

Minutes: Meeting to discuss the possibility of digitizing the ARPT process

13 April 2017

In attendance: Emily Beall, Humanities & Media Studies/Union Vice President; Lawrence Blough, Undergraduate Architecture; Anthony Caradonna, Undergraduate Architecture; Damon Chaky, Math and Science; Dennis Masback, Fine Arts/Union Treasurer; Linnea Pascow, Foundation; Debbie Rabina, School of Information; Keena Suh, Interior Design; Jonathan Thayer, Industrial Design; Jason Vigneri-Beane, Graduate Architecture; Laurel Voss, Provost's Office/Director of Budget and Operations; Holly Wilson, Libraries/Union Secretary

Unable to attend: Cisco Bradley, Social Science & Cultural Studies; Lisabeth During, Social Science & Cultural Studies; Patricia Madeja, Fine Arts (emailed input); Jacki Ochs, Film; Meredith TenHoor, Undergraduate Architecture (emailed input); Joan Wittig, Creative Arts Therapy

After brief introductions, there was an open discussion of the possibility of moving the ARPT process to a digital format. Faculty described the procedures their "Peer Review Committees" (PRCs) use to field applications, and the various advantages and challenges they saw in doing so using a digital tool, as well as the specific needs different departments might have:

Here are the points that came up in discussion:

- PRC Chairs (or Secretaries in some departments) would need to be able to control what materials in an application get advanced to the Department Chair, and which stay internal to the committee (particular concern of Math & Science), as well as when materials get advanced. Also would need to control access to materials for reasons of confidentiality.
- Many faculty (Architecture, Fine Arts, Information) discussed the challenge of external letters of review for Tenure files— including the difficulty PRCs have in distributing appropriate material to outside reviewers for their consideration; the difficulty of a PRC Chair or applicant to receive and track letters as they come in; and, the ability of letters to remain confidential.
- Faculty have, in other contexts such as the curriculum review process, have had frustrating and even very negative experiences with digitizing other processes on campus! The transition would need to be as simple as possible
- Some departments may want to still accept physical materials as a part of or an addendum to digital applications, as some materials cannot be reproduced digitally (Architecture), and in other cases a physical portfolio of visual work (Fine Arts) might remain most appropriate. Digital portfolio of visual work could be an option but could be quite difficult for some faculty
- PRC members may wish to be able to print (in high quality) some materials for easier review & consideration

- Probably PDF would be the preferable standard format for faculty applicants, with no fragmented uploads, and the ability to handle high-resolution files and the ability to automatically resize files for easier reviewing
- No limit or a very high limit on file size to allow for film and video, and particular attention to scholarly work with visual components. An attention and ability to support visuals in various fields and media.
- The digital tool could certainly help with (a) keeping applications focused, (b) keeping them well organized and indexed, (c) eliminate cumbersome paper. Also allows faculty not frequently on campus to review materials with more ease, which enables more participation, too.
- A digital tool could ease the coordination of materials for PRC chairs, especially where there are missing items in an application, as well as make communication between PRC chair & members easier.
- A digital tool could help with continuity within departmental PRCs from year to year—offer a stable repository for not just standards and procedures but best practices, templates, communication tools, etc.
- Some departments (Interior Design, Math and Science) have already crafted their own digital tools. The desire was there, but the functionality was not. Interior design uses a tabbed system for different materials, they control the privacy settings, have a google email/drive account set up, but have had issues with the handoff year-to-year, and the PRC Chair having to do a lot of organizational legwork because faculty submit multiple files (where one complete file is preferable for their system).
- Important to keep in mind that PRC's standards and procedures do evolve (most changes happening through discussion & vote with whole department), so tool would need to be able to evolve with it. While of course maintaining the primacy and responsibility of faculty committees in the larger process.
- From administrative perspective, it's a challenge to work with the physical files; not only do they take up quite a bit of space, they aren't always organized in a way that is helpful or easy to access. Creates extra work and lack of clarity for when Provost needs to review specific materials in a file.
- Question of information in HR files: some PRCs have members or chair visit HR to review files, requires a separate trip, could a digital tool integrate with that?
- Question of student evaluations: these are still paper, some committees review all of them, some review a selection. Some review a summary produced by the faculty member.

- Thorough testing and training will be important. Having some templates departments can use, and training for both applicants and PRCs, will be important.

After the discussion, Laurel talked about what seems like the best possible tool out there, provided by “Interfolio.” Holly, Emily, and Laurel had a chance to get a preliminary introduction to that tool, and our first impressions were good.

The next step will be: having had this discussion and fleshed out what needs and desires faculty have, to meet with the Interfolio rep and see if we think that tool will indeed work. We will aim to set up multiple sessions to accommodate faculty’s schedules late April/early May.

There was further discussion of the timeline for implementing the digital tool/making the transition. The Provost’s office wanted to have this tool live for Fall 17, and could move back the deadlines for PRCs sending their letters to departmental Chairs to accommodate that—so that there’d be time for applicants/PRCs to train on it in before they had to submit/ review applications. Several faculty thought it unreasonable to work on such a compressed timeline, for reasons including: needing more time to train; planning for the additional work given regular teaching loads; doing test-runs to make sure there aren’t bugs; giving PRCs time in case they need to change their procedures (which would involve deliberation & voting with the whole department); and, setting up the templates PRCs will need to use.

Action items:

- Schedule a meeting with Interfolio Rep
- Further discussion on roll-out options and timeline