

May 2, 2016

TO: Deans and Department Heads

FROM: Thanassis Rikakis
Executive Vice President and Provost

SUBJECT: Annual Follow-Up on Promotion and Tenure 2015-16



The University Promotion and Tenure Committee reviewed 57 faculty for promotion this spring. For associate professor with tenure, 21 of 23 candidates were recommended for promotion. For tenure at the currently held rank, two candidates were recommended for tenure. And for promotion to professor, 30 of 32 candidates were recommended. Thus, 53 candidates will be recommended for approval at the June 6th meeting of the Board of Visitors.

The university committee discussed a range of issues at this year's meetings. The success of the promotion and tenure process is directly related to the meticulous work of the department committees, department heads, college committees, and deans in preparing the dossiers and writing the letters of support. The success of our promotion process is due to the commitment of the faculty members who serve in these important roles. I would like to thank everyone for their contributions to another year of very successful reviews.

The dossier guidelines will include some changes for the coming year, including the expectation that the executive summary will include tables that summarize the faculty member's accomplishments. This memo summarizes the discussion and recommendations that emerged from the university committee's meetings.

Contributions and Comparative Evaluation

Each dossier should provide an assessment of the contributions and quality of the candidate's research and scholarship. In the candidate's statement, the faculty member should provide the context for her/his work in the specific areas of scholarship and how her/his contributions are evaluated nationally. The department head and the department committee are also encouraged to provide further context for the candidate's scholarly productivity and impact. These letters should consider how to place the candidate's contributions in the context of major contributors at similar rank and years in the field of scholarship.

As part of their 2nd and 4th year pre-tenure reviews, candidates should be encouraged to develop a narrative about their scholarship goals with special emphasis on the place of their research and creative activity. Although this narrative may change across time, creating the context for their work can assist candidates in understanding how to continue to develop professionally in a national and international

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context in preparation for promotion and tenure. The department chair, the mentor(s), and the department committee should engage in discussions with assistant professors across the probationary period to encourage professional growth and development of the candidate's scholarly work.

There are many quantitative and qualitative indicators for external recognition of candidate's research and scholarship and these may include, but are not limited to the following:

- For peer-reviewed journal articles, what are impact factors (e.g., H-index or I-index, journal ranking) that reflect the excellence of the work?
- For performances, what are indicators of the prestige of venues?
- For books, what is the scholarly quality of the publisher?
- For all research and scholarship, what are the indicators of excellence that are highlighted in the external reviewers' letters?

Other indicators of the perception of candidates and their work include serving on proposal review panels for funding agencies, serving on editorial boards for journals, giving keynote/plenary presentations at conferences, and receiving national or international awards. Many individualized impacts can be highlighted and it is important for the candidate, the department committee, and the department head to provide the best presentation of the influence and impact of the candidate's scholarly contributions.

External Reviewers

External reviewers play a very important role in the evaluation of faculty members' research and scholarship, the influence and impact of their work, and their national reputation. The selection of external reviewers is therefore critical. At least three reviewers should be selected by the department head or department promotion committee. In a parallel process, the candidate should be invited to submit a list of potential external reviewers. Once the department's list is generated, then the department head and/or committee chair can reconcile the two independent lists and select the appropriate number of reviewers to be invited.

Generating the department's list independently from the candidate's list avoids the appearance of any conflict of interest associated with the candidate's suggested reviewers. The promotion guidelines indicate how to list who selected the reviewers and, as long as the two lists are generated independently, the overlap of department and candidate suggestions does not present a problem. If a candidate and the committee choose the same external reviewers, please be sure to indicate that in the table. If the candidate does not make a recommendation about external reviewers, the dossier should include a statement about this choice.

Please be sure that external reviewers are from peer institutions and/or peer departments and that the dossier provides biographical information for the reviewer and the basis for serving as an external reviewer. Please avoid external reviewers who have collaborative relationships with the candidate or who were involved in the candidate's graduate or postdoctoral education. When possible, please avoid

selecting external reviewers from the candidate's Ph.D. granting institution or from universities at which the faculty member had a prior faculty position.

Departments often report difficulty in securing external reviewers for promotion evaluations. Please consider extending invitations before the end of spring semester and use personal contacts (e.g., phone calls) to invite reviewers.

Please follow the guidelines for inviting external reviewers and use the standard language provided in the guidelines regarding tenure clock extensions. The guidelines are posted at: (http://www.provost.vt.edu/promotion_tenure/external_review_request_guidelines.pdf).

External reviewers may also be invited to comment on their views of the candidate's scholarly contributions and how the candidate's contributions compare with peers working in similar areas at similar ranks and years.

Committee Letters

It is important that the letters from the department and college committees reflect the major points of discussion that occurred during the deliberations. All committee members should have an opportunity to review the letter before it is finalized and included in the dossier. In cases with a split vote, it is also important for department and college letters to address the differing opinions of members who support the promotion and members who do not. The next level of review will benefit from understanding any disagreement reflected in a split vote. Committee letters should make the case for the majority vote, but should also explain the basis for one or more dissenting opinions. A minority letter is not usually necessary; the differing opinions can be reflected in one letter. A minority letter is most useful when the committee vote does not reflect a clear majority opinion or when there is a tie vote.

When there are negative votes (even one negative vote), it is important for committees to summarize reasons for the negative votes. The voting process should be administered so that anyone casting a negative vote is required to list reasons for such vote. These negative votes are often in the minority and committee letters tend to focus on the majority opinion. Please use a balloting method (e.g., electronic survey) that requires any committee member to anonymously provide the reasons for a negative vote. These reasons can then be summarized in the committee's letter. In addition, please make sure to explain any ineligible and abstention votes.

Department Head's Letter

The department head's letter should address the expectations for the candidate's promotion. Because responsibilities can vary widely across departments and disciplines, it is important for the department head to comment on the expectations for teaching, research and scholarship, and service and outreach and how those expectations relate to expectations in peer departments. For example, provide the context for the faculty member's teaching accomplishments compared to others in the department.

Provide the expectations for external funding (e.g., grants and contracts), mentoring graduate students (e.g., masters vs. doctoral), publications and the role that funding plays for the faculty member's research and scholarship in your unit and in peer units nationally. A focus on enhancing collaborative grant-funded research will be a future expectation consistent with the destination areas, and also applies to other interdisciplinary work. Provide the context for service and outreach expectations, which will vary across departments, disciplines, and ranks.

Moving Forward

Virginia Tech is engaged in a visioning process to define what it means to be a global land grant university of the 21st century with a special emphasis on retention and recruitment of talent in a globally competitive landscape. This visioning will require discussion of faculty expectations in the context of placing Virginia Tech among great research universities nationally and internationally. We must clarify the expectations for national recognition of research and scholarship for promotion and tenure and national and international leadership for promotion to professor and to update our descriptions of our faculty ranks.

In closing, please accept my appreciation for the care and importance that is placed on the promotion and tenure process by our departments, colleges, and the university committee. We have a system that has been working well and we strive to improve it each year. Let me add my congratulations to the faculty who were recommended for promotion and/or tenure this year. You are contributing to the learning, discovery, and engagement missions of Virginia Tech and we are pleased to have all of you as members of our community of scholars.

cc: University Promotion and Tenure Committee