

To: Deans, Directors, Department Heads and Chairs, Department and School/College Personnel Committee Chairs
From: Fouad Abd-El-Khalick, Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
Date: April 2025
Subject: **Promotion and Tenure Recommendations for Tenure-Stream Faculty**

Faculty make central contributions to the advancement of our mission. The evaluation of faculty contributions in research, scholarly and creative activity, teaching, and outreach and engagement is, therefore, among our most important administrative processes and a significant responsibility that ensures the continued excellence of our institution. This memorandum reinforces the criteria and procedures mandated by the [UMass-MSP Collective Bargaining Agreement \(CBA\)](#) and by the [Board of Trustees' Academic Personnel Policy \(the "Redbook"\)](#) for all recommendations of tenure and promotion. The expectations for tenure and promotion should be transparent to the candidate in the years leading up to the review. Such transparency should be achieved through proactive guidance in Annual Faculty Reviews, the reappointment review (4.2), the Periodic Multi-Year Reviews (PMYR), and through formal and on-going mentorship.

Non-trivial revisions since last year's memo (April 2024) are highlighted in **green**.

Tenure and Promotion processes, dates and deadlines are provided on the Academic Human Resources website and are no longer included in this memorandum.

Standards & Criteria: Tenure and Promotion to Associate Professor

The Redbook notes the special responsibility that the faculty and the university's leadership bear for personnel decisions based on "high professional standards" (Section 4.1) and "clear and convincing evidence," (Section 3.1):

High professional standards must be the basis for all personnel decisions. Personnel recommendations and decisions shall be made only after a review of all the qualifications and all the contributions of the individual in the areas of teaching; of research, creative or professional activity; and of service. All three areas must be considered, but the relative weight to be given to each may be determined in light of the duties of the faculty member. [Section 4.1]

The faculty has the obligation to present a clear, complete and convincing case for the recommendation so as to assure the faculty member of a complete presentation of his or

her qualifications and achievements, and so as to provide the basis both for full reviews of the recommendation, and for the decision. [Section 3.1]

In applying these standards to the criteria for tenure, the Redbook describes in broad terms the importance of excellence:

The award of tenure can be made only by the President with the concurrence of the Board of Trustees. Consideration of a candidate for tenure shall be based on the following:

- 1. Convincing evidence of excellence in at least two, and strength in the third, of the areas of teaching; of research, creative or professional activity; and of service, such as to demonstrate the possession of qualities appropriate to a member of the faculty occupying a permanent position.*
- 2. Reasonable assurance of continuing development and achievement leading to further contributions to the University. [Section 4.9]*

Most tenure cases also involve an assessment of suitability for promotion to Associate Professor. In these cases, Section 4.6(a) also applies and should be addressed at each level of review:

For promotion to Associate Professor, the faculty member must have a record of achievement sufficient to have gained recognition on and off campus among scholars or professionals in his or her field; and must show promise of continuing professional development and achievement.

The “continuing development and achievement” criterion is often overlooked in the presentation of tenure cases. It is important to consider it and address it at each level of review (e.g., by discussing evidence of work in progress).

The Redbook also requires that positive tenure recommendations relate the proposed award of tenure to the academic and strategic plans of the department, college, campus, and university and to the department’s affirmative action goals.

Standards & Criteria: Promotion to Professor

The standards for promotions are further defined in Section 4.6 (b). In their evaluations, reviewers at all levels should explicitly cite these standards and criteria, and articulate whether and how the candidate’s record conforms to them:

For promotion to Professor, the faculty member must have a record of achievement sufficient to have gained substantial recognition on and off campus from scholars or professionals in his or her field; and must show significant potential for continuing professional achievement.

Three Areas of Evaluation

The Redbook outlines three domains in which candidates for tenure and promotion must be assessed. In each domain, the assessment should refer directly to the evidence in the dossier and “high professional standards” to justify its conclusion.

