at the following bar graph:

Distribution of Merit Units by Category

(each year totals to 100%)



Clearly, teaching gets third place, despite its importance. We all know how much easier it is to measure research productivity than teaching excellence. But so little merit for teaching indicates a low regard for so much of our work with students. Good teaching is taken for granted, as is service. The Faculty Senate Steering Committee would like to increase faculty participation

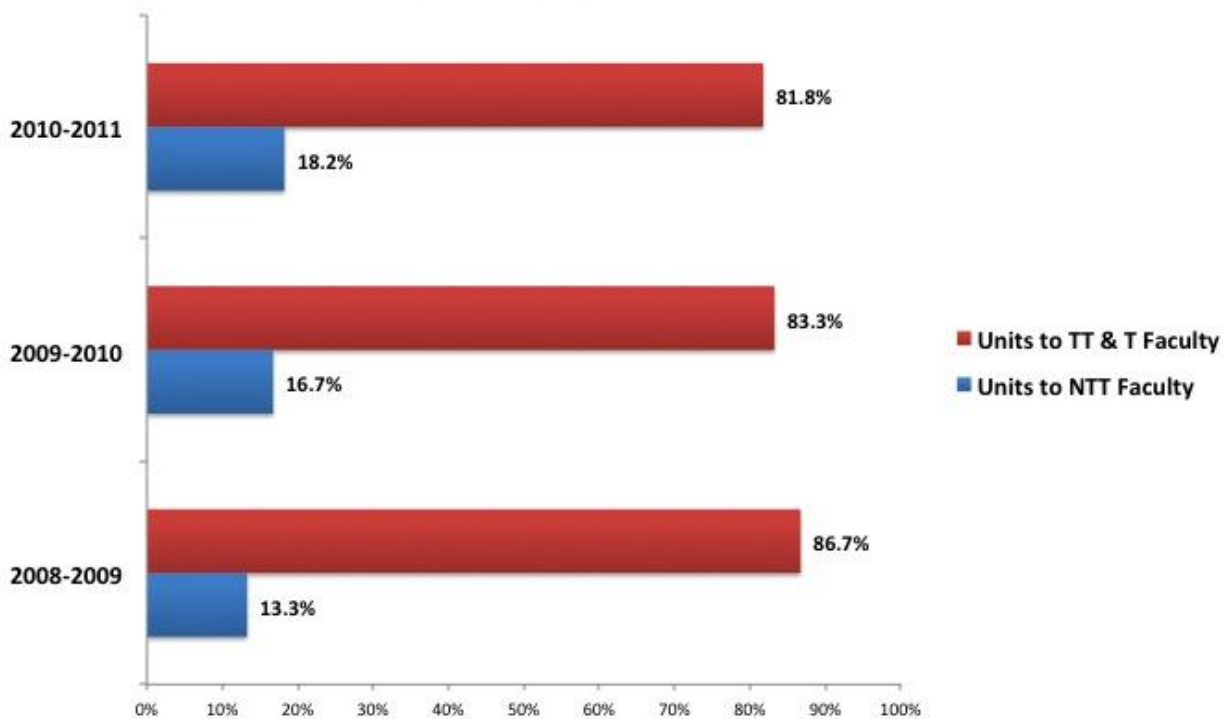
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in shared governance. Senate leaders have advocated more recognition of service activities, including increasing the amount of merit given for service. I agree. But this should not come at the expense of either research or teaching.

Almost 40% of the full-time faculty is nontenure-track (NTT), most of them teaching 12 credit hours per semester, whether on the teaching/instructional track, the clinical track or the practice track. So, how much merit pay do NTTs get? The proportions are slowly changing, but they are nowhere near parity in relation to headcount. Again, look at the data in this next bar graph:

**Distribution of Merit Units
By Faculty Appointment Track**



Some tenure-track and tenured (TT&T) faculty may think this is fair, but I presume that most NTTs would not. While I do not know all the reasons for this disparity, I urge all of us to ponder this situation, especially now that merit decision season is upon us. I do know this: Neither the gulf between the two tracks nor the lack of reward for teaching is healthy for the faculty, for our students, for our university or for TAUP.

