

Promotion and Tenure Guidelines IST AC-18 Administrative Guideline

This document provides guidance to tenure-line faculty, mentors, and internal and external evaluators for tenure-line faculty career advancement in the Penn State College of Information Sciences and Technology.¹ The guidelines describe expectations for promotion and tenure, supporting continuous career advancement and encouraging pursuit of scholarly activities aimed at the highest levels of impact, influence, and recognition. These pursuits should embrace and advance Penn State’s values as well as the college’s mission. In addition, faculty are expected to abide by all University policies, including AC47 General Standards of Professional Ethics and AD88 Code of Responsible Conduct (see Appendix) which are reflective of those values.

¹ This document is adapted from the Penn State College of Engineering’s April 2022 “Guidelines and Criteria for Promotion and Tenure in the College of Engineering. “We thank our colleagues for their work in crafting an exceptional document worthy of imitation.”

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1. General Guidance on the Assessment of Impact

High-impact scholarship generates benefits to students, colleagues, the institution, the profession, industry, governments, the Commonwealth, the nation, and global society generally.

Accordingly, impact cannot be defined through a single metric, nor can it be assessed solely through an accounting or enumeration of activities and outputs. While activities and outputs may be *indicators* of impact and excellence, they are not themselves the impact. For example, the impact of faculty advising would not be solely indicated by the number of graduate students advised, but instead by evidence of their students' success such as awards or job placements. Assessments are made through representations reflected in promotion and tenure dossiers. Where possible, dossiers should aim to provide more than a set of lists. Evaluators' task of applying their professional expertise to translate a dossier's factual content into an assessment of excellence is facilitated by indicators of impact. Such assessments should not overly emphasize any single metric or indicator but rather assess impact holistically. A holistic assessment takes into consideration the totality of a faculty member's accomplishments.

The assessment of a faculty member's impact is fundamentally based on peer evaluation. Peer review is crucial in the dissemination of research results and vital to upholding the standards of publication and the ethical conduct of research. Promotion and Tenure review committees are comprised of peers who are tasked with assessing a candidate's accomplishments based on their individual and accumulated experiences. While information from students and other non-peers may be included in a candidate's dossier, and administrators have key roles in the promotion and tenure process, faculty peers are particularly well-positioned to understand the context of a faculty member's contributions. Our College has a robust process for peer reviews (see Addendum for guidelines) which includes both formative and summative assessment of faculty teaching. The reviews are completed in both fall and spring semesters.

External reviews play a key role as well. Selection of external reviewers is a shared process involving the candidate, P&T committees, and the dean. Invitations to external evaluators are issued by the dean guided by a template provided by the provost's office. An example is provided in the annual Administrative Guidelines for AC 23 (see Appendix). Generally, external evaluators are asked to respond to questions such as: in what capacity, if any, they know the candidate; providing evidence of the impact of the candidate's work on other researchers and the

broader discipline; and in cases of tenure, whether they expect the candidate will continue a trajectory of excellence.

It is incumbent upon internal and external evaluators to do more than cite numbers. Instead, evaluators should provide an explanation of how these numbers (of publications, dollars in research funding, scores on teaching effectiveness) form a holistic basis of a determination of the positive impact, or lack thereof, of the candidate's contributions. Internal and external evaluators are asked to describe how they interpret and translate the contents of a dossier into an assessment of excellence. How have they used, for example, a summary of numerical teaching ratings, a list of publications, or a list of committee assignments to determine impact? Holistic assessments include research, teaching, and service. Within these three domains, we do not specify the weight evaluators give to any particular metric. Instead, we rely on disciplinary norms for assessing impact. The lack of specific metrics is *intentional* as we aim to support innovative and creative approaches that may be foreclosed through a precise enumeration of metrics.

As an interdisciplinary college, we expect and embrace variance in disciplinary norms and approaches to generating impact. For example, differences may be observed in the form of research outputs (e.g., books, journal articles, conference papers) or the number of authors on publications (e.g., many co-authors, solo-authored papers). Further, we value interdisciplinary and applied research and recognize their differences in research processes as well as implications for an interdisciplinary scholar's research trajectory.

