Successful promotion of assistant professors to the academic rank of associate professors with tenure is one of the most important responsibilities of department chairs and senior faculty. The most recent version of the Guidelines for Recommendations to Promotion and Appointment to Tenure Rank in the Biological Sciences is posted on the divisional committee website: https://secfac.wisc.edu/tenure/biological-sciences-divisional-committee/tenure-documents/. Please consult these detailed guidelines before and during the process of assembling a tenure dossier. Below is some guidance regarding the tenure process. Please share it with your assistant professors who are on the tenure track, their mentors, and your department’s executive committee:

**Mentoring**: It is critical that assistant professors have active and engaged mentors. Please ensure that mentoring committees are established for all assistant professors at the beginning of the first year of appointment. Mentoring committees should meet at regular intervals and provide written feedback to the candidate and the department executive committee or relevant department leaders. We also suggest additional or refresher training for faculty mentors. Each year we hold workshops for assistant professors and mentor committee members which provide the opportunity to ask questions about the tenure guidelines and best practices for mentoring. In addition, staff in the UW-Madison Delta Program (http://www.delta.wisc.edu/index.html) may help set up mentor training. It is the chair’s responsibility to make sure that the candidate is in a position to succeed and ensure that they can leave their departmental duties to deliver invited presentations, serve on grant panels, and perform other activities expected of tenured faculty. The chair should confirm that mentoring committee members are willing to commit the time necessary to actively and effectively mentor the candidate, including performing peer teaching evaluations, providing feedback on grant applications, and reviewing the tenure dossier prior to submission.

**Independence**: Assistant professors establish a record of independent scholarly activity. If a significant proportion of the candidate’s scholarly activity is in collaboration with postdoctoral mentors, current faculty colleagues, or a multidisciplinary team of investigators, the candidate’s role and independent contributions must be clarified and highlighted in the tenure document. Non-arm’s length letters from collaborating faculty and prior mentors can address this. The suggested format for requesting non-arm’s length letters is provided in the tenure guidelines.

**Tenure Clock Extensions**: Tenure clock extensions can be requested and are readily granted to faculty members when something beyond their control occurs that could adversely affect their academic work. Extensions are automatically approved for childbirth or adoption, but the request must be made in writing. The Biological Sciences Divisional Committee has the same expectations for tenure whether or not extensions are used. The chair’s letter should note if the candidate received clock extensions, however, do not reveal the specific circumstances for those extensions.

**Outside Letters**: Letters of evaluation are a very important component of the dossier. For all letters of evaluation included in the tenure document, the qualifications of the letter writers, their institutional association, and relationship with the candidate must be described clearly. Letters from experienced faculty or other academic leaders are required. It is necessary to list those individuals who were asked but declined to provide letters of evaluation and their stated reasons. The candidate may suggest referees, however the ultimate selection of letter
writers is the responsibility of the department mentoring committee and chair and at least half of the letter writers should not have been suggested by the candidate. The number of letter writers chosen from the candidate’s list and the department’s list must be described. The letter from the chair soliciting outside letters of evaluation cannot be prescriptive or leading. A suggested format modeling the neutral tone for this letter is in the tenure guidelines. A copy of the letter sent to solicit outside evaluations must be included in the tenure dossier. A letter of request that fails to be neutral in tone may lead to a request for additional letters and delay the candidate’s consideration for promotion. Letter writers should provide an evaluative assessment of the candidate’s accomplishments during the probationary appointment period, not a letter of recommendation or a simple summary of accomplishments.

At least five (5) letters must be “arm’s length” and come from nationally recognized experts in the candidate’s field. More letters are acceptable but the total should not exceed eight (8). If under unusual circumstances more than 8 letters are received, all of them must be included. Arm’s length experts are scholars who have never published with the candidate, had a significant research collaboration with the candidate, shared grant funds or other financial interests with the candidate, or worked at the same institution with the candidate. Arm’s length does not preclude people who have professional acquaintance with the candidate, such as speaking together at meetings, serving together on editorial boards or grant panels, or exchanging research materials. No more than three (3) “non-arm’s length” letters are allowed, except under exceptional circumstances. Non-arm’s length letters that detail a candidate’s unique and independent contributions are highly recommended, especially when the candidate has worked on large and/or multidisciplinary projects or has collaborated extensively with a previous mentor or advisor. Additional letters that are non-arm’s length may also be valuable to document the impact of a candidate’s activities when the dossier is submitted as an integrated case. Letters from peers evaluating teaching also are necessary and do not count toward the total number of letters.

**Division of Time:** If the candidate’s actual activities and division of time differ substantially from those described in the letter of appointment, the chair’s letter should provide an explanation. This may be important for faculty with clinical responsibilities that have changed since the time of hire, especially for candidates who have changed tracks since initial appointment.

**Excessive Service Obligations:** The tenure guidelines state that: “Departments must ensure that probationary faculty, particularly those of under-represented groups, are not required to take on more committee, service and advising responsibilities than their peers so that all assistant professors are given an equal opportunity to develop a strong record of scholarly accomplishments.” Given the recent success of cluster-hire initiatives in which interdisciplinary faculty have been recruited to campus, it is especially important to monitor the progress of assistant professors who may have to answer to more than one department for teaching or service needs so that these faculty don’t shoulder undue or unequal burdens.

**Preparing the Document:** One of the major responsibilities of the department chair is to ensure that the tenure dossier is prepared correctly for presentation to the Biological Sciences Divisional Committee. There are three ways to make a case for promotion: 1) excellence in one area (research, teaching, or outreach/extension) with significant accomplishment in a second area (research, teaching, outreach/extension, or service); 2) an integrated case in which the candidate’s overall impact on the field results from the integration of work across two or more areas; or 3) truly exceptional performance in a single area.

The chair’s cover letter should describe the expectations for a successful tenured faculty member in their discipline or department and how the candidate meets these expectations. It should highlight the candidate’s scholarly contributions to their discipline and the factors predicting that the candidate will continue to make strong contributions in their areas of excellence and significant accomplishment. It should educate the committee about discipline-specific practices, unusual career paths that the candidate may have taken, and directly address potential limitations/weaknesses in the dossier, including explanations of any mitigating circumstances.

Improper or lax preparation of the tenure document is not acceptable as it can detract from the well-earned scholarly accomplishments of candidate. The tenure guidelines provide clear instructions for assembling
documents for a complete dossier. A complete dossier ensures that the candidate receives the fairest evaluation possible; missing or incomplete documentation can create problems and delays in assessing the merits of a case for promotion. Please use the Checklist of Materials for Tenure Recommendation when preparing tenure dossiers. The primary purpose of the checklist is to avoid delays in making the tenure recommendation. The Biological Sciences Divisional Committee evaluates each candidate based only on what is included in the tenure dossier. The committee will not seek additional information about the candidate through either web-based searches or communications with references.

Sample dossiers are available for review in the Office of the Secretary of the Faculty. Please contact Michaela Aust (at michaela.aust@wisc.edu or 608-263-5741 with questions or to schedule an appointment to view sample dossiers.)

Thank you for helping ensure that our assistant professors on the tenure track have the best chance to be promoted at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.