Fall 2017

To: Department Chairs, Department Administrators, Deans and Directors
From: Katrina Daly Thompson, Chair, Arts & Humanities Divisional Committee
Re: Tenure guidelines for 2017-2018

This memo accompanies the most recent version of the Arts & Humanities Tenure Guidelines, which can be found at [https://secfac.wisc.edu/tenure/arts-humanities-divisional-committee/tenure-documents/](https://secfac.wisc.edu/tenure/arts-humanities-divisional-committee/tenure-documents/). It is intended to emphasize some of the most important aspects of the preparation of the dossier for promotion to associate professor with tenure. Even if you are not preparing a case for promotion and tenure, please look over the guidelines, since they provide, in outline, expectations that all assistant professors should anticipate as they move toward tenure, and also provide a sense of the work expected of department chairs and faculty colleagues as they prepare the assistant professor for the tenure and promotion process. Please share this letter with all assistant professors in your department. Pre-tenure faculty members are encouraged to begin constructing tenure dossiers in their first year at UW.

Tenure dossiers must be submitted electronically to the divisional committee. Working bookmarks are appreciated.

One of the most important facets of preparing an assistant professor for tenure—one that is reflected in the tenure dossier, and the process of which is expected, by all divisional committees, to be made explicit in that dossier—is support and mentoring over the course of the probationary period. Some of the most important things you can do in this regard include:

- ensuring that all assistant professors understand the process of mentorship in your department, and that each—along with colleagues assigned to mentorship roles, particularly members of the review committee—follows that process actively and responsibly;
- making clear, in the chair’s letter, the mentoring system in place and the extent to which the department followed it;
- ensuring that assistant professors’ classes have been visited, ideally twice a year (once every semester), by a variety of faculty members and for a range of classes.

The strongest tenure and promotion cases tend to be those where the junior faculty member has had thorough mentorship, has understood the process, has engaged in the process actively and collaboratively, and in which the chair’s letter is explicit about how her or his work has been supported.
It is also important to realize that a poorly-prepared dossier can hinder even the strongest of tenure cases. Be careful and thorough when putting the dossier together, and make sure that all directions are followed—including directions on when to submit cases during the academic year—and that all supporting material is contextualized in the chair’s letter and other documents.

On the matter of timing and logistics, please bear in mind the following:

- We encourage submission of tenure cases early in the year; having all our cases bunched up toward the end of the year creates an imbalance in the committee’s workload and limits the time we can devote to considering individual dossiers.
- After the March meeting, we cannot consider early tenure cases (i.e. cases for probationary faculty who have time remaining on the tenure clock beyond spring semester). Please note that early cases must meet the same criteria that a case brought in the final probationary year must meet.
- The last meeting for which cases for promotion to tenure will be accepted is the April meeting.
- Cases in which a faculty member is hired with an offer of appointment with tenure will be accepted for the May meeting or will have to wait until the following Fall. Because the Divisional Committee meets only during the academic year—not over the summer—departments may wish to encourage recipients of offers of appointment to take a leave of absence from their previous institution for the following academic year (the first year of appointment) so that departments will have ample time to prepare the tenure dossier for consideration by the Divisional Committee in the early fall of the first year of appointment.
- Please be sure that you have included all the necessary material in the dossier before it is sent to the Divisional Committee. If we find that a file is incomplete, or that it has been prepared hastily, we will send it back to the department, delaying the case until the deficiencies have been remedied. If you have questions about what does and doesn’t go in a tenure file, please contact Michaela Aust (at michaela.aust@wisc.edu or 263-5741).

While all parts of the dossier are crucial, among the most closely scrutinized by the Divisional Committee are the chair’s letter, the outside letters of evaluation, the candidate’s statement on future work, and the material supporting the assistant professor’s teaching. The Divisional Committee is also seeing more cases that cross traditional disciplinary boundaries, and it is vitally important that members of the Committee understand the nature and contribution of the assistant professor’s work between and inside these boundaries.

