

May 15, 2026

TO: Washington State University (WSU) Faculty Senate
Dr. Elizabeth Cantwell, President
Dr. T. Chris Riley- Tillman, Provost and Executive Vice President

FROM: Dr. Bidisha Mandal, Co-chair, WSU Faculty Status Committee
Dr. Praveen Sekhar, Co-chair, WSU Faculty Status Committee

RE: 2025-2026 Faculty Status Committee Annual Report

Pursuant Section I.B.8. of the Washington State University Faculty Manual, we are reporting the activities of the WSU Faculty Status Committee for the 2025-2026 academic year.

Membership and Duties

The Faculty Status Committee (FSC) is an independent investigative faculty committee elected by the Washington State University (WSU) faculty at large. The committee comprises of tenured and career-track faculty that reports and makes recommendations directly to the WSU President. Under provisions of the WSU Faculty Manual, a faculty member may appeal non-reappointment, denial of tenure, or deferral of promotion to the FSC. Historically, tenure denials have been the most common type of FSC case. FSC can also be asked to investigate a faculty member's termination of employment following elimination of a program due to financial exigency or discontinuance of a program or department. FSC also nominates members of the Faculty Hearing Committee and arranges for investigations and hearings prior to disciplinary action. Finally, other types of decisions that a faculty member believes may violate the Faculty Manual may appeal to the FSC. FSC members serve for three-year terms that end on August 15th.

FSC's investigations are thorough, confidential, and open-ended. Reports of the findings of an FSC investigation are provided only to the appellant and to the President. Under provisions of the Faculty Manual, the FSC can make its own rules of procedure but must meet certain timelines for handling a case. The specific provisions in the Faculty Manual have been approved by the Faculty Senate, the university administration, and the WSU Board of Regents; they should be regarded as authoritative. Further information on FSC's composition, powers, and operations is available in the 2026 Faculty Manual in sections I.B.8., II.F.9., II.F.10(c)., III.D.7., III.D.9., III.E.14., III.F.3., III.F.5., III.F.6., and IV.E.3.

In the 2025-2026 academic year, the members of FSC were:

Bidisha Mandal (2026) – Co-Chair,
Praveen Sekhar (2027) – Co-Chair,
Michael Berger (2027),
Kimberly McBride (2028),
Chris Dickey (2026) – replaced Thabiti Lewis (on sabbatical) for Spring 2026,

Kayo Niimi (2026),
Jessica Goldberger (2027),
Anne Cox (2028),
Marc Kramer (2026),
Erin Thornton (2027),
Allan Felsot (2028),
Kimberly McKeirnan (2028) – stepped down in January 2026 due to leadership position.

Dr. Praveen Sekhar and Dr. Anne Cox will serve as co-chairs in academic year 2026-2027.

Dr. Erin Thornton will be on sabbatical in 2026-2027. Dr. Kimberly McKeirnan stepped down from the FSC in January 2026 as she transitioned into a leadership position.

Therefore, in the spring of 2026, the FSC held an election for the regular three (3) tenure-track and one (1) career-track positions that become vacant at the end of the academic year, one (1) vacancy that has occurred, and one (1) vacancy that will occur in the next academic year.

The four (4) incoming members with the regular three (3) years term of 2026-2029 are:

Dr. Sergey Lapin (career-track),
Dr. Heather Watts (tenure-track),
Dr. Traci Gillig (tenure-track), and
Dr. Michael Hubert (tenure-track).

The one (1) tenure-track incoming member with a two (2) year term of 2026-2028 is:
Dr. Sammy Perone.

The one (1) tenure-track incoming member with a one (1) year term of 2026-2027 is:
Dr. Dennis DeHart.

All faculty members on the ballot were informed of the election results on May 6, 2026.

Changes in Procedure

A. By-laws: In spring 2026, committee members met regularly to update the FSC by-laws. They were last updated in 2020. The proposed changes are summarized below:

1. Clarifications regarding eligibility to serve on the FSC:
 - Establishes clearer and more consistent expectations for rank and experience across both career-track and tenure-track faculty (generally at least Associate Professor rank).
 - Strengthens conflict-of-interest provisions by prohibiting members from holding administrative roles involving tenure and promotion decisions.
 - Explicitly reinforces the ineligibility of Chairs, Directors, and senior administrators.
2. Updates to reflect and broaden the FSC's functional role:
 - Retains and clarifies investigation of specific appeal types, including:
 - Non-reappointment, denial of tenure, or deferral of promotion,
 - Termination of employment following elimination of a program due to financial exigency or discontinuance of a program or department,
 - Annual review disputes, and

- Other alleged violations of the Faculty Manual or other university policies or procedures unless these appeals are more appropriately addressed by other offices of the university or outside the university.
3. Removes prior limitations on career-track FSC members' participation, allowing:
 - Involvement in investigating appeals involving tenure-track faculty members.
 - Eligibility to chair FSC subcommittees that investigate appeals from career-track faculty members.Once approved, the new by-laws promote equitable participation between career-track and tenure-track faculty members.
 4. Updates and clarifies jurisdictional boundaries:
 - Revises and updates reference to other WSU offices better suited to handle certain types of complaints (e.g., compliance, HR, ombuds).
 5. Strengthens governance structure:
 - Provides more detailed and transparent procedures for nominations, elections, and replacements.
 - Clarifies processes for handling vacancies and interim appointments.

The FSC approved the changes on April 20, 2026.

The revised by-laws document has been shared with the Faculty Senate and the Faculty Affairs Committee. The Faculty Senate Executive Committee is currently working on the next steps to incorporate the changes in the Faculty Manual.

