Academic Promotion in Australia

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Presentation Structure

- Introductory remarks
- Context and background
- Policy environment
- Structure, foundations and criteria for academic promotion
- Implications and impact of academic promotion processes
- Research Issues
Introductory Remarks

- A corporate governance model – academic staff members are not civil servants
- 39 highly autonomous universities (37 public, 2 private) (93% of all enrolments) and about 170 non self-accrediting higher education institutions
- 5 appointment levels – Professor (about 10%), Assoc. Prof. (10-15%), Senior Lecturer (35%), Lecturer (30-35%), Assist. Lecturer (5%-15%)
Introductory Remarks

- Strongly meritocratic culture for academic appointments and academic promotions
- Opportunities for academic appointment are publicly advertised (hence there is a high level of inter-institutional mobility)
- Opportunities for academic promotion are advertised annually within institutions
Context and Background

- Government plays no direct role in academic promotion – academic promotion system is decentralized (but comparable from institution to institution)
- Collegial processes of decision-making are dominant
- During the past 20 years, academic promotion policies have become more explicit in recognizing the importance of teaching quality
Policies are developed and implemented at an institutional level.

Strong national commitment to the importance of individual rights and freedoms, clearly documented contractual arrangements, individual negotiation of terms and conditions of employment, and security of employment.

National policies exist regarding equity (affecting disabled persons, women, Indigenous peoples).
Structure for Academic Promotion

- **Assistant Lecturer** – recent PhD; tutoring and some lecturing; developing research portfolio
- **Lecturer** – lecturing and unit coordination; well-developed research portfolio; PhD supervision
- **Senior Lecturer** – lecturing and course coordination; significant research achievements
- **Assoc. Prof.** – national recognition for teaching and/or research leadership
- **Professor** – international recognition for research leadership
Foundations for Academic Promotion

- **Teaching:** student feedback, peer review, innovative approaches, leadership in teaching, publications about teaching
- **Research:** peer-reviewed publications, PhD completions, research funds obtained
- **Service/leadership:** within the University (service to committees etc.), outside the University (service to professional organisations etc.)
Criteria for Academic Promotion

- Satisfactory: acceptable level of competence
- Commendable: record of performance consistently better than ‘satisfactory’
- Meritorious: recording notable achievements
- Distinguished: high level of external recognition
Examples

- **Example 1:** Promotion to Senior Lecturer as “teaching and research” scholar – ‘meritorious’ in two areas (e.g. teaching and research), and ‘commendable’ in one (service/leadership)

- **Example 2:** Promotion to Professor as “teaching and research” scholar – ‘distinguished’ in two of teaching, research or service/leadership, and meritorious in third area
Process for Academic Promotion

- Letter of recommendation from Head of School/Dean of Faculty
- Independent peer review – up to 7 independent reviewers for Professor; up to 3 independent reviewers for Lecturer
- Promotion Committees generally include senior academic managers, senior academics from other universities, and an equity officer
Implications and Impact of Academic Promotion Processes

- Promotion as an incentive – lost if process too restrictive
- Promotion as a reward – difficult to reward large numbers through promotion, though some universities wealthier than others
- Promotion as a means of filling senior ranks – but alternative is to appoint externally
Additional Remarks Concerning Academic Promotion

- The difficulty of recognizing distinctive contributions to the scholarship of teaching
- The tyranny of research metrics as a basis for appraising contributions to research scholarship
- The tacit role of academic promotion in meeting institutional leadership needs
Research Issues

- Promotion and equity
- Promotion and metrics
- Promotion and the formation of academic identity
  - organizational and disciplinary
THANK YOU.