

TENURE AND PROMOTION GUIDELINES:

General Guidelines for Conducting Tenure and Promotion Evaluations

College of Education and Human Development
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This document provides an overview of the guidelines used to evaluate candidates seeking tenure (i.e., tenure-track faculty) or promotion in rank (whether in a term or tenure-line position).

NOTE: For brevity, the phrase “Tenure and Promotion Guidelines” is used for each of the 6 documents organized under this general heading. However, many of the guidelines and explanations in these documents are also relevant to tenure-track faculty seeking renewal of their initial 3-year tenure-track contract, as well as cases in which term faculty are seeking to renew (or establish) a multi-year term faculty contract (whether in conjunction with a promotion review or seeking contract renewal at the same academic rank).

How Tenure, Promotion, and Contract Renewal Evaluations Differ from Annual Evaluations

The primary purpose of the annual evaluation process is to provide ongoing feedback to support continuous improvements in faculty performance as it relates to the University’s mission (with a primary focus on teaching, research and scholarship, and service, including faculty leadership roles related to each of these areas of performance). Annual evaluation results also provide a primary (though not the only) basis for salary increase recommendations when such increases are authorized.

Although tenure, promotion, and multi-year contract renewal evaluations also focus on teaching, research and scholarship, and service, the primary purpose of these evaluations is contractual (i.e., should the faculty member’s employment contract be extended in time for a specified term—or without term—and/or escalated to a higher academic rank).

Consistent with these different purposes, the relevant evidence for the annual evaluation process, and for multi-year contract renewal evaluations, includes activities and accomplishments for a specified evaluation time period. However, for tenure and promotion evaluations, actual accomplishments are the primary evidence of interest. As stated in the *Faculty Handbook*, “While tenure-track appointments will, to some extent, recognize perceived potential rather than achievement, appointment without term or promotion in rank will be based on achievement rather than potential.”

College-Level Criteria and Procedures Related to Tenure and Promotion Can Supplement and Clarify University-Level Criteria and Procedures, but They Cannot Substantively Alter or Negate Those Criteria and Procedures

Each full-time instructional faculty member’s employment contract invokes and requires compliance with the statements in the *Faculty Handbook*, including several sections specifically focused on criteria

and procedures for conducting tenure, promotion, and contract renewal evaluations. Consequently, nothing in the series of 6 documents detailing Tenure and Promotion Guidelines for faculty appointed within the College of Education and Human Development should be construed as replacing, nullifying, or otherwise circumventing the guidelines spelled out in the *Faculty Handbook*.

Peer Faculty Within the College, with Input and Guidance from Peer Faculty Serving as External Reviewers, Have Primary Responsibility for Operationalizing the Concepts of “Genuine Excellence” and “High Competence”

The Mason *Faculty Handbook* provides faculty with the high-level concepts of “genuine excellence” and “high competence” to guide their tenure and promotion recommendations. Specifically:

Candidates for renewal, promotion and tenure will be evaluated in light of the missions of the University which are teaching; research and scholarship, both theoretical and applied; and service... Peer review plays a central role in the evaluation of individual achievement in each of these areas. Although candidates are not expected to have equal levels of commitment or equal responsibilities in each of these areas, high competence is expected. Genuine excellence must be exhibited either in teaching or in research/scholarship. High competence must be exhibited in both areas. The primary consideration in the evaluation of the candidate’s achievements will be the extent to which these continue to improve the academic quality of the University.

The concepts of genuine excellence and high competence are necessarily abstract because they must be applied to faculty working across a wide array of disciplines and sub-disciplines. However, these concepts provide an effective and flexible method for maintaining high standards over time and across many different circumstances. The key to ensuring that these essential criteria are appropriately and equitably applied is to ensure that concepts and methods for operationalizing these criteria at the level of a local academic unit, and within the context of a particular discipline, are clearly communicated and frequently discussed by peer faculty and relevant administrators. In a university that continues to grow with regard to its aspirations, expectations, and stature, the operational definition of these concepts must be continuously reviewed and recalibrated to ensure their reliability (i.e., all of the evaluators are on “the same page”) and validity (i.e., the outcome aligns with the *Faculty Handbook’s* “primary consideration” that the candidate’s achievements must continue to improve the academic quality of the University).

Because the operational meaning of (i.e., evidence required to document) genuine excellence and high competence is dynamic and multifaceted, faculty and administrators should resist the temptation to try to quantify the teaching, research and scholarship, and service accomplishments that equate to “genuine excellence” or “high competence” in artificially precise terms. Teaching excellence can be manifested in many different ways depending on the person, context, and discipline. Extraordinary accomplishments in research and scholarship can take many forms, both within and across disciplines and academic units. Exceptional service may similarly stand out on dimensions that are more qualitative than quantitative (e.g., breadth or magnitude of impact, timeliness or uniqueness of a particular contribution, reputational consequences for the individual and Mason). This *equifinality* principle (i.e., the same end state can be reached through many different means) is at the core of what it means to celebrate (rather than punish) diversity and innovation in faculty accomplishments.

