

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: When do I have the right to ask to be considered for promotion to full professor?

A: Technically, any time after tenure you think you are ready. Unlike promotion to associate professor, the timing for this review is flexible. Although some understand that the customary practice is to apply for consideration six years post tenure, there is no prescribed schedule. Readiness is key.

Former Provost Michael Malone wrote on this topic in his annual promotion and tenure memo saying that “it is a good practice for DPCs and heads/chairs to informally review all associate professors annually for their readiness for promotion to (full) professor. This review may lead to a decision, in consultation with the candidate, to proceed with the promotion case. If not, it provides an opportunity to mentor the candidate about the path toward promotion.”

To be clear, there is no specified minimum time between tenure and promotion to (full) professor, and the decision to go forward is ultimately the candidate’s. If you’re being dissuaded from submitting your application based on timing and you feel your record deserves promotion, please come to the MSP office for confidential advice about how to move forward successfully.

Q: What are the standards and criteria for this review?

A: Standards and criteria can be found in the Academic Personnel Policy (aka “Redbook”) in Sections 4 and 6, specific language of which is included elsewhere in this packet. Basically, they state that high standards must be the basis for all personnel reviews and that recommendations are to be made only after a full review of the candidate’s contributions in the three areas of teaching, research and service.

The Redbook goes on to say that while all three areas must be considered, the relevant weight to be given to each may be determined in light of the duties of the faculty member. Please read Provost Emeritus McCarthy’s comments on this in the annual memo on tenure and promotion (included in this packet). While it has been the norm on our campus to place the greatest emphasis on research/creative activity, the Redbook does allow more flexibility in assigning weight in light of the duties of the individual. Former Provost Malone joined Provost Emeritus McCarthy in urging faculty to consider a more expansive view of the accomplishments that would qualify an individual for elevation to this rank and the MSP and administration solidified this notion in recently negotiated contract language that states:

“With regard to promotion to full, relative weight given to each area may also be determined in light of the duties of the faculty member when considering if the following criteria have been met:

- a) The faculty member has achieved substantial recognition on and off campus from scholars or professionals in the faculty member’s field and
- b) the candidate has shown significant potential for continued professional achievement.”

Q: When should I have a conversation about coming up for promotion to full professor?

A: The Provost says it's good practice for DPCs and department chairs/heads to informally review all associate professors annually for their readiness for promotion to (full) professor starting in the fourth year after the award of tenure. Not all departments engage in this practice and promotions to full professor have been approved as early as a year or two after the award of tenure so we suggest having conversations with your chair and trusted colleagues on a regular basis after you are tenured to check in on your progress. It's also a good idea to get elected to your PC during a year when you know a promotion to full case will be going forward. This allows you to see first-hand how your department evaluates a candidate for this promotion. Once you feel you are ready to come up, talk to your chair and ask others to look at your CV as well. Should you decide to go forward, you should talk about the process with your chair well in advance of your department's deadline for submitting materials for your external referees to review.

Q: What if I don't get the "green light" from my chair/colleagues but I still feel that I am ready to come up for promotion?

A: Come to MSP and talk with us about this! We have counseled many faculty members on this very topic. The advice you are receiving from your department may in fact be appropriate given your progress but the reality is sometimes a faculty member may not have support for reasons that have nothing to do with whether or not they are ready. It's important to talk with us when you feel this may be the case and to realize that you can move ahead with the review even if your department is urging you to wait.

Q: How is this review different from tenure?

A: The standards are different (see Section 4.6 of the Redbook) and there is no requirement that you show convincing evidence of excellence in at least two, and strength in the third, in the three areas of teaching, research and service. Also, while recommendations are based on contributions in each of the three areas, there's no need for PCs to take a vote on each of them as is the case with tenure reviews. Furthermore, only tenure cases need to go to the Board of Trustees for approval. In promotion to full, the final decision is made on campus and resides with the Provost. Finally, and perhaps most important, this is not an up-or-out review. If you are not successful the first time you come up for promotion to full professor, you can be reviewed again.

Q: Must external letters writers be full professors? Are there requirements about the makeup of letter writers?

A: There is no requirement about the makeup of letter writers. What's important is that you choose individuals whose standing in the field/discipline is such that their assessment of your work will be given weight by the internal reviewers (DPC, Dept. Chair/Head, etc.). While rank is an indicator of the standing of a particular referee, it is not the only one and you may have good reason for choosing an individual at a lower rank or a professional in the field. Other indicators include the reviewer's accomplishments and recognition in the particular discipline or in the department or institution where they are employed. It is important for you to work with your department chair/head to be sure the descriptions

concerning the standing of the external reviewers are clear to those outside the department and so they can understand the weight those individuals should be given in the assessment of your work.

It's also important to mention that there is absolutely no requirement to have international letter writers; this is an urban legend on this campus that in order to be promoted to full professor you must have an international reputation. The standards make clear that this is not the case. If you have done a lot of international work, then you may want to include them in your list but we would want candidates to exercise caution given these reviewers tend to critique work and achievements more stringently than their American counterparts.

Q: What do you do if you receive a recommendation letter that is negative or includes misinformation or items you disagree with?

A: The first thing you do is call MSP (545-2206, mzp@umass.edu). We will be happy to look over any recommendation letter and talk with you about an appropriate response (if warranted). You do have the absolute right to respond to any recommendation letter or decision concerning your review and have it added to your file going forward. APWS builds in 5 days for you to upload a response should you wish to do so. MSP is happy to not only advise about and help construct your response but we can also request that the process be delayed if necessary to allow time for your comments to be added before the next level begins its review.

Q: What other rights do I have with regard to this review?

A: In addition to the rights articulated in Section 5.1 of the Redbook, you also have the right to:

- make the choice whether or not to waive access to internal and/or external letters of evaluation solicited in connection with your review. It's important to note that this waiver applies only to letters directly and individually solicited, and not to letters submitted in response to a general announcement that you are undergoing a personnel review.
- be provided with a copy of the letter to be sent to outside reviewers BEFORE it goes out along with the list of proposed referees in order to have the ability to comment on the appropriateness of both. This is your opportunity to discuss any name you feel is problematic with your department chair and to let them know why you feel the person is not appropriate to be asked to write for you. You do not have veto power regarding the names your chair/head puts on the list but often times, a discussion beforehand can result in the removal of that person from the list before the letter goes out. If the chair insists on soliciting from the problematic referee, be sure to document your objections in written form.
- have access to all materials in your basic file upon request at any point following the DPC recommendation (with the exception of letters you may have waived your right to see).
- see and receive a copy of all materials added to your file when they are added so you have the opportunity to respond to its substance and appropriateness.
- a decision from the Provost within 45 calendar days of receipt or the deadline for receipt (whichever is later) of both the basic file with all relevant recommendation letters and all additional information or clarifications requested.