Internal and external evaluators are expected to be alert for potential sources of bias, whether based on discipline or gender, race, sexuality, or any other identity. The faculty value and embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion through mentorship, teaching, research, and scholarly service. Accordingly, evaluators are expected to mitigate bias to the greatest extent possible. The intent is to encourage our faculty to be impactful, perhaps in ways that may not be captured by traditional metrics. Thus, candidates for promotion and/or tenure and evaluators are cautioned that the following guidelines and indicators are merely potential elements of a promotion and tenure evaluation. Candidates for promotion are encouraged to articulate and demonstrate, beyond numbers and lists, their impact by evidence of the positive influence their scholarly endeavors are having on others. The narrative provides this opportunity to articulate why their scholarship is important/impactful, particular if that impact is unique or different from traditional indicators.

In exceptional cases where the candidate's impact is difficult to document the possibility for supplemental letters or materials exists. Candidates are encouraged to discuss this potential with their mentor in advance of their portfolio submission.

2. Expectations for Advancement—Promotion and Tenure Criteria

The University's goal in faculty advancement is "to have a faculty appropriate to a major research university, with a commitment to teaching and service, so that the internal and external reputations of each unit are constantly improving."² In support of that goal, in the following we articulate distinctions in promotion and tenure, differences in expectations for promotion at different ranks, and expectations for and indicators of excellence in teaching, research, and service.

² Dr. Kathleen Bieschke (2021) Penn State Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs, <https://www.readkong.com/page/2021-promotion-and-tenure-workshop-dr-kathleen-bieschke-4315747>

At Penn State, **promotion** is based on recognized performance and achievement in each of the central areas of responsibility (teaching, research, and service). **Tenure**, as a separate decision, is based on the potential for further achievement in these areas as evidenced by performance during the provisional appointment. While separate decisions, typically they are taken at the same time. At the time of promotion to associate professor, a faculty members' scholarship may not have reached its pinnacle of demonstrable, widespread impact. Nevertheless, they should have demonstrated outcomes and trajectories typical of highly successful faculty. In contrast, candidates for promotion to professor are expected to have sustained high levels of performance, demonstrated the impact of their scholarship, through mentorship shown a commitment to the success of their students and colleagues, assumed leadership roles within and external to the institution, and established international reputations as influential experts in their fields. Time-in-rank as an associate professor is not a factor in the decision to consider a candidate to promotion to professor.

Candidates for promotion or tenure are expected to have demonstrated significant accomplishments in teaching and research, and an appropriate level of service. We provide several criteria for measuring and evaluating teaching and research accomplishments with the understanding that a person need not show equal accomplishment or involvement in all areas, but those accomplishments should be commensurate with the person's discipline and goals. The Committee's recommendations for tenure will be based on the merits of their academic achievements, and their potential for contributing to the success of the College in achieving its mission.

The following expectations and examples of indicators are to be used to assess faculty performance in the three central areas of responsibility.

2.1 TEACHING AND LEARNING

Expectations for teaching and learning include demonstration of a commitment to student success, inside and outside the classroom. Such commitment is demonstrated by sustained records of high quality, effective, innovative, and inclusive teaching, in both content and delivery, at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Faculty are expected to produce and deliver instructional excellence by conveying the subject matter of a course to students in an effective manner, by keeping the content of courses current, and creatively integrating knowledge from their research activities into the classroom. Teaching excellence also contributes to a climate that is welcoming and supportive of all students recognizing the diversity of backgrounds represented by the Penn State student population. Teaching excellence may also involve innovation in teaching and design of novel curricula. Instructional excellence may also be pursued through curricular innovation projects, potentially supported by internal or external grants. Efforts to significantly revamp a curriculum, innovate on approaches to enhancing diversity, or adopting new pedagogical techniques or technologies, are particularly helpful to contributing to the College's goals.

Expectations for mentorship include recruiting and managing graduate students in support of the candidate's research programs, guiding and retaining students in activities leading to their degrees, and, when fitting, engaging undergraduate students in their research. Faculty mentorship of students and postdoctoral researchers should be reflective of Penn State values and promote a working environment of mutual respect. In recognition of the cross-disciplinary nature of

research, advising, and in some cases funding, students seeking degrees in programs outside a faculty member's tenure home is valued.

Indicators of instructional impact include peer and student assessments of teaching and course materials; evidence of developing critical thinking skills in our students; successfully incorporating evidence-based best practices into the classroom or research group; and fostering students' awareness of and the ability to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and ethics. Candidates are encouraged to discuss these approaches in their narrative.