Consistent with this principle, George Mason University and the College of Education and Human Development are committed to actively promoting and encouraging multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary research and education. In the context of tenure and promotion decisions, this means that multidisciplinary/transdisciplinary accomplishments should be regarded as an amplifier (“plus factor”) rather than as a vulnerability when faculty and administrators are assessing the appropriateness and value of a faculty member’s contributions. This is a particularly important principle to make explicit in written and verbal communications about tenure and promotion as the structure of the review process tends to encourage evaluators to think in terms of traditional discipline-based concepts and images of success.

The Criteria Guiding Contractual Decisions about Tenure and Promotion Must Appropriately Vary Based on Academic Rank and the Length of the Contract

Consistent with this principle, and based primarily on the contractual statements in the *Mason Faculty Handbook*, CEHD has the following expectations with respect to tenure and promotion decisions:

Term Faculty Promotion in Rank from Assistant to Associate Professor: High Competence in the candidate’s focus area (teaching or research) is required, as is High Competence in service.

Term Faculty Promotion in Rank from Associate to Full Professor: Genuine Excellence in the candidate’s focus area (teaching or research) is required, as is High Competence in service.

Tenure and Promotion from the Assistant to Associate Rank (or Tenure within the Associate Rank): Genuine Excellence is required in teaching or research, with at least High Competence in each of the other areas.

Promotion to Full Professor for Tenured Faculty: The *Faculty Handbook* states that “evidence of significant impact beyond the boundaries of the University must be much more substantial than in cases involving tenure or promotion to the rank of associate professor” [with impact beyond the boundaries of the University being the *sine qua non* of the Genuine Excellence concept]. In that spirit, full professors are expected to manifest either:

1. Substantially greater breadth with respect to Genuine Excellence than would be required for promotion to the associate rank (i.e., Genuine Excellence in at least 2 of the 3 areas of evaluation, with at least High Competence in the remaining area), *or*
2. Substantially greater depth with respect to Genuine Excellence than would be required for promotion to the associate rank (i.e., Genuine Excellence in research or teaching at a level that is far beyond the threshold required for this designation, with at least High Competence in the remaining areas).

Another way in which the criteria guiding tenure and promotion decisions must appropriately vary based on academic rank relates to the concept of *leadership*. This is a “meta-criterion” cutting across all three areas of faculty work that is particularly relevant to decisions regarding the appropriateness of promoting a faculty member (whether in a term or tenured position) from the associate rank to the full professor rank. For example, whereas promotion to the associate rank might focus on evidence

regarding whether one is teaching courses well and having an impact on students, full professor evaluations might also be attuned to evidence that the faculty member is playing a leadership role in program development, in facilitating the program's resource base and reputational strength, and in mentoring the next generation of faculty leaders. Similarly, whereas tenure-track faculty might earn promotion by publishing with increasing frequency in well-regarded venues, full professor candidates would be expected to have widely cited signature scholarly products and already established recognition for their research contributions that demonstrate their leadership role in the field.

Tenure and Promotion Evaluations for Faculty with Substantial Administrative Assignments*

Consistent with the idea that leadership is a highly valued quality of a faculty member's contributions, administrative assignments that are carried out effectively can strengthen a bid for tenure or promotion. However, if the administrative assignment is so large that it has a significant negative impact on research and scholarship production and impact, the ability of the candidate to meet the basic tenure and/or promotion criteria outlined above may be impeded.

To clarify, because teaching effectiveness is generally calibrated based on how *well* one teaches (rather than how often), administrative assignments that have an appropriate teaching load reduction (in terms of time compensation) typically do not have a significant negative impact on a candidate's ability to meet either teaching-related or research-related tenure and promotion criteria. When problems arise, it is typically because there is diminished time available to commit to research and scholarship endeavors (i.e., any teaching load reduction is insufficient to compensate for the administrative time commitment, or the administrative assignment is so large that there is no teaching load reduction that could compensate for the reallocated time).

Thus, faculty who aspire to a tenured appointment and/or promotion in rank should be aware that, while an administrative assignment can escalate their candidacy up to a point (because effectiveness in leadership roles is generally a plus factor in tenure and promotion decisions), the costs are likely to outweigh the benefits if the assignment significantly detracts from their research and scholarship time over an extended period of time.

**At present, George Mason University has no policies or procedures designed for administrative/professional faculty seeking tenure and/or promotion in rank (i.e., they can only pursue tenure or promotion through the criteria and procedures specified in the Faculty Handbook designed for instructional/research faculty).*