

# If Mack Brown were on the tenure track

The big questions in Austin right now are what grade do we give Mack Brown for his performance as head coach of the University of Texas football team, and who gives him his grade?

Sportswriters are giving out C's, D's and F's for play on the field. Let me propose that it would be much better if decisions about coaches, expenditures, admissions and academic standards were made with a wider range of voices, perspectives and values.

Athletics decision-making has long operated in a silo. Regents, a sports-enthusiast president, other insiders and a few carefully chosen and easily outvoted outsiders decide on hiring and firing and set spending priorities.

What if decision-making in athletics at UT was modeled on the university's system for promotion and tenure? The promotion and tenure system obtains broad perspectives from inside and outside the university. It involves the tenured faculty and university administration at many levels of authority. It virtually eliminates decisions based on cronism, except at the highest levels, where such decisions are at least transparent. It allows at every stage for fact-finding and debate.

Before you say it just can't work, hear me out. And imagine your own analogies to UT big-time sports.

Assistant professors apply for tenure and promotion generally in their sixth active year at the university. During their first five years, committees and chairpersons or directors within their units have assessed their annual reports and given them advice on how to improve in the year ahead.

In the promotion and tenure year, full dossiers relating to research, teaching and service are compiled and closely reviewed. Five or more evaluations of research are sought from distinguished scholars worldwide, chosen to be knowledgeable about a candidate's areas of specialization but unbiased. Long gone are the days, for the most part, of the good-old-boy system, when going to the finest schools and knowing the right people assured tenure.

Chairpersons or directors and committees of tenured professors judge each case separately within units. Everyone knows the stakes are high for the candidates and for the future of their units. Budgets are tight. Investing in the right person is crucial.

The two departmental decisions are scrutinized by a college-wide committee of professors and by the dean within

each college. Their two then go to the provost and president. Not much gets missed or overlooked, but appeal safeguards are in place in case the process is flawed.

We complain about decision-making by large committees. Yet UT has made real progress every 25 years because of committees like the Commission of 125. In the promotion and tenure process, stacking committees upon committees and including the independent opinions of chairpersons, program directors and deans really works.

It was recently reported to professors that the prevailing philosophy in the provost's and president's offices is that UT is not in the business of awarding tenure and promotion to B+ professors. We were also told that research productivity is the bottom line. Mentoring, advising, award-winning teaching, university, professional and community service won't get assistant professors tenure if they have not gotten an A in research now and for the predictable future.

These are hard standards. I have seen them used. The assistant professors who received the Texas Exes Jean Holloway Teaching Award the year before and after I received it in 2004 were denied tenure. One was a brilliant linguist in Germanic Studies, the other a government professor.

Imagine a similar process and standards applied to Mack Brown. We would discount academic matters like six-year graduation rates of players and the heavy use of tutors. We would discount as outreach service his fundraising and recruiting skills and Longhorn Network appearances. The bottom line would be productivity on game days.

What grade would a broad-based system of evaluators outside the sports silo give a coach who recruits A+ athletes and coaches them in A++ facilities to play against mostly B and lower-grade teams? He chooses his own assistants who are paid A+ salaries.

Right now the problem is defense. But in 2008, 2009, 2010 under Will Muschamp, then-anointed successor to Brown, the Longhorns had the top defense in the Big 12.

The silo did not offer tenure to A+ Muschamp. Instead, they gave a \$2 million raise to Brown, who has only coached two teams in his entire career to conference titles. Would a promotion and tenure-style committee make and stand by the same decision?

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