For the award of tenure, the candidate must demonstrate excellence in two of these domains and, at least, strength in the third. For promotion to (full) Professor, assessment in all three domains is required, but there is no mandate to reach a conclusion about whether each domain is excellent, strong, or not strong. In drawing these conclusions, I strongly encourage evaluations at all levels to take an inclusive view of the activities contributed by the candidate, moving beyond traditional measures to include modern reflections of these domains that also contribute to excellence and the advancement of our mission. UMass-Amherst recognizes the value of scholarship, teaching, and outreach activities that have public and societal impacts. The work of our faculty in tackling real-world problems in partnership with external stakeholders should be valued and credited in personnel actions. To that end, this memorandum includes discussions within each section on research and creative activity, teaching, and service about how to recognize public impact contributions.

Rigorous evaluations require an integration of the evidence presented in the dossier, and it is not uncommon for individuals to emphasize different aspects of the dossier in their evaluations. For this reason, it is crucial to communicate the basis of evaluation transparently and clearly in the memoranda prepared at each level of review; a simple listing of activities and a vote provide little guidance to the subsequent levels of review, especially where different conclusions are reached.

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted the inclusion of Impact Statements in the Annual Faculty Review process where faculty members may describe disruptions to their research/creative and professional activity, teaching, and service due to external factors beyond the control of the faculty member. At the faculty member's discretion, these statements, or a summary of them, may be included as a separate addendum to the faculty member's personal statement. The faculty member should indicate whether any Impact Statement(s) should be shared with external evaluators or be for internal use only. Internal evaluators (DPC, chair/head, CPC, and Dean) should assess the faculty member's work in light of any COVID-19 or similar broad-scale impacts reported in the dossier and are strongly encouraged to explicitly and transparently explain this context in their memoranda to inform subsequent levels of review. For example, this academic year, the Impact Statement could be used by faculty to describe impacts on their research activities due to federal actions regarding sponsored research that have transpired during the Spring 2025 semester – such as interruptions and rescissions of funds for current federal grants – and continue to unfold as we disseminate this memorandum.

Research/Creative/Professional Activity

The assessment of a tenure candidate's accomplishments in research/creative/professional activity should consider whether the candidate demonstrates high professional standards. These standards vary across disciplines. The judgment of disciplinary specialists at the department level is crucial in fleshing out these standards; so too are the views of college-level personnel committees and deans. The reference letters are also very important in this regard. It is essential, then, not only to review a candidate's accomplishments, but to contextualize them in ways that enable subsequent levels of review to understand the criteria that are most important in the specific field of study.

A Note on “Cultural Standards”: Recognizing the breadth of promotion and tenure standards articulated by the CBA and the Redbook, some departments have developed documents that express the “cultural standards” of their disciplines. These documents are valuable expressions of the expectations of professional communities, but they must not be used to formally evaluate a candidate’s research, teaching, and service since they have not been bargained with the MSP. Accordingly, departmental reviewers must not rely on or refer to such documents in making their recommendations, and department chairs/heads must not send these documents to external reviewers.

Pandemic Impacts: During the COVID-19 pandemic period beginning in March 2020, any scholarly disruptions and decreased productivity, particularly when inconsistent with the prior or subsequent record, should not be interpreted as meaningful. Likewise, changes in areas of emphasis may have occurred as an adaptation to the pandemic and should not be viewed as problematic. In addition, scheduled conference presentations, invited talks, performances, and exhibitions that were cancelled should be weighed as if they had occurred. Virtual performances and exhibitions, along with presentations at virtual conferences and seminars, should be weighed as if they were face-to-face. In fields, such as Engineering, where doctoral completions are evaluated in tenure cases, allowance should be made for the pandemic’s effects on doctoral students’ progress toward their degrees.

Because the pandemic’s impacts have fallen more severely on certain faculty (e.g., women, persons of color, parents), internal evaluators should avoid implicit or explicit comparisons with faculty members whose personal circumstances allowed their productivity to remain undiminished during the pandemic and to cases that were successful prior to the pandemic.

