



WISCONSIN

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Fall 2014

To: Department Chairs, Deans and Directors
Biological Sciences Division

From: Margaret McFall-Ngai, Chair, Biological Sciences Divisional Committee
Ron Gangnon and John Svaren, Vice Chairs, Biological Sciences Divisional Committee

RE: Tenure Review Documents 2014-2015

The successful promotion of assistant professors to associate professors and the accompanying granting of tenure is one of the most important responsibilities of department chairs and senior faculty. Below, we provide some 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 during the first year of appointment. The committee should meet at regular intervals and provide written feedback to the candidate and the executive committee or relevant department leaders. Recent experience suggests that some training for senior faculty who will serve as mentors may be useful. Staff at the UW-Madison Delta Program (<http://www.delta.wisc.edu/index.html>) may be helpful in setting up such training.

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 a written description of the candidate's role be included in the tenure document.

Tenure Clock Extensions: Tenure clock extensions are readily granted to faculty members when something beyond their control occurs that could adversely affect their academic work. It is automatic for child birth or adoption, upon request. The Biological Sciences Divisional Tenure committee does not consider a tenure application "early" if it is submitted at the time that would be required under the original clock even though an extension has been granted.

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 with the candidate must be clearly described. Letters from accomplished senior faculty or other academic leaders are desirable. In addition, it is important to list those individuals who were asked to provide letters of evaluation but who declined and their stated reasons. While the candidate often plays a role in suggesting referees, the ultimate selection of letter writers is the responsibility of the mentor committee and chair. 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,

Divisional Committees

University of Wisconsin-Madison 132 Bascom Hall 500 Lincoln Drive Madison, Wisconsin 53706
608/262-3931 www.secfac.wisc.edu

leading to significant delays in evaluating the candidate's case for tenure. It is important that letter writers focus on the candidate's accomplishments during the probationary appointment.

The tenure guidelines require at least 6 letters of evaluation of the candidate's scholarly efforts from nationally recognized experts in the candidate's field. At least 5 of these letters must come from referees who are clearly "arm's length" from the candidate. 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 on editorial boards or grant panels together, or exchanging research materials. More than 10 outside arm's-length letters are not advisable. Letters from peers evaluating teaching are also required. Other letters may be from collaborators on multidisciplinary projects specifically attesting to the unique contributions of the candidate and letters that detail the candidate's independent stream of research within a larger project when the candidate's previous mentor or advisor remains a collaborator. Additional letters that are not arms-length may also be valuable to document impact of candidate activities when the dossier is submitted as an integrated case.

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 especially important for faculty with clinical responsibilities that have changed since the time of hire.

Excessive Service Obligations: 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](#). These 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 those junior faculty who may have to answer to more than one department for teaching or service needs so that these junior 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 Tenure 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 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. The well-earned scholarly accomplishments of junior faculty must not be eclipsed by improper or lax preparation of the tenure document materials. The tenure guidelines provide clear instructions for assembly of the document. A complete document 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](#) when preparing tenure cases. The primary purpose of the checklist is to avoid needless delays in making the tenure decision; such delays can be very hard on the candidate. The tenure committee evaluates each candidate based on what is included in the tenure dossier and will not seek additional information about the candidate through either web-based searches or communications with references.

Thank you for ensuring that all our tenure track assistant professors are given their best chance to be successfully promoted and achieve tenure at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.