Further indicators of instructional impact include a faculty member's record of pursuing self-improvement as a teacher and the success of introducing the outcomes of such efforts into the classroom. Publication or presentation of outcomes of teaching and advising activities in professional venues and an assessment of the quality of those disseminations are also potential indicators of impact. Awards for teaching or fellowships are also indicators of impact. Impacts of mentorship may include the record of supervising undergraduate and graduate students to timely degree completion and job placement; involvement of students in publishing research outcomes; chairing and serving on thesis committees; postdoctoral researcher mentoring; and the record of advising undergraduate honors theses. Interdisciplinary mentorship may be indicated by serving on thesis committees in departments across the university. The record of competitive awards or grants received by advisees in recognition of the promise or quality of their scholarship is also indicative of positive impact on students.

Impact in mentorship also may be indicated by providing professional growth opportunities for advisees including postdoctoral researchers; evidence of successful application of innovative mentoring methods; advancing equity and inclusion within a faculty member's research group; and advising awards.

2.2 RESEARCH

Research expectations include: investigating significant research problems demonstrating originality; building independent, sustainable, ethical, and high-impact research programs; disseminating the results of research in the most appropriate venues; and having these results considered by experts in the field, through peer review processes, to be of very high quality and to have meaningful impact. An impactful research program may also include, but not exclusively consist of, activity that does not lead to journal publications or other common forms of the dissemination of outcomes, such as work supporting industry and government agencies, the disclosure and protection of intellectual property (e.g., patents), or technology transfer. Regardless of the nature of a research program, information must be included in the dossier, particularly the narrative, to enable evaluators to assess the quality and impact of these activities. Candidates are expected to have an area of specialization wherein a significant portion of their research effort is concentrated. It is common, though, for faculty to shift areas of scholarly focus, even at the junior level, and successful interdisciplinary collaboration often involves contributing one's expertise to a variety of projects. The narrative statement is an opportunity to explain both the significance of the applicant's scholarship and its interconnections.

Faculty are strongly encouraged to engage in collaborative research with internal and external partners. The impact of one faculty member upon the success of others is often valuable and important, yet difficult to quantify. Faculty members are expected to establish themselves as thought leaders for significant parts of collaborative research projects and to demonstrate how their participation led to impacts that are greater than the sum of those of the individual

participants working alone. Faculty members who lead successful multi-investigator and center-type research projects merit additional recognition. However, it is equally important not to discount or overlook contributions made by tenure-track faculty members when a colleague who is more advanced in their career is a member of the same team.

To the extent it is necessary to support their research program, faculty are expected to pursue external funding. Faculty are then expected to demonstrate competent and ethical stewardship of funds as well as capabilities in managing all aspects of an externally funded research program (e.g., proposal writing, financial management, personnel management, timely delivery of reports and outputs).

As faculty advance in their careers, and particularly for those seeking promotion to professor, they are expected to assume expanded leadership roles in their research enterprise and develop an international reputation.

Research impact can be indicated in a variety of ways. The candidate's overall research record must show a high standard of research impact as demonstrated by continued, sustained, and significant contributions such that the candidate's research expertise is recognized within the candidate's subject area. The applicant's record should demonstrate the ability to carry out independent, high-quality research and disseminate its outputs through recognized outlets using peer-review appropriate to the norms of the scholarly area. Publications appropriate to the candidate's area of specialization are likely to include articles in top-quality journals, highly competitive refereed conferences, refereed research-oriented books, book chapters, textbooks, and design portfolios. Given the universal use of peer-review journals across academic fields, and that faculty from these diverse fields are involved in review at levels beyond the College, candidates are encouraged to include journals among their mix of outlets. Impact may be demonstrated by awards, citations, media mentions, data regarding use and engagement with the scholarly work, references by industry, public, and civil society organizations, or inclusion in course syllabi in other units, among others.

While the quantity of publications provides insight into the contemporary importance and trajectory of a faculty member's research program, quantity should be part of a holistic assessment that includes the quality and reputation of the publication venue and its ability to reach the intended audience; the list of authors and the contribution of the candidate; whether the venue is consistent with the vision and goals of a candidate's research program as laid out in the narrative statement; and disciplinary norms in the publication process.