Public Impact Scholarship: Faculty research and creative activities that advance the university’s mission with respect to public impact should be credited for related accomplishments. Public Impact Research and Creative Activity (PIRCA) is inclusive across the spectrum of fundamental/basic, translational/applied, community engaged/participatory, knowledge/technological transfer, extramural/extension research, and creative activity. PIRCA creditable toward tenure and promotion should be intellectual work whose significance is validated by peers and effectively communicated. In its diverse forms, PIRCA is based on a high level of professional expertise, gives evidence of originality, is documented and validated by peers, has demonstrable usage or benefit to society and/or the discipline (including future impact as appropriate). Dissemination of impactful research beyond the typical venues of peer-reviewed publications should be credited. These include:

- Increasing the public’s understanding of complex topics and the public impacts of research discoveries (e.g., research-based public presentations and workshops, op-eds, exhibitions, performances).
- Increasing the transparency, rigor, and reusability of research (e.g., shared research data); ensuring research results and creative products are made available as soon as possible (open access venues, working paper series).

- Bringing research innovations and creative products into public use (e.g., patents, copyrights, use and licensing agreements, commercialization).

Promotion to Associate Professor or Professor requires “recognition on and off campus from scholars or professionals in his or her field;” for promotion to Professor, this recognition must be “substantial.” The reference letters are, of course, an important component of the evidence for assessing whether this recognition has been achieved. Other sources of evidence may include reviews of books by the candidate, awards, citations of published work, publications in high-ranking journals or with well-regarded presses, fellowships, grants, and so on. Special attention should be given to assessing the unique contributions of the candidate to collaborative works, including the candidate’s statements, letters from collaborators, etc. As in the assessment of research/creative/professional activity, the departmental and college levels of review should contextualize the assessment of “recognition on and off campus.”

External Letters: Letters from respected scholars, scientists, or other professionals are essential to the assessment of candidates for tenure and/or promotion. Letters that provide mere summaries of the record are significantly less useful than those that provide and explain the reviewer’s assessment of the candidate’s work. Therefore, in soliciting letters, department chairs/heads should draw attention to the evaluative nature of the review so that reviewers understand what the University is asking of them. The Provost’s Office Academic Personnel website offers [two templates for soliciting external reviews](#). (Please use the most recent versions, which incorporate language on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.)

The Redbook’s Section 6.4 requires that the file contain descriptions of the “standing” of external reviewers so that internal reviewers, particularly those outside the department, can understand the weight that should be accorded to their assessment. Indicators of standing include the reviewer’s rank, the reviewer’s accomplishments and recognition in the discipline, and the stature of the department or institution at which the reviewer is employed. A reviewer’s positive assessment is more compelling if the reviewer is at arm’s length from the candidate. An arm’s-length reviewer is one who is not the candidate’s personal friend, doctoral or post-doctoral advisor, or recent collaborator. (Recent collaboration on work that involves a large number of collaborators, such as happens in some branches of physics or astronomy, does not necessarily place a reviewer at less than arm’s length; the candidate’s and the reviewer’s specific contributions to the collaboration are relevant to the determination.)

Departments sometimes ask whether it is permissible to depart from the template solicitation letter provided in APWS. *We strongly recommend use of the template letter for consistency across the campus and to ensure compliance with the Redbook, the CBA, and agreements with the MSP about advising reviewers on the effects of the pandemic.* Moreover, the candidate has the right to review the solicitation letter and comment as to its “appropriateness.” The CBA provides in Article 12.4.4 that “Prior to the solicitation, the candidate shall be provided with a copy of the solicitation letter and the list of the proposed referees and shall be given an opportunity to comment on the appropriateness of both.” The template solicitation letter has been vetted and is, therefore, presumptively appropriate.

Solicitation letters for tenure or promotion of faculty who started work during or before Spring 2020 should remind external reviewers of the disruption that the campus experienced beginning on March 13, 2020, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the automatic one-year delay in the tenure decision year granted to pre-tenure faculty. The template solicitation letter to external reviewers cautions them against regarding approved TDY delays as “extra” time from which greater productivity can be expected. The same caution applies to internal reviewers.

