Non-Tenure Track Faculty Learning Community Issue: FYO Seminar Instruction

**Issue:** Despite the stated goal of introducing students to the full range of the “instruction, research, public service and international missions of the University,” faculty members at UGA who are not on the tenure track are no longer permitted to teach First-Year Odyssey Seminars.

**Background:** As part of UGA’s Quality Enhancement Plan for accreditation, the First-Year Odyssey (FYO) program was initiated in Fall 2011, requiring first-year undergraduates to take a one-credit hour class taught by a faculty member or administrator, in small sections, to expose new students to the resources and programs of the university and to the roles of faculty members in teaching, research, and service. Those teaching FYO seminars receive an additional payment (currently, $3,000) beyond their regular salary.

In 2011 and 2012, non-tenure track faculty members were allowed to teach FYO seminars, and in fact were needed to ensure sufficient courses available to students. Beginning in 2013, this was no longer allowed, with the FYO office emailing all non-tenure track faculty who had proposed courses, stating: “We have had an increase in the number of proposals submitted for this fall and have received more proposals than are needed based on the projected enrollment numbers for first-year students. In determining which seminars to approve, we have based our decisions on the guidelines provided in the approved SACS Quality Enhancement Plan. The plan recommends a focus on having tenured and tenure-track faculty teaching seminars. As a result, we have given preference to tenured and tenure-track faculty; therefore, we have not approved your seminar for fall. If the projected enrollment numbers increase, we will contact you to see if you would still be willing to teach a seminar. We very much appreciate your participation in the program in past semesters.”

**Concerns:** This current policy is not equitable, and the justifications provided for excluding one set of faculty are not internally consistent. The decision to exclude non-tenure-track faculty appears inconsistent with the program’s stated purpose of introducing students to the full range of the “instruction, research, public service and international missions of the University”; this decision also seems to conflate non-tenure track faculty with teaching assistants or part-time adjuncts. Privileging “tenured/tenure track” faculty members to the exclusion of other full-time members of the teaching faculty (e.g., academic professionals and lecturers, who are specifically part of the teaching faculty per UGA’s academic affairs policy manual 1.02) seems to imply that a new, tenure-track assistant professor in their first year at UGA is somehow automatically better qualified to introduce first-year students to these aspects of our campus than are faculty members who (1) have equivalent credentials to tenure-track faculty members, (2) are engaging actively across the university’s mission areas by virtue of their position responsibilities, and (3) in many cases have been employed at UGA for decades. In fact, due in part to the kinds of roles they play on campus, allowing full-time faculty members in non-tenure track appointments to teach FYO courses seems likely to enhance participating students’ understanding of the breadth of faculty roles and of the ways the university’s mission areas and program offerings are integrated.

If there really are more FYO seminars offered then needed, other possible solutions to this issue could include to limit the number of courses taught by a given faculty member to one per year, which is not currently the case. Likewise, as an initiative of OVPI, the FYO courses’ instructional quality and overall benefit to students should be of paramount interest. Prioritizing FYO seminars based on their demonstrated success in accomplishing desired student outcomes could also allow a more equitable determination of future offerings.

**Policy Recommendation:** Specifically allow and encourage full-time, non-tenure-track faculty members to participate in the FYO program along with tenure-track faculty.