TT&T faculty seem to have an easier path to merit. In 2011, 62.0 percent of all TT&T faculty received at least one merit unit, while just 33.5 percent of NTTs did. Is it possible that more TT & T faculty do a better job than the NTTs at their particular responsibilities? Or is it that NTTs don't even bother to apply for merit by filling out their Annual Reports (ARoFAs) by September 1? Do college committees or Deans focus mostly on TT&T faculty research?

The data tell of a slightly promising trend. Teaching awards used to go overwhelmingly to TT&T – 66.6 percent in 2009 – but NTTs have been getting a larger share of these recently – 55.2 percent in 2011. Still, teaching merit units are relatively few and getting fewer. NTTs are getting a bigger share of a diminishing slice of the pie.

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Merit decisions have significant consequences for individuals because they mean recognition of accomplishments and contributions, not to mention the boost in salary that merit units represent. The average TT&T merit recipient was awarded 3.24 units (worth \$1,945) in May 2011; whereas the average NTT merit recipient received 1.85 units (\$1,110). This gap, combined with the far smaller proportion of NTTs that receives merit, only increases the gulf between the two segments of the faculty.

It's obvious why NTTs would care about this situation. But why should TT&T faculty care? It comes down to the importance of working together to carry out both Temple's mission and our own responsibilities.

Temple is extremely dependent on undergraduate tuition revenue. This revenue source is essential for supporting much faculty research. Temple does not garner a large amount of federal research funding, ranking 142 in the nation based on 2008 figures, nor does it have a large endowment that can support research endeavors. Most tenured and tenure-track faculty are given release time from teaching to conduct research, meaning that teaching done by others (NTTs, adjuncts, and graduate teaching assistants) subsidizes their scholarship. The teaching and research missions are intricately intertwined.

This system uses Peter to pay for Paul. Subsidization is fine, but ignoring equity will lead to a divided faculty. These tensions can play out in departments, programs, collegial assemblies, the Senate and at the bargaining table. It's shortsighted to adopt the attitude that "I care only about me and faculty like me. Let the other side of the faculty take care of themselves." We are a university, that is, a whole. The fulfillment of our jobs depends on the work of the entire faculty. TAUP, moreover, represents both TT&T faculty and NTT faculty. Over the years, TAUP has worked with all faculty to find a balance of interests and will continue to do so in the future.

TAUP's concerns about the merit system strengthen our resolve to make sure that faculty are adequately compensated, while setting no upper limits. We need fair pay levels and we need a fair merit system. We need to encourage the fulfillment of all our responsibilities and to honor all faculty who contribute to that end.

If you want to be part of the solution, I strongly urge you to get involved – in your department and college's decision-making, in the Senate, and especially in TAUP. The merit issue can and should be addressed by faculty and administration in this semester. I can guarantee you that in the upcoming contract negotiations TAUP will take it on.

Endnote: Regarding merit awards for faculty, the contract says (Article 21 Salary Increases, section C1, page 63):

*Merit awards shall be given for recognition of exceptional performance of the duties and responsibilities set forth in Article 11 for tenured and tenure-track faculty and Article 15 for nontenure-track faculty of this agreement for promotion to the faculty member's rank. Specifically, merit awards shall be given **principally for outstanding performance in teaching/instruction and in research/scholarship/creative activity**. Outstanding performance in service to the University, in service to the profession/discipline and in discipline-based community service may also be considered in making merit awards. [Emphasis added]*

Article 11 Promotion and Tenure (Section B1, page 14), which is referred to above, states:

*Consideration for promotion shall be based primarily on outstanding performance and continuing promise of outstanding performance as a faculty member. **Teaching / instruction and research / scholarship / creative activity shall be primary in this evaluation. University service, service to the profession/discipline, and discipline-based community service shall be secondary.** [Emphasis added]*

Article 15 Nontenure-Track Faculty Classifications, which also is referred to in Article 21, states:

(Section B3, page 41) The responsibilities as specified in the foregoing appointment and annual letters shall be used as the primary criteria by which to evaluate the faculty member's performance and eligibility for reappointment, promotion and merit.

(Section B4, page 41) Evaluations shall be based on multiple measures of performance and accomplishment in relation to the type of appointment.