Neither the Redbook nor the CBA specifies a particular number of letters that must be collected. If the number of letters from high-standing, arm’s-length reviewers is small, however, it may be harder to make the case for a specific assessment of the candidate’s work. This is particularly true when one of a small number of letters disagrees with the others, or if a letter is too cursory to be persuasive. Departments have been asked to establish an external-letter minimum in their by-laws. Many of the departments have done so. If they have not, the number of external letters to be solicited is ultimately determined by the Chair/Head in consultation with the candidate, guided by disciplinary and school/college expectations. Continuing the current practice, six arm’s-length letters are generally sufficient for a rigorous evaluation. A larger number of letters rarely adds new information to a case and is an unnecessary burden on external colleagues.

The campus currently has a subscription to Academic Analytics, a compiler of data on faculty research activity. While useful for identifying opportunities in comparison with peer institutions, this tool does not provide comprehensive information at the level of the individual and should not be used by internal evaluators (DPC, head/chair, SPC/CPC, Dean, Provost/Chancellor) in academic personnel actions.

Teaching

In considering whether a candidate has met the Redbook’s high professional standards for teaching, faculty should be considered within the totality of their contributions to the instructional mission. This is in accordance with the CBA, which specifies that the basic file contain “evaluations of teaching effectiveness, including **but not limited** to those of students.”

Achieving such a comprehensive assessment typically involves multiple sources of evidence, not just the student perspective, including:

- Evidence of teaching effectiveness not only in the formal classroom setting but also in less formal student interactions.
- Commentary on the range of courses taught, the development and/or renewal of courses, and their importance to the curriculum. This perspective may include not only the departmental level but also the school/college level (for interdepartmental requirements) and the campus level (for general education requirements).
- Evaluation of the currency of course content as revealed in course syllabi.
- Evaluations from students, including SRTI and Forward Focus scores, SRTI and Forward Focus open-ended comments, and letters.
- Evaluations from peers, including observations of the candidate’s teaching; evaluations of the effectiveness of pedagogical innovations or improvements.

Beyond the classroom, reviewers should include assessments of the candidate's role, if any, in such areas as:

- Academic advising (unless this falls in the service category).
- Creation of open educational resources.
- Mentoring undergraduates and directing undergraduate research, including honors theses.
- Activity in graduate education beyond the classroom, including advising doctoral or master's students, chairing or serving as a member of dissertation or thesis committees, mentoring, etc.
- The largely invisible but crucially important teaching and service work of mentoring women students, students from first-gen or low-income backgrounds, students of color, and international students. This work is often undertaken by faculty who share one or more of these identities with the students they are mentoring. These contributions are frequently invisible because the faculty member may have no official connection with the students being mentored.
- Supervision of students engaged in independent study.
- Service learning and other forms of community engagement.
- The development of curricular materials, including those intended for alternative formats, such as FLEX learning.
- Innovative instructional efforts, such as creation or adaptation of courses for TBL classrooms or introduction of instructional technology. Introducing novel teaching methods may lead to a decline in student evaluations. Faculty members should not be penalized for adopting innovative pedagogy that may lead to superior learning outcomes.
- Curricular revision to better align curricula with departmental, school/college, and campus priorities.
- Contributions to maintaining educational continuity for our undergraduate and graduate students during the period of remote learning beginning in Spring 2020. Faculty success in moving courses online, developing substitutes for class labs and studios, maintaining student engagement, and providing students with a human connection to our institution should be acknowledged. Because SRTIs were not administered in Spring or Fall of 2020, reviewers should rely more heavily on faculty self-reporting of teaching accomplishments. Faculty are encouraged to be explicit about their efforts and include any evidence of successes in the realm of teaching.

