

Guidelines for Promotion in the Tenure Stream

School of Education
University of Pittsburgh

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Criteria for promotion or appointment to tenured rank have been published in the [Faculty Handbook](#), which should be consulted for information on the University's standards for appointment or promotion to each of the tenure-stream ranks. These criteria are formulated in rather general terms to cover all divisions of the University. Pitt Education has formulated more specific guidelines for our faculty. These specific guidelines have been formulated with the recognition that there is a range of scholarship within Pitt Education, and that specific indicators of excellence may vary across that range.

Within Pitt Education, tenure is awarded for demonstrated excellence, together with the promise of continued excellence in research, teaching, and engagement. All three of these areas are core functions of the University and are also vital to the Pitt Education mission and vision. The relationship between the three is complex, the balance between them will not be the same for every tenure case. Thus, no single formula could serve as an adequate guide in every tenure case. However, two things will always be true—research is always the most important area for faculty in the tenure stream, and every successful case will also contain evidence that demonstrates excellence in the areas of teaching and service/engagement. Strength in research alone does not excuse weakness in teaching or service/engagement.

The determination of excellence is basically a peer judgment, the responsibility of the faculty. In judging excellence, the indispensable ingredient for promotion to tenured rank should be intellectual vitality as reflected in the candidate's research, teaching, and engagement. Vitality is best revealed through the candidate's activities—classroom performance, research, publication, impact on the field or the community. These should be assessed for the evidence they reveal of intellectual power and originality. Quantitative measures of productivity and popularity are ranked no higher than qualitative judgments. Evaluations of the candidate's record of achievement will be used primarily to judge future promise. Elements of this evaluation shall include the quality and originality of the candidate's contributions to the advancement of knowledge, the candidate's status with respect to the standards of excellence in their area of Education, and the candidate's commitment to, and performance in, teaching and mentoring students. Tenure is not a reward for past services, but a kind of contract—a lifetime of employment in exchange for a lifetime of continued creative output and continued responsibility for stewardship of our scholarly culture.

The Department Chair plays a central role in mentoring their faculty through promotion and tenure. Faculty receive yearly evaluations from the Chair that include specific feedback on whether the faculty members' performance in research, teaching, and engagement are consistent with expectations for promotion and tenure. The Chair might also suggest additional senior faculty members who can act as mentors.

Research

Faculty in the tenure stream are expected to be active researchers throughout their career, making consistent scholarly contributions to the discipline. Research contributions typically take the form of

articles, books, chapters, research grants, fellowships, and conference papers/presentations. Peer reviewed work is valued most in tenure and promotion decisions, as it reflects an external judgement of excellence. Quality, impact, and quantity of research output are all potential indicators of excellence.

All faculty in the tenure stream are expected to publish regularly. Collaborative work is valued, and including students as co-authors is particularly encouraged. However, for assistant professors seeking promotion to associate professor with tenure, it is important to publish first-authored articles, and in highly ranked, core disciplinary journals. Different disciplines lend themselves to different publishing frequency, but a general rule of thumb (although not a guarantee) is that assistant professors should aim to produce at least two peer-reviewed articles per year, in addition to other kinds of research output.

All faculty in the tenure track are expected to actively seek external research funding. Success in obtaining external funding is highly desirable, but not necessary for promotion to associate professor with tenure. Most faculty promoted to full professor with tenure will have a track record of success with external research funding.

When faculty seek promotion, the Department Chair will be responsible for obtaining external letters from experts in the field who are asked to evaluate the excellence and impact of a candidate's scholarship. Thus, as they work towards promotion, faculty should seek their Chair's advice about the specific expectations that external reviewers in their area often have in terms of quality, impact, and quantity, the journals and conferences considered most prestigious, and strategies to obtain external research funding. This advice will be the most specific and helpful for a candidate's case.

Teaching and Mentoring

As a premiere public institution, one of our major responsibilities is the teaching and mentoring of students. All faculty are expected to be committed to excellence in teaching. Evidence of this commitment can include developing new courses and instructional innovations, active and competent mentoring and advising of students, student evaluations of teaching, and peer evaluation of teaching through formal review processes or by working with more experienced mentors.

Service & Engagement

Service is an expectation of tenure-track faculty. Faculty should be active in their discipline, serving as peer-reviewers or editors, participating in and organizing conferences, serving on national committees, etc. Faculty should be engaged with the University and Pitt Education, serving on committees, taking on leadership roles as appropriate, and developing new ways for work in the University to have greater impact in the region, nation, and world. Assistant professors should not be expected to perform large amounts of service beyond their departments, as their top priority pre-tenure is to establish their research and teaching credentials.

