

**REFERRAL**

**TO:** The Faculty Senate  
**FROM:** The Steering Committee  
**SUBJECT:** “Regular Faculty” Terminology  
**DATE:** September 7, 2021

On July 19, 2021, the secretary for academic governance received the following communication from Assistant Dean Bethany Laursen of the Graduate School:

By defining tenure stream faculty, librarians, and the principal administrator of each MAU as the “regular faculty” ([Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities] Article 8), our policy language reinforces the problematic hierarchy at MSU that devalues academic specialists, staff, and fixed term faculty. Often these are termed “non-regular” faculty. The terms “regular” and “non-regular” are divergent, value-loaded terms. In the Grad School, we have tried to find a different term for the “non-regular faculty” because we approve members of this group to sit on graduate committees (per Academic Programs), and we need a succinct adjective to describe them and we have heard repeatedly that “non-regular” is demeaning and offensive. We have tried and failed to find a suitable alternative. Our current attempt is to describe them with an awkward phrase such as “Graduate School Approved Faculty Committee Member.” A better term is needed that is both practical and affirming. I am asking Steering Committee to take up the issue of how the “regular” faculty are named to find better terms. I propose the terms “core” and “elective” faculty.

Of course, perhaps the conversation that really should be had is whether we still need this distinction at all. At least when it comes to service on grad committees, perhaps there ought only to be one faculty--the Graduate Faculty--and everyone has to go through some vetting process to become part of that. Such a process would go some way to ensuring only those good at mentoring would be approved to mentor as committee members.

While Assistant Dean Laursen’s email dealt with the use of the term “regular faculty” in the Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities document,<sup>1</sup> the term “regular faculty” is also used in the *Bylaws for Academic Governance*,<sup>2</sup> the bylaws of all but five colleges,<sup>3</sup> and throughout the Faculty Handbook.<sup>4</sup> As such, the Steering Committee decided the matter warranted a broader review.

The Steering Committee refers the matter to Faculty Senate (or an ad hoc committee thereof) for advice on whether the term should be replaced. Note that the *Bylaws for Academic Governance*, college bylaws, the Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities document, and the policies in the Faculty Handbook all have different amendment processes that would need to be followed before any potential changes would be implemented.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities* (as amended June 20, 2014), 8.1.9.1.

(<http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/graduate-student-rights-and-responsibilities/article-8-definitions>).

<sup>2</sup> See *Bylaws for Academic Governance* (as amended April 16, 2021), 1.1.1.1.

(<https://acadgov.msu.edu/sites/default/files/content/Bylaws/Bylaws%20for%20Academic%20Governance%20%28Updated%204-16-21%29.pdf#page=4>)

<sup>3</sup> See generally <https://acadgov.msu.edu/bylaws>. Lyman Briggs College, the Residential College in the Arts and Humanities, and the Colleges of Education, Music, and Nursing use “tenure-system faculty” or “tenure-stream faculty.”

<sup>4</sup> See generally *Faculty Handbook* ([https://hr.msu.edu/resources/pdf/faculty-handbook/fac\\_policy\\_man.pdf](https://hr.msu.edu/resources/pdf/faculty-handbook/fac_policy_man.pdf)).