Because the contributions of faculty to education beyond the classroom are sometimes unofficial, particularly in the area of graduate education, department-level reviewers should take note of any contributions that might not otherwise be apparent from the written record. Contributions to a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive educational experience should be noted in the assessment of teaching and may also be relevant to the assessment of service. Further, teaching activities with Public Impact should be credited. These may happen through facilitating internships and service-learning experiences, workshops and experiential learning in the community, and with partner associations. Examples include:

- Developing collaborative approaches with students and community partners in solving complex world problems.
- Developing and/or advising experiential learning opportunities, including facilitating internship and study abroad opportunities for students.
- Support and instruction of students in commercialization of innovative technologies and activities.
- Creating service-learning curricula with community partners.
- Providing educational and/or mentoring programs, volunteering and extension activities.

Assessment of teaching based solely on numerical student evaluation scores (SRTI and/or Forward Focus) is not permitted by the Academic Personnel Policy and the MSP labor agreement. The Office of Academic Planning and Assessment (OAPA), administers the SRTI. SRTI resources can be found [here](#); questions about the interpretation of SRTI can be directed to Associate Provost Elizabeth (Liz) Williams: williams@acad.umass.edu

Forward Focus resources can be found [here](#). Student evaluations were not administered during the Spring and Fall 2020 semesters because of the shift to remote learning. Departments were permitted to administer either SRTI or Forward Focus for the Spring 2021 semester by agreement with the MSP. Spring 2021 student evaluations, however, should not be compared to past or future student evaluations in assessing teaching effectiveness. The SRTI/Forward Focus choice has since continued.

Although not required, a teaching portfolio may be a useful way to connect teaching activity with the candidate's personal statement.

Service

The Redbook's "high professional standard" for service may mean different things at different levels of seniority. For assistant professors, service on editorial boards or in national or international scholarly societies not only contributes to the field but helps to forge professional relationships and establish a professional profile beyond the University. Service contributions within the department or university, while still important, might well be fewer than those of more senior colleagues. Senior faculty might engage in a balance of professional and local service activities, taking on more advanced leadership roles on the campus. This aspect of the dossier is particularly prone to differing opinions and care should be taken to transparently contextualize expectations specific to the discipline. Of note is the contribution that faculty make by mentoring their colleagues. Like the mentoring of students described in the teaching section above, this service activity may be invisible, and it may contribute significantly to a campus climate of diversity, equity, and inclusion. This work can fall more heavily on faculty of color and women, and I strongly encourage all levels of review to be aware of and to elevate this important work as crucial contributions to our mission through our promotion and tenure processes.

Certain types of service receive special mention in the CBA and the Redbook. For example, the CBA requires that service to the faculty union be considered, and the Redbook requires that service outside the department be considered at the department level. Service may include

contributions to governance or management (of the department, college/school, Faculty Senate, university, or profession); outreach to extend knowledge beyond the university or professional community; and community engagement that benefits both the university and off-campus communities. Some faculty members have special service obligations recorded in a Memorandum of Understanding at the time of appointment; these should be recognized and assessed in accordance with the terms of the MOU. Consideration should be given to service and engagement activities with public impact. Examples of these include:

- Engaged consulting and advisory work, such as serving as an advisory board member, expert witness, research advisor, or community board member representing one's scholarly expertise.
- Promoting a culture of innovation and entrepreneurialism at the university, within or across disciplines, and/or with community partners.

Many usual forms of service were difficult or impossible to carry out during the COVID-19 pandemic; committees did not meet, and many conferences and professional events were canceled. At the same time, some faculty made extraordinary contributions to service, and their efforts should be recognized.

Continuing Professional Development

The Redbook's tenure standard requires "reasonable assurance of continuing development and achievement leading to further contributions to the University." The promotion standards require "promise of continuing professional development and achievement" (Associate Professor) or "significant potential for continuing professional achievement" (Professor). These mandated assessments should not be overlooked at the departmental and college levels of review. Generally, evidence of potential consists of work in progress or under submission, which the dossier might include in the vita or the candidate's personal statement, as well as assessments by external reviewers. For works that are in development, evidence, such as grant summary statements, reviews from the academic press, etc., on potential impact should be prioritized.