- The chair’s letter serves many purposes. The most important is to frame the case for the committee. Tell us about the voting process, and the total number of votes cast; if the Executive Committee’s vote was not unanimous, summarize the major concerns raised during the discussion; if there are weaknesses in the case, explain how they were considered in the discussion, and what measures the department has taken to address them and how it has worked on the problems together with the assistant professor. You should explain to committee members what the criteria are for tenure in your discipline and department, and you should explain the nature of the candidate’s work in terms understandable to non-experts. Please remember that the committee includes members from across the arts and humanities disciplines in the college, and will probably not include people squarely in the candidate’s discipline.
- The five to eight outside letters tell Divisional Committee members what experts in the candidate’s discipline think about her or his work, but they are not sufficient in and of
themselves. Please remember to tell us who these people are, why they are qualified to review the case, how they were selected—according to the Divisional Committee’s guidelines—and which of those solicited refused to review the candidate’s work and why. Please note that recent updates to the Arts & Humanities Tenure Guidelines stipulate that all communication related to obtaining letters of recommendation, including communication with those who decline to write letters, must be in writing (letter or email). Copies of all communication must be submitted to the divisional committee as part of the dossier. The divisional committee will not consider letters solicited independently by the candidate. In the past year we have received several questions about whether it is appropriate to include outside letters written by scholars who have previously reviewed a candidate’s book manuscript, e.g. for the First Book program. We continue to encourage departments to select reviewers based on their expertise and who are at sufficient arm’s reach from the candidate; clearly explaining why you selected them should suffice to ensure no conflicts of interest.

• The candidate’s statement on present and future work should explain to the Divisional Committee what she or he intends to work on, how far along each of the projects are, what each project’s relation to the dissertation and first major work is, and what funding, if any, has been secured to pursue it. Please remember that one of the criteria for promotion and tenure is evidence of future work, so the candidate must be able to do more than speculate as to what future projects might be. To whatever extent possible, the statement of future work should be supported by information in the curriculum vitae and the dossier.

• The tenure dossier should fully explain the assistant professor’s role in the department’s teaching mission, including what courses were taught, how the candidate’s evaluations compare to those of departmental colleagues, and how the candidate’s pedagogy might be understood as innovative. The department should carefully prepare cumulative and comparative data that is clearly understandable to members of the Divisional Committee. In addition to student evaluations and peer reviews of teaching, programs are strongly encouraged to provide evidence of instructor effectiveness beyond the quantitative summary. A growing body of evidence shows that student evaluations commonly reflect gender, race, and even age or class biases. Possible indications of bias should be taken into account in the analysis of a candidate’s teaching effectiveness.

• With the increased emphasis on cross-disciplinary research and teaching, department chairs should address not just the nature of the assistant professor’s interdisciplinary work, but the extent to which that work meets the standards of rigor, expertise, and methodology in each of the fields in which s/he works. It is equally important to explain the innovative aspects of the work, and how it is important to the department, the division, the school or college, and the university.

• If a candidate has received an extension to the tenure clock for any reason, please do not include the reason anywhere in the dossier. References to health and family issues do not belong in the file.

A few last words. If the assistant professor’s work is in a language other than English, please be sure that the sample of that work is in English or has been translated into English, and that the chair has explained the topics, methods, impact, and relation to the field of the material in the file in that other language, since most members of the Committee will not be fluent in that language. For cases where performance is a major component of the tenure record, please provide the divisional committee with information about upcoming performances, exhibitions, and ticket availability. For candidates who have joint appointments, please take care that the chair of the home department consults with and requests the support of the other departments or units involved (including, but not limited to, student and peer
teaching evaluations, evaluation of the candidate’s research, record of the unit’s vote and explanation of voting).

A long dossier doesn’t necessarily equal a strong dossier. Be detailed, but also economical. Examples of strong dossiers are available in the office of the Secretary of the Faculty. Please contact Michaela Aust to schedule a visit to the office.

We look forward to working with you over the coming months. Please contact me (katrina.daly.thompson@wisc.edu or 608-262-6537) or Divisional Committees Coordinator Michaela Aust (michaela.aust@wisc.edu or 608-263-5741) if we can be of assistance.