B. Submitting appeal documents: In consultation with Kristina Peterson-Wilson (Vice Provost for Academic Administration & Chief of Staff, Office of the Provost and Executive Vice President), the FSC will no longer require hard-copies of the appeal Request to Review form and other material to be sent to the co-chairs. The FSC will continue to require soft-copies of the appeal documents to be emailed to the FSC co-chairs, which will then be forwarded to the Office of the Provost and Executive Vice President.

C. Brief guide: The FSC has begun updating the Brief Guide and expects to complete the revisions in the next academic year (2026-2027). Once updated, this document will be posted on the FSC website. This document serves as a guide for new FSC members, faculty, and appellants describing how to appeal, issues that the FSC may investigate, issues that are not appropriate for the FSC to investigate, how an investigation is conducted, and provides examples of each of the three major reasons for appeals related to tenure and/or promotion denials.

Faculty Appeals in the 2025-2026 Academic Year

The FSC investigated three (3) appeals during the fall semester.

1. The first appeal was received on April 17, 2025, to review the deferral of promotion to the rank of full professor. Because of the timing of the appeal (end of spring semester 2025), the appellant was informed that the investigation will be initiated in fall 2025. An FSC subcommittee was formed on August 18, 2025, an investigation was initiated on August 25, 2025, and it was concluded on September 22, 2025. The FSC final report and recommendation was sent to the

appellant and the President on October 13, 2025. While the FSC identified a key procedural error, it could not reach a definitive recommendation. The FSC did not recommend that the decision under appeal be set aside.

2. The second appeal was received on May 27, 2025, to review the non-renewal of tenure-track appointment following the intensive third-year review. Again, due to an end of spring semester appeal, a subcommittee of the FSC initiated an investigation on August 18, 2025, which concluded on October 31, 2025. The FSC final report and recommendation was sent to the appellant and the President on November 6, 2025. Concurring with the FSC and in accordance with the FSC's recommendation, the President decided to overturn the non-renewal tenure denial on April 16, 2026.
3. The third appeal was received on August 8, 2025, to review the non-renewal of career-track appointment. A subcommittee of the FSC initiated an investigation on August 18, 2025, which concluded on September 8, 2025. The FSC final report and recommendation was sent to the appellant and the President on September 30, 2025. Concurring with the FSC and in accordance with the FSC's recommendation, the President affirmed the decision to not renew the appointment on November 3, 2025.

The FSC received four (4) appeals during the spring semester.

1. The FSC received an appeal from a Teaching Assistant Professor on a fixed-term appointment until May 15, 2026, to review non-renewal of appointment. After reviewing the appeal documents and in consultation with Kristina Peterson-Wilson (Vice Provost for Academic Administration & Chief of Staff, Office of the Provost and Executive Vice President), the FSC co-chairs determined that there was no evidence of violation of any policy as outlined in the Faculty Manual. Thus, the FSC did not investigate this case.
2. The FSC received an appeal from a tenured full professor on April 21, 2026, to review their annual review rating. The FSC will begin investigating this appeal in fall 2026 if deemed suitable and/or appropriate.
3. The FSC received an appeal from a tenure-track assistant professor on May 13, 2026, to review non-renewal of appointment following their third-year intensive review. The FSC will begin investigating this appeal in fall 2026 if deemed suitable and/or appropriate.
4. The FSC received an appeal from a tenure-track assistant professor on May 13, 2026, to review non-renewal of appointment following their third-year intensive review. The FSC will begin investigating this appeal in fall 2026 if deemed suitable and/or appropriate.

Hearing Committee

The FSC co-chairs received a memorandum from Dr. T. Chris Riley-Tillman, Provost and Executive Vice President on April 23, 2026, to appoint a Hearing Committee from the members of the tenured faculty in accordance with the Faculty Manual Section II.F.10 (Formal Discipline with Major Infractions). The FSC co-chairs sent the Hearing Committee roster on May 6, 2026.

Recommendations

1. As per the Faculty Manual (section III.F.2.), for a faculty member with an appointment carrying a terminal date, the appointment automatically ends on the specified terminal date, unless positive action is taken to reappoint that faculty member. The manual further states that “If a contract will not be renewed, it is **strongly recommended** that the faculty member’s administrative head communicate directly with the faculty member as early as possible and provide written notification of non-reappointment.”

The FSC recommends revising this language to “If a contract will not be renewed, the faculty member’s administrative head **shall** communicate directly with the faculty member as early as possible and provide written notification of non-reappointment.”

With respect to the appeal that the FSC declined to investigate, the co-chairs conducted a preliminary review to determine whether any Faculty Manual policies may have been violated. The appellant suggested that the non-reappointment might have resulted from financial exigency, which would fall within the FSC’s jurisdiction. However, in the absence of a formal letter of non-reappointment, this claim could not be substantiated. Accordingly, Kristina Peterson-Wilson, in consultation with the co-chairs, contacted the CAHNRS Dean to clarify the circumstances. It was confirmed that the non-reappointment was not due to financial exigency.

2. The FSC continues to emphasize that the formal annual review process, as outlined in the Faculty Manual Section III.D.7, must be clearly communicated and consistently implemented. A faculty member, in their third year, should receive a copy of their annual intensive review and a copy of their career progress report.
3. The FSC continues to recommend that a mentoring committee is necessary for all faculty members (career and tenure tracks) seeking tenure and promotion or promotion, in addition to the support and guidance of relevant departmental guidelines. We continue to encourage each unit/department to carefully review the roles and responsibilities of a mentoring committee. Mentoring responsibilities should be clearly delineated in writing, preferably in the unit/department manual or its equivalent. The role of the mentor in providing the Chair/Director’s input in the annual evaluation process should also be explicitly stated.