

Summer 2019

To: Department Chairs, Deans and Directors
From: Richard Gourse, PhD and Caitilyn Allen, PhD, Co-Chairs of the Biological Sciences Divisional Executive Committee
Re: Tenure Review Documents 2019-2020

The 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/>. These detailed guidelines should be consulted before and during the process of assembling a tenure dossier. Below, we provide some summary information 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: The importance of effective mentoring cannot be overemphasized. 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. Recent experience suggests that additional or refresher training for faculty who will serve as mentors may be useful. During the academic year, we hold workshops for assistant professors and mentoring committee members which provide the opportunity to ask questions about the tenure guidelines and best practices for mentoring. In addition, staff at the UW-Madison Delta Program (<http://www.delta.wisc.edu/index.html>) may be helpful in setting up relevant mentor training. It is the chair's responsibility to make sure that the candidate is in a position to succeed and ensure that they are permitted to leave their departmental duties to deliver invited presentations, serve on grant panels, and perform other activities expected of tenured faculty. The chair should also 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 reading the tenure dossier prior to submission.

Independence: It is crucial that assistant professors establish a record of independent scholarly activity. If a significant proportion of the candidate's scholarly activity was done in collaboration with postdoctoral mentors, with current faculty colleagues, or with a multidisciplinary team of investigators, it is essential that the candidate's role and independent contributions be highlighted in the tenure document. Non-arm's length letters from collaborating faculty and prior mentors can address this. A 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 automatic for childbirth or adoption, but the request must be made. The Biological Sciences Divisional Committee will have the same expectations for tenure whether or not extensions are used.

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 and their association and relationship with the candidate must be clearly described. Letters from experienced faculty or other academic leaders are required. In addition, it is necessary to list those individuals who were asked but declined to provide letters of evaluation, and their stated reasons. While the candidate often plays a role in suggesting referees, the ultimate selection of

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letter writers is the responsibility of the department mentoring committee and chair and should include letter writers not suggested by the candidate. The number of letter writers chosen from the candidate's list and the department's list must be stated. 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 provided 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 thus significantly delay in considering the candidate's tenure dossier. It is important that letter writers 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 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 are also 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, this should be discussed in the chair's letter. 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 will remind you 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. Please note the clarifications to the integrated case in the most recent guidelines. There are currently three ways in which a candidate's case for tenure can be made: 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 is very important in presenting the case for tenure. It describes what a successful tenured faculty member in that discipline or department is expected to have accomplished 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 taken and directly address potential limitations/weaknesses in the dossier, including explanations of any mitigating circumstances.

The well-earned scholarly accomplishments of assistant professors must not be eclipsed by improper or lax preparation of the tenure document. 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 tenure case. 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; such delays can be very hard on candidates. 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 ensuring that all of our tenure-track assistant professors are given their best chance to achieve tenure at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.