All faculty are expected to be engaged scholars, working to improve education and well-being in the world, partnering with educators and communities, involved in policy, developing interventions, developing assessments, conducting evaluations, doing foundational work that allows others to engage more effectively, etc. There is no single set of criteria for judging excellence in engagement. However, the strongest arguments for excellence would be aligned with the mission and vision of Pitt Education and would reflect the cultural drivers detailed in Pitt Education's strategic plan, such as educational

equity and justice; a culture of respect, transparency, and accountability; and innovation and interdisciplinarity. Some faculty will devote considerable effort in cultivating partnerships and community relationships as part of their research and/or teaching activities. This should be considered in establishing achievement expectations for tenure and promotion, as their intellectual contributions and innovation are registered in part through significant societal impact. For some cases, departmental tenure evaluation committees may need to bring in additional expertise and/or calibrate expectations for external references to ensure that a candidate's full breadth of achievements is evaluated.

Process

May. Chair informs Dean's office of candidate's intention to go up for promotion. Before this time, candidates should have discussed their intention to go up for promotion with their Chair and other faculty at rank and should have begun dossier preparation.

June. Chair solicits external letters, due September 1. The candidate, if they choose, can suggest up to six names for external letters. The chair, in consultation with their faculty, develops a list of additional names independent from the candidate's list. A minimum of six external letters is required – with at least three letters from referees who were not on the candidate's list of suggested names. Sometimes we fail to receive letters that are promised, so initially soliciting nine or ten letters is a good idea. The chair should record a potential letter writer's reasons for not accepting the invitation to write for a candidate. Candidate delivers dossier to Chair by June 15. Chair sends dossier to external reviewers. Chair schedules promotion talk for September or early October and informs the candidate and the Dean's office.

September. Chair collects all external letters and puts them into dossier.

October. Following the promotion talk, all full-time department faculty at or above rank meet to discuss evidence from dossier and promotion talk. Tenure stream faculty at or above rank vote by secret ballot. If there are less than five tenure stream faculty at or above rank, the Dean's Office will appoint additional rank-appropriate faculty from other departments in the School of Education. If the department vote is in favor of promotion or tied, chair writes transmittal letter for P&T committee that includes the outcome of the secret ballot and a narrative characterizing the faculty discussion of research, teaching & mentoring, and professional service in turn. The chair's letter should represent the opinion of the faculty and not the chair's singular point of view. In addition to the department letter, if a candidate for promotion has had significant involvement in a multi-disciplinary venture, the appropriate administrator (e.g., center director or head of a different academic unit) should be asked to comment on the case and that letter should be included in the dossier transmitted to the Promotion and Tenure Committee. If the department vote is not in favor of promotion, the chair informs the candidate that the case will not move forward. The candidate can request that P&T review the dossier despite the lack of support at the department level.

November. Promotion and Tenure Committee meets to discuss and vote in a secret ballot. Pitt requires the advice of two levels of review for each consideration of promotion to associate or full professor or for the conferral of tenure. The department vote plus the vote of the Promotion and Tenure committee is how Pitt Education meets this requirement. In this two-tiered system, it is possible that a faculty member would participate in a review at both levels. However, it should be understood that a faculty member has only one vote in any given case.

December. By December 15 the P&T committee sends a letter to the Dean characterizing their discussions of the case and including the outcome of the vote.

January. Dean writes a detailed letter to Provost summarizing an independent opinion on the entire case. Letters are currently due to the Provost by Feb 1 for Associate Professors and March 15 for Full Professors. The cover letter should provide a full account of the case and the role of the candidate within the context of the unit's planning priorities. The letter should provide a balanced explanation of the candidate's scholarly contributions to the field and the impact made on the profession. In addition to providing an interpretation of the letters from external referees, the cover letter should indicate the other types of evidence used to inform the Dean's recommendation. The cover letter should include vote tallies from both the department and P&T votes. The number of actual votes should be noted. Reasons for abstentions at any level should be explained. If there is a minority opinion, the cover letter should address the reasons for the dissent. A representative for the dissenting views might be invited to submit a minority report.

