

ADVANCE COPLAC PLAN Case Study for AAC&U Presentation

“Faculty Review During the Pandemic”

It is faculty evaluation season at Public Liberal Arts College, and the Department of Geology’s Personnel Committee, a body composed of the only three tenured faculty members in the department, has given an unsatisfactory annual review to Dr. Jan Lightly, who is up for tenure and promotion the following year. Dr. Lightly began her career with a stellar record as a teacher, particularly in the large enrollment sections of Physical Geology, and she recently received a college-wide teaching medal that is awarded by students. However, after the transition to remote learning, the trend in student evaluations of Lightly’s teaching veered more negative, compounded by the fact that very few students completed their teaching evaluations in the remote environment. Because both Lightly and her departmental colleagues continued to teach remotely, the Personnel Committee is unable to observe her teaching face-to-face and write a traditional evaluation of Lightly’s performance in the classroom.

The Personnel Committee also has strong disagreements about Lightly's research. She is short one article according to the departmental criteria for promotion and tenure. In addition, some committee members argue that her co-authored geology publication should not count because she played a secondary role that was not significant. They also take issue with the fact that her first-authored publication is in geoscience education, rather than her specialty area within the discipline. Lightly has at least one work in progress, but it is not under review at the time of her evaluation. In the transition to remote learning, Lightly’s two young children were no longer able to attend school and daycare. Her husband has a full-time job as a structural engineer, so while he also worked from home, his job lacked the flexibility of Lightly’s remote teaching schedule thus childcare responsibilities largely fell to her. Due to campus closures and social-distancing restrictions, Lightly has been unable to regularly work in her lab with students, the primary source of data for her current research project. Not helping matters is the state of Lightly’s relationships with her geology colleagues. Once learning went remote, Lightly stopped volunteering for service tasks on departmental committees and stopped attending some virtual departmental events. The Personnel Committee therefore also rated her service as unsatisfactory, and interpreted her decline in participation as Lightly lacking collegiality, and even being hostile towards departmental work.

Although the committee's deliberations are intended to be confidential, word quickly leaks to the other junior faculty members in the department, who are appalled and upset that Lightly has been given an unsatisfactory review. As a group, they express grave concerns about the manner in which the criteria have been applied and worry that, if Lightly does not meet the standards for satisfactory review, surely neither do they.

Questions:

- 1) Is there an indication in the scenario of gender bias? If so, what is it?
- 2) What policies could have been put into place to prevent this scenario from happening?
- 3) What strategies might you suggest that the Chair/Dean utilize in ensuring that Lightly's review is fair, in light of the constraints in place due to the pandemic?
- 4) Would your thoughts as to how you should proceed differ if Lightly was identified as African-American, and the only person of color in the unit? If so, how?
- 5) Addressing the consternation of the junior faculty will be important to their morale and retention. What steps might you recommend that the Chair/Dean take to mitigate the negative impact of the committee decision on these individuals?
- 6) Is there evidence that the criteria for advancement are being applied inappropriately by the committee? If so, what is it?