18 February 2016

TO:   University Academic Planning Council
FROM:   Michael Bernard-Donals, Vice Provost for Faculty and Staff
RE:   Revised draft policy on minimum qualifications of instructors

At its meeting of 21 January 2016, I presented a draft policy on minimum qualifications of instructors, created in response to a change in accreditation criteria from the Higher Learning Commission and in anticipation of our accreditation study and visit scheduled for 2017-18. (I refer you, for context, to my memo of 8 December 2015 to the UAPC.)

During that meeting, members of the UAPC recommended some small revisions to the policy. Since that January meeting, I presented the document to members of the Council of Deans, who also suggested some revisions.

Attached you will find the revised policy (with revisions made using the “track changes” function). The principal revisions are these:

- Under “General Standard,” first bullet point: clarification that there may be exceptions to the “one-degree-higher” criterion, which include criteria offered by professional accreditors, or different norms established in the disciplines.
- Under “General Standard,” second bullet point: a change (from “the terminal degree” to “a terminal degree”) to indicate that there are different disciplinary understandings of which degree is considered terminal.
- Under “General Standard,” clarification that while permission to employ instructors with alternative qualifications originate in the departments, approval of these alternative qualifications must be granted by the schools/colleges.
- Under “Other factors,” inclusion of methodological training in addition to substantial graduate level coursework.

Thank you for your consideration.
Objective: This policy aims to create a university-wide standard for the appointment of instructional staff in courses taught for academic credit at the UW-Madison. Such a standard will set common expectations for instructor qualifications at UW-Madison. In addition, it is being promulgated to meet the new accreditation standards adopted by the Higher Learning Commission in June 2015.

Applicability: This standard will apply to all UW-Madison staff who teach with appointments as faculty or instructional academic staff, including limited-term appointments, defined here collectively as “instructional staff”. It will not apply to graduate students who receive appointments as teaching assistants or as lecturers-SA (Student Assistant) and work under the direct supervision of a member of the faculty or instructional academic staff. In cases of instructors (including graduate student teaching assistants) who are supervised by faculty or qualified academic staff, the institution will note both supervisor and instructor of record. Individuals who teach courses offered for UW-Madison credit must have instructional appointments consistent with that role during the term of instruction.

General Standard: Qualifications for instructional staff will be judged primarily on the basis of earned degrees in a field or subject area relevant to the courses taught, obtained from academic institutions that are accredited by regional higher education associations and/or professional accrediting organizations, or the equivalent quality of university or college in countries outside the USA.

* As a default standard, all instructional staff will have earned a terminal degree, or a degree at least one level higher than the degree for which the course to be taught can be counted. (For example, a Master’s degree is required to teach a course that counts toward the bachelor’s degree, and a Ph.D. is required for a course that counts towards a Master’s degree.) Exceptions may include cases where the norm in the discipline is otherwise (for example, J.D. holders teaching Ph.D. students in Law, or M.F.A. holders teaching Ph.D. students in the arts); or when the accreditation standards of the profession require otherwise.
Instructors teaching in graduate programs should hold the terminal degree determined by the faculty to be appropriate to the discipline, and have a record of research, scholarship or achievement appropriate for the graduate program.

In some cases, instructional staff who do not possess the academic credentials described above can be appointed to teach courses, if they possess at least a bachelor’s degree and are determined by the hiring authority to be otherwise qualified by possessing substantial tested experience. In these cases, permission to employ instructors in this category will be the purview of the department in which the courses are taught, in consultation with subject to approval of the relevant school or college.

Departments, in consultation with the relevant school/college, will define the minimum threshold of experience for alternative qualification, and will establish alternative processes for documenting alternative qualifications, evaluation instruction by, and otherwise supervising, these instructors.

Other factors that may be considered relevant to being “otherwise qualified” may include, but are not limited to:

- Substantial graduate-level academic coursework and/or methodological training in the discipline
- Related research experience in industry and/or the private sector
- Practical experience in the art, business, legal, or political sector
- Relevant clinical experience
- Demonstrated competence or fluency in a language other than English and demonstrated ability to teach that language

It is the expectation of the institution that the decisions to hire instructors under this provision will be relatively rare, and made in light of providing students with the best possible learning experience.

These guidelines are informed by new accreditation standards adopted by the Higher Learning Commission in June 2015; they are promulgated to meet these standards.