Promotion Dossier

An electronic dossier describing the candidate's qualifications should be developed by the candidate. The department chairperson, the candidate's mentor or a person designated by the chairperson should assist the candidate in preparing the credentials document. The dossier should include the following sections and subsections, in this order:

A. Table of Contents

B. Promotion and Tenure Materials

1. Personal Statement
2. Curriculum Vitae
3. Transmittal Letters (Chair's letter, P&T letter, Dean's letter)
4. External Letter Procedures
5. External Review Letters
6. Yearly review letters from Chair/Dean (added by Dean's office after P&T review)

C. Research

1. Scholarship
2. Funding
3. Impact on Educational Practice

D. Teaching and Mentoring

1. Courses and Seminars
2. Course Evaluations
3. Peer Evaluations of Teaching
4. Advising, Mentoring, and Supervision Committees

E. Professional Service

1. National and international service to the field
2. Regional service to the field
3. University, school, and departmental service
4. Consulting

Promotion and Tenure Materials

1. Personal Statement. Written by the candidate, this statement interprets the candidate's accomplishments in research, teaching and mentoring, and professional service.
2. Curriculum Vitae. The candidate provides a full CV. Student co-authors should be indicated on all publications and presentations by an asterisk. A candidate may wish to add quantitative measures of publication impact on the CV at the beginning of the publication section, but this is not currently required.
3. Transmittal Letters. These are written and inserted into the dossier by the department chair, promotion and tenure committee, and Dean, as each completes their respective step in the procedure.
4. External Letter Procedures. The chair includes information about the academic credentials of each letter writer and whether the referee was suggested by the candidate or by the chair. The chair also provides a full accounting of all persons solicited, those who agreed to provide letters, and letters ultimately obtained. This accounting would include the reasons given for not agreeing to write for the candidate and/or agreeing to write but ultimately not sending a letter.
5. External Review Letters. Referee letters should be sought from well-regarded scholars in similar and/or related fields--without defining the area too narrowly. A broader net allows a larger pool from which referees can be drawn and also encourages opinions on the impact of the candidate's work on a larger body of scholarship. Although some referees may be persons who have had previous professional association with the candidate--such as doctoral supervisor, co-principal investigator, or co-author on a major project--most of the letters should be from scholars who know the candidate primarily because of their knowledge of the candidate's work and its impact on his or her field. Referees should be at or above the promotion rank and from an institution that is as, or more highly, regarded than the University of Pittsburgh. Referees should be asked to make critical judgments about the candidate's work (possibly mentioning specific items) and on its significance and impact. Further, referees should be asked to compare the candidate with others in the field at a comparable stage of development, preferably by having the writer suggest specific named benchmarks. Finally, it is very helpful and revealing to get answers to the questions as to whether the referee believes that the candidate would be promoted (or achieve tenure) at the referee's own institution and whether the referee would support that promotion. All external referee letters received should be included in the dossier, whether favorable or unfavorable. A minimum of six external letters (i.e., external to the University of Pittsburgh) is required with at least three letters from referees who were not on the candidate's list of suggested names.
6. Yearly Review Letters from Chair/Dean. Once the dossier is at the Dean's office, it should be supplemented with copies of all annual review letters that were sent to the candidate. Minimally, these written reviews should consist of a letter to the faculty member which contains statements as to whether or not the faculty member's performance in teaching, research and service meet School of Education expectations. Detailed comments regarding these areas may be included and should be included in cases where performance does not meet expectation in any area.

Research

1. Scholarship. As evidence of research productivity, the candidate should include examples of their published, in press, or submitted work. The candidate's peer-reviewed work should be well represented, but any scholarly work can be included.
2. Funding. The candidate should include examples of grants funded, pending, or submitted but declined.
3. Impact on educational practice. Although impact on education can be established by the CV and personal statement, the candidate can include evidence of efforts to connect research and practice in some area of education, including professional development materials, learning tools, materials, or environments, partnerships with practitioners, writing policy briefs, communicating research to public or practitioner audiences, et al.

Teaching and Mentoring

1. Course Syllabi. The candidate should include three representative examples of syllabi developed or revised in the last several years.
2. Course Evaluations. Student evaluations from at least four courses selected by the candidate must be included (the submission of evaluations from all of the candidate's courses is encouraged but not required).
3. Peer Evaluations of Teaching. For promotion to associate professor, one peer evaluation of teaching must be included
4. Advising, Mentoring, and Supervision Committees. Although evidence of advising and mentoring can be established from the CV and personal statement, the candidate can add additional evidence in this section as appropriate.

Service and Engagement

Although work in these categories can be established from the CV and personal statement, the candidate may wish to include additional information here to help make the case for impact through national and international, regional, or university service and engagement. If the candidate would like evidence from consulting activity to be part of the promotion process, it would go here. The primary consideration in evaluating consulting is the quality of the work, whether it is of such unique character that it helps to build a discipline, and whether it is a substantial public service. Evidence of meeting these criteria from consulting might include evaluation reports, white papers or policy statements, descriptions of learning environments or tools, etc.