



Spring 2023

To: Department Chairs, Department Administrators, Deans and Directors
From: Meg Mitchell, Incoming Chair, Arts & Humanities Divisional Committee
Re: Tenure guidelines for 2023–2024

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/>. 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 this year, please look over these guidelines. They provide, in outline, expectations that all assistant professors should anticipate as they move toward tenure, and also give 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. The tenure dossier and supporting materials should be submitted as two separate, bookmarked, and text-readable PDFs. Some reviewers prefer hard copies of already published books or creative works, so please provide those as well, if possible. A poorly-prepared dossier can hinder even the strongest of tenure cases. The tenure guidelines give clear and explicit instructions on the tenure dossier components. Missing components can lead to delays in the committee's evaluation. Be careful and thorough when putting the dossier together: make sure that all directions are followed – especially deadlines on when to submit cases during the academic year – and that all supporting material is fully contextualized in the chair's letter and other documents. The Arts & Humanities Divisional Committee evaluates tenure cases solely on the basis of materials presented in the tenure dossier.

Mentoring: One of the most important aspects of preparing an assistant professor for tenure is support and mentoring over the course of the probationary period. All divisional committees expect that this support and mentoring process be made explicit in appropriate parts of the dossier such as the chair's letter. The strength and quality of junior faculty mentorship is often directly reflected in the strength and quality of the dossier itself. 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 follows that process actively and responsibly along with colleagues assigned to mentorship roles, particularly members of the review committee;
- 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 clearly at each stage of tenure preparation; has engaged in that process actively and collaboratively; and has had the full breadth of their department's support and mentorship articulated clearly in the chair's letter.

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

- We encourage submission of tenure cases early in the year. An overload of cases for one meeting can mean deferring a case to the next meeting. This is less likely to happen for cases submitted in the fall and early winter. 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 cases for probationary faculty who have time remaining on the tenure clock beyond Spring semester. Please note that all 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.
- Double check the review period for your case. Please remember that the review period, including "years toward tenure" is usually found in the initial offer letter. Please ensure that the review timeline is established prior to soliciting external reviewers and that all elements in the dossier are in agreement.
- Cases in which a faculty member is hired with an offer of appointment with tenure will be accepted at any of the deadlines. The last will be the May meeting; otherwise it will have to wait until the following Fall. Because the divisional committee meets only during the academic year and not over the summer, departments may wish to pursue one of several options when preparing offers for faculty who wish to come in with tenure: for instance, a department might have an incoming faculty member begin their official appointment in January, which would allow the divisional committee to consider their case in the Fall; or they may have the faculty member come in as a visiting professor for their first year while the dossier is being prepared to be sent to the divisional committee either in late Fall or Spring. These options give departments ample time to prepare the tenure dossier for consideration by the divisional committee while providing some amount of professional protection to the incoming faculty.

- 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. Delays caused by material found to be missing during review can create unnecessary stress for the tenure candidate who may be anticipating news of the divisional committee's final vote. If you have questions about any procedural issues, such as what does and doesn't go in a tenure file, please contact the Divisional Committees Coordinator, Michaela Aust (michaela.aust@wisc.edu or 608-263-5741).

Dossier Components: While **all parts of the dossier are crucial**, among the most closely scrutinized by the divisional committee are the chair's letter, the contributions to knowledge and culture, the outside letters of evaluation, the candidate's statement on future research, and the material supporting the assistant professor's teaching. Since the divisional committee is also seeing more cases that cross traditional disciplinary boundaries, 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** is critical to the tenure dossier and serves many purposes. The most important is to frame the case for the committee. Tell us about the voting process, the total number of votes cast, and provide a justification for those not present to vote. Also, please note that the committee frowns upon votes in which a large percentage of faculty are not in attendance. 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, 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 chair's letter should not be a duplication of materials that appear elsewhere in the dossier or an attempt to combine those other documents into a single presentation. If preparing a chair's letter for the streamlined tenure process, please note that the length and depth of narrative are the same for both the streamlined and traditional tenure cases.
- The five to eight **outside letters** tell divisional committee members what experts in the candidate's discipline think about the candidate's 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 understand that substantive evaluation letters are valued by the committee, therefore it is vital that letter writers are adequately informed of the standard to which their evaluation is being held. The best way department's can communicate with letter writers about these expectations is with the template for invitation included in the guidelines, Appendix 6.

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). Please notify letter writers that their communications are part of the record of the case in your letter of inquiry. 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 previous years 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. In the new version of the guidelines, the divisional committee has taken steps to further explain the potentially ambiguous term "arm's length," which ultimately means mitigating against soliciting letter writers with an *immediate vested interest* in a given candidate's success. We clarify that an outside reviewer of someone's article or book manuscripts *could potentially be* a viable letter writer as long as they have no obvious personal or professional investment in the outcome of the case. At the same time, we understand that members of small or developing fields will likely have a stake in the broader success of scholars within that emergent disciplinary formation, and thus that it may sometimes be difficult to completely eliminate all possible interests a letter writer may have in a given candidate's advancement.

With that in mind, a certain degree of common sense judgement should be exercised by the department chair and tenure committee to ascertain if a letter writer's relationship to the candidate may compromise the integrity of the review. Should questions remain, we encourage you to reach out to the chair and/or coordinator of the committee. We continue to encourage departments to select impartial reviewers based on their expertise and who are at sufficient arm's reach from the candidate. Clearly explaining why you selected them typically suffices to ensure no conflicts of interest. It is highly recommended, however, that you insure against unknown conflicts of interest in your communication with letter writers, rather than discover once you've received a letter that there is a close relationship of which you were unaware.

Please note that we have revised the template invitation letter to suggest that you ask potential letter writers to disclose any concern for arm's length issues in their reply to your request, rather than waiting for the letter itself to communicate it. It is also not necessary to ask these letter writers to speak to the candidate's teaching and service accomplishments in your invitation; they will likely be unable to do this without firsthand assessment. Outside letters should focus on research. One final note here: in order to alleviate some of the pressure on smaller departments, the divisional committee has added language about including letters from associate-level professors and from reviewers who work in adjacent fields (see Section I). Nevertheless, the preference remains to find reviewers who are experts in the candidate's field and who are at the full professor rank.

- The **candidate's statement** on future research plans should explain to the divisional committee a) what the candidate intends to work on moving forward, b) how far along each of their proposed projects are, c) the relationship of each potential project to the candidate's dissertation and first major work, and d) what funding, if any, has been secured to pursue these new avenues of research. 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 research plans should be supported by information in the *curriculum vitae* and the dossier. The candidate's statement should also include a discussion of future teaching plans.

- 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. Teaching awards received and for which the candidate is nominated should most certainly be highlighted, but as with everything in the dossier, provide context for understanding that honor. You might differentiate, for example, between a Distinguished Teaching award received by one or a handful of instructors each year and a University Housing Honored Instructor award received by over 100.
- 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 the candidate 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.
- There are a range of professional processes that may constitute peer review in any particular field. Please note the following instructions from the tenure guidelines (Section H): "Briefly state the peer review process for each peer-reviewed publication outlet and/or performance/exhibition venue, in addition to explaining their quality and standing." You could accomplish this by sharing information about acceptance rates, though you can also contextualize the importance and status of the relevant publication and performance/exhibition venues qualitatively (if, for example, acceptance rates are not available or do not reflect actual standing in the field).
- If the candidate's work is in a language other than English, please be sure that the representative sample of work provided to the divisional committee is in English or has been translated into English. The chair should explain 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 public 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).

Covid-19 Pandemic Considerations: As of May 2021 tenure guidelines include a statement on the challenges posed to probationary faculty by the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the opportunity for departments to contextualize these challenges and the candidate's achievements properly. Please refer to the specified guidelines in Appendix 1 and do not hesitate to reach out with further questions.

Diversity, Engaged Scholarship, and the Wisconsin Idea: Please also note that, as of May 2020, our tenure guidelines include a statement on the value of diversity and inclusion to the university mission and the ways in which community engaged scholarship should be recognized as important form of contribution to the Wisconsin Idea. These contributions should be valued in the tenure process. As you prepare candidate dossiers, keep these values in mind, and at the same time, watch out for ways in which the tenure process can perpetuate forms of privilege and oppression and try to avoid them.

- Be wary of biased language that might qualify the strength of the candidate's contributions. WISELI provides excellent resources for minimizing bias in the evaluation of faculty ([please see this brochure](#)).
- As a reminder, although the dossier will include documentation of the hiring process, the divisional committee will evaluate all candidates based on their time on the tenure clock as full members of the faculty regardless of the ways in which they were hired.
- **Streamlined Tenure Process for Senior Hires:** The committee has also made some updates to our process for senior hires (see Appendix 3). One change is that the recommendation letters from the initial hiring process will be accepted as part of the dossier and two letters from senior-level reviewers are required. We hope that this change will ease the burden placed on departments and on reviewers from the wider field(s). Following a successful introduction in 2021-2022, this streamlined version of tenure for senior hires has now been instituted as our standard procedure. We will continue to track the success of this approach and reconsider should issues arise in the future. Please note that in chairs letter's, the length is narrative are the same for both the streamlined and traditional tenure cases.

Dossiers should inform the committee of all the excellent work our candidates are doing. Examples of strong dossiers are available in the Office of the Secretary of the Faculty. To consult them, please contact Michaela Aust to schedule a visit (contact information below).

We look forward to working with you over the coming months. Please contact the chair, Ramzi Fawaz (meg.mitchell@wisc.edu or 727-741-4279) or Divisional Committees Coordinator Michaela Aust (michaela.aust@wisc.edu or 608-263-5741) if we can be of assistance.

Regards,



Meghan (Meg) Mitchell