As stated above, evidence of research impact relies heavily on peer review. Use of pre-publication venues, such as Arxiv.org, are useful for timely dissemination of research outcomes. However, per Penn State policy, only after peer review will such articles be considered part of the candidate's formal record of accomplishment. Candidates should also beware of predatory publishing and may consult the University Libraries for guidance.³

Research impact can be indicated by a candidate's record of securing research support in that it provides information regarding the importance, quality, and timeliness of a faculty member's ideas and record of achievement. The record of funding may also be an indicator of the candidate's professional growth and likelihood of continuing contribution. However, funding should be considered a means of achievement and impact, not the ends. An assessment of a

³ <https://guides.libraries.psu.edu/predatory-publishers/identify-avoid>

candidate's funding should take into consideration the nature of the candidate's research and the opportunities for funding in that field.

Research impact and a faculty member's standing within their research community may also be evidenced by external seminars at peer institutions, government laboratories and agencies, industry laboratories, and invited presentations at top conferences. Opportunities for such activities vary by field. Other factors relevant to the assessment of research contributions include the synergy that a faculty member has brought to collaborations, and whether a faculty member's work has garnered external recognition or awards for its quality and influence.

2.3 SERVICE

Service contributes to the goals of the College, the University, to one's profession, as well as the University's impact on society. As organizations embracing shared governance between faculty and administration, internal service plays a critical role in maintaining a functional university to the benefit of society. Similarly, many academic and professional societies rely on faculty contributions to support their ongoing function, making faculty external service a key resource for academia. In both internal and external service, faculty are encouraged to propose, lead or participate in activities they are passionate about and that are likely to make a positive influence on stakeholders.

Expectations for internal service are that faculty members will reliably and ably contribute to the college and University administration, governance, and advancement, commensurate with the other expectations of tenure line faculty and their time in rank. As faculty members advance in their careers, they are expected to assume leadership roles in such activities. The college places high value on service activities that support Penn State's values, particularly those that advance equity and inclusion.

Faculty members are also expected to contribute externally to the technical and governance missions of their academic, professional or local communities, government and non-governmental organizations, industry panels, review boards, commission and industry in ways that leverage their research and teaching expertise and enhance their stature within the profession. Initiative-focused service, such as launching a new activity to improve culture, creating a new journal or conference, proposing and leading research centers and interdisciplinary coordination bodies are also valued. As with internal service, faculty members are expected to assume leadership roles within their professional communities as their careers advance.

Service leveraging research expertise often includes peer-reviewing activities such as proposal and manuscript reviews and service in editorial capacities. Faculty members must manage these activities at levels consistent with the other expectations and demands of tenure-line faculty at a research-intensive university. Service may also include outreach activities, which should be properly documented. Outreach activities may not be limited to service and where appropriate should also be included with teaching when they involve teaching, and under research and scholarship when they result in publication or activity that can be valued in those terms. Outreach activities should be related to the mission of the College and leverage or contribute to the candidate's expertise.

Impact for candidates for promotion to professor reflect their international stature and may be indicated by: leadership in centers or institutes; leadership in College, University, state, national

and international research-oriented decision-making bodies, participation in formulation of research-oriented industry, professional, state, national or international science, technology or educational policies, significant involvement in academic societies steering the priorities and research vision of the field such as chairing divisions/special interest groups, and editorial positions on journals (board, editor, associate editor, special issue editor).

The impact of a faculty member's internal service activities may be demonstrated by: meaningful participation in college, or university administration, governance or advancement; furthering a culture and climate of equity and inclusion; supporting extracurricular activities of our students; mentoring colleagues; supporting global programs; and advancing a culture of sustainability. Internal service may also reflect a faculty member's commitment to student success as demonstrated through support for co- and extracurricular activities, such as global experiences, student competitions and clubs, or other forms of student engagement. Candidates for promotion should describe their level of engagement in and important outcomes of their activities.

The impact of a faculty member's external service may be demonstrated by active participation in professional organizations that advance the professional community or ultimately leads to professional growth opportunities for members of those organizations. Evidence may include contributions to conference organizing, membership on government review boards and panels, active participation in professional societies, policy making, etc. Activities in support of diversity, equity, and inclusion are valued forms of service, both internal (e.g., for the College of University) and external (e.g., for a discipline or society). Faculty members should describe their level of engagement and important outcomes of such activities.