Special Considerations for Promotion to Professor

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. In any case, it should never be necessary for a faculty member who is ready for promotion to have to request it. Notwithstanding the results of this informal review, any associate professor has the right to be reviewed for promotion to full at their discretion. There is no specified minimum time between tenure and promotion to professor, and the decision to seek promotion should be based solely on the merits of the case. Dissuading candidates on the basis of time or making reference to an "early" review should be avoided.

Over the course of one's career, areas of emphasis are likely to change although the expectation of continued and robust contributions to the advancement of our mission remains. Consistent with this reality, Provost McCarthy articulated a more expansive view of the requirements for promotion to professor in his December 20, 2018 memo:

I am writing to share some thoughts on the criteria for promotion to (full) professor. I ask you to consider a somewhat more expansive view of the accomplishments that would qualify an individual for elevation to this rank.

Candidates for promotion to professor are required to demonstrate “a record of achievement sufficient to have gained substantial recognition on and off campus from scholars or professionals” and “significant potential for continuing professional achievement” (Redbook). They are evaluated in all three areas of research/creative activity, teaching, and service. Generally, personnel committees and the administrative levels of review have placed the greatest emphasis on the first of these areas. At an R1 university like ours, it is appropriate to focus on accomplishments in research/creative activity in assessing the records of candidates for promotion to our highest academic rank.

While an exceptional record of accomplishments in research/creative activity is and should be the norm for promotion to professor on our campus, the Redbook language is somewhat more flexible:

Article 4, Section 4.1 High professional standards must be the basis for all personnel decisions. Personnel recommendations and decisions shall be made only after a review of all of the qualifications and all the contributions of the individual in the areas of teaching; of research; creative or professional activity; and of service. All three areas must be considered, but the relative weight to be given to each may be determined in the light of the duties of the faculty member.

As we all know, the Redbook language on tenure is much more specific, requiring demonstrated excellence in at least two of the three areas, and at least strength in the third. But the notion of “relative weight ... determined in the light of the duties of the faculty member” is potentially applicable to promotion to professor.

Consider the case of a faculty member who has maintained a modest level of activity in research/creative activity but has excelled in teaching or service. This individual may be making significant contributions to the scholarship of teaching and learning in the discipline or obtaining significant external funding to support teaching or diversity initiatives, or creating and launching new degree programs, or exercising major leadership at the department, school/college, or campus level in an administrative, MSP, or Senate role. In assessing these contributions, we should apply the same criteria as we do with faculty whose research records are the primary justification for promotion: it must be of a quality and extent “sufficient to have gained substantial recognition on and off campus from scholars or professionals,” and it must be sustained over a long period sufficient to demonstrate “significant potential for continuing professional

achievement”. It seems to me that the Redbook’s flexibility in assigning weight allows for these possibilities.

I concur fully with this expanded view of the evaluation criteria for promotion to Professor and strongly encourage candidates and departments to bring such cases forward. Questions on the assembly and presentation of such dossiers can be directed to Senior Vice Provost Michelle Budig: budig@umass.edu

Evaluators’ Duty to Mitigate Unconscious Bias

We recommend that all UMass Amherst personnel committee members, chairs/heads, and deans who review personnel files for tenure and promotion take the [STRIPE workshop](#) to increase awareness of and actions to mitigate unconscious bias in faculty evaluation. Questions about the STRIPE (*Strategies and Tactics for Retention through Inclusive Program Evaluation*) training can be directed to Senior Vice Provost Wilmore Webley: wilmore@umass.edu.

If you have questions about the procedural aspects of the promotion and tenure process, please contact Associate Provost Michael Eagen at meagen@umass.edu or (413) 545-6221.

The University of Massachusetts—from the campus to the Trustees—has expressed its commitment to high-quality scholarship, teaching, and service. Chancellor Reyes and I welcome your comments on ways in which we can improve the process, and we thank you in advance for all of your hard work while executing this critical responsibility. The thoughtful evaluations you provide strengthen the university for many decades to come.

cc: College Personnel Officers
Faculty Members
Michael Eagen, Associate Provost for Academic Human Resources
Jocelyn Tedisky, Assistant Provost & Senior Director of Academic Human Resources