How the Physical Sciences Divisional Committee Operates

and

What the Division Looks for in Tenure Cases

Jan. 16, 2024 version
Tenure and PSDC - Key concepts

• We advise appropriate dean on tenure (FPP 7.15)
  Full process involves department executive committee, divisional committee, dean, and Board of Regents

• Tenure-track hires are campus commitment of available spot
  • There is a tenured position available for every assistant professor
  • Tenure decisions are yes/no, not comparative with other candidates

• Historically, about 80% of asst. professors receive tenure
  • Most of the other 20% are not recommended out of their department

• Department must make a positive recommendation for the case to reach the Divisional Committee
  • Clearly, the most important hurdle in the tenure process is meeting the requirements of your department!
Faculty Tenure Promotions by Divisional Committee Affiliation, continued

Percent Promoted to Tenure Within 7 Years, by Year of Hire

Total Percent Promoted to Tenure Within 7 Years, by Division

ACADEMIC PLANNING & INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH, OFFICE OF THE PROVOST • VICE CHANCELLOR FOR FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION
Tenure Dossiers

• Dossier prepared by department, with candidate input
  • Instructions are ~14 pages long + appendices and templates
    • Posted at the Office of the Secretary of the Faculty
      • https://secfac.wisc.edu/tenure/physical-sciences-divisional-committee/tenure-documents/
    • Not all sections are relevant to all cases
      • May be better to leave something out than to report minor activities that distract
  • Cover letter: department makes the case
    • identify balance of responsibilities for Teaching, Research, Outreach/Extension, and Service
  • Documentation of teaching
    • Courses taught, philosophy (2 p), student & peer evaluation
  • Research
    • Non-specialist description (2 p), publications, presentations, mentoring, funding,…
    • More activity is generally better than less, but there are no cutoffs, minima, etc.
    • Quality is key!
    • "Holistic" - # of pubs, h-index, amount/type of funding is highly variable across cases
  • Outreach (if part of appointment)
    • Highly variable content, generally not a requirement
  • Service (visibility, expectations)
  • Letters of Evaluation
    • Letter writers of national repute are chosen by the department, not the candidate
    • Arm’s length- letters from collaborators and former advisors are discounted
PSDC Process

- Subcommittee meets with department representatives
  - Usually department chair and mentor committee chair – can be others
  - Clarify expectations, understand research & teaching culture
  - Clarify independent research record (tenure-track era) and authorship conventions for broad understanding
- Subcommittee presents case to full PDSC at monthly meeting
- Discussion & Vote

PSDC recommendation is reported to Dean and Chair
Observations

- If you are unclear what your department’s expectations are, now is the time to clarify them.
  - Guidelines for communication and mentoring are provided in FPP 7 and PSDC tenure package guidelines
  - A strong endorsement by the dept, supported by strong external letters, is absolutely necessary

- Most appointments have research/teaching/service components

- The PSDC recognizes that evaluation of teaching can be challenging, and so highly values evidence of creativity and effort when judging excellence in teaching
  - Teaching statement – involvement in curriculum, innovation
  - Student evaluations – levels, trends, comments (can be fickle)
  - Mentoring and peer evaluations

- No need to describe “Outreach” category unless that is part of appointment
  (same for some other sections – don't create content, but include it if significant activity)

- Standards for attaining tenure are the same regardless of time spent as probationary faculty (the “tenure clock”). This applies for both "early" cases and cases with clock extensions.
- UW policy is a single tenure evaluation. Unsuccessful cases will not be reconsidered.

- Appeal process (CFRR, FPP) is for addressing procedural errors, not review of facts
Extensions: COVID-19 and other causes

• There are several categories and reasons for tenure clock extensions
  • Application process described on OSF web site
  • Apply when need and rationale are clear – don’t wait until closer to tenure
  • Clock extension is not a factor in evaluation of any tenure case

• Campus is aware that asst. professors faced a wide range of challenges during the pandemic – automatic COVID-19 extensions were available

• A statement of COVID-19 impacts in the dossier is not required, but welcome if specifically helpful
Closing considerations

• PSDC is committed to holistic evaluation, not relying on quantitative measures of research/teaching/service activity

• Letter writers are asked to do same
  • Letter writers are expected to be knowledgeable experts with no vested interests
    • “Arms-length” rather than collaborators, advisors, etc.
    • Letters often mention whether writer knew candidate before receiving request

• Tenure is a life-long commitment by UW-Madison; as far as possible the decision made should not affected by unusual circumstances