3. Early Promotion to Associate Professor with Tenure

The decision to promote a faculty member to associate professor and award tenure is typically made in the sixth year of service in a tenure eligible position. To consider a candidate for tenure prior to this period, a particularly strong case must be presented by the Dean to the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs. These cases are expected to be rare.

According to the Administrative Guidelines for AC23, "the number of years and achievements beyond the completion of the doctoral degree are key factors in early tenure considerations." To be considered for early tenure in the College of Information Sciences and Technology, a candidate should discuss this possibility with the dean. Approval for consideration to conduct an early tenure review does not imply that the review will be successful. If a candidate is not successful in receiving tenure through an early review process, the candidate is not penalized in any way or disadvantaged from the normal tenure review sequence.

4. Nomination for Promotion to Professor

Per official university guidelines, faculty can be nominated for consideration for promotion to Professor, by an "appropriate academic administrator" or the "department review committee after consultation with the appropriate academic administrator." In the context of the College of Information Sciences and Technology, where we do not have departments, this translates to being nominated by the dean or by the college's P&T committee after consultation with the dean. In practice, the college P&T committee does not nominate individuals itself, but it is involved in the nomination process. If an individual has not been nominated for formal review for promotion by the time of their second AC-40 extended review, the individual may self-nominate for formal review one time.

Timeline: Each spring, faculty interested in being considered for promotion to Professor are invited to express their interest in being formally reviewed. By the second Monday in January, faculty are reminded of the nomination process. Preliminary candidate materials for those interested in being considered for promotion to Professor are due by the first Monday in March. Decisions regarding those who are approved to move forward will be shared by the first Monday in April.

Each individual who asks to be considered is instructed to submit a current CV and a narrative statement outlining contributions and impact through teaching, research, and service in the context of the college's guidelines. SEEQ results for the courses the individual has taught since the most recent promotion are added to candidate's materials.

The materials (i.e., CV, narrative statement, SEEQs, peer reviews) are shared with individuals who hold the rank of Professor and who are currently on the P&T committee, as well as individuals who will be joining the P&T for the upcoming review cycle for review. Review by the dean and this group focuses on whether the individual may be successful in being promoted if they are nominated. The threshold for nominations is intended to avoid nominating individuals where there are obvious concerns that would prevent promotion. The intent is to allow individuals to be nominated when there is a chance of promotion, such that individuals who are nominated may or may not ultimately be promoted. Based on this review, the dean makes a decision and notifies each individual who requested consideration of the outcome.

For those individuals where the feedback did not support nomination, the dean drafts a response outlining areas of concern, suggestions, and when appropriate a recommended timeline for seeking nomination. The draft is shared with the Professors consulted previously to ensure that all issues that contributed to not nominating the individual are addressed. Once there is agreement that the message effectively summarizes the concerns and suggestions of the group, the potential nominee is notified of the outcome.

Requests to be nominated are accepted once per year. If an individual has requested to be considered for formal review but was not nominated to proceed, they are strongly encouraged to wait at least as long as was suggested in the feedback provided by the dean. If the same individual requests consideration again (for the second time) and is once again denied, they are strongly encouraged to wait at least as long as was suggested in the feedback provided by the dean. At this point, when the individual requests consideration again (for the third time), they will be nominated for formal review with no feedback being provided regarding the materials that were submitted.

For those individuals where the feedback supported nomination, they are notified that they can proceed with submitting their materials for formal consideration for promotion to Professor.

5. Appendices

University General Codes of Conduct

- AC47 General Standards of Professional Ethics (<https://policy.psu.edu/policies/ac47>)
- AD88 Code of Responsible Conduct (<https://policy.psu.edu/policies/AD88>)

University and College Values

- Penn State Values (<https://universityethics.psu.edu/penn-state-values>)
- College of IST Mission, Vision, and Strategic Plan (<https://ist.psu.edu/about/we-are/mission>)

University Promotion and Tenure-Specific Documents

Penn State Promotion and Tenure processes rely on two key documents – the more static policy AC23 and an annual ‘administrative guidelines for AC 23.’ The annual specification allows for time-sensitive changes, such as those related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

- AC 23 Promotion and Tenure Procedures and Regulations (<https://policy.psu.edu/policies/ac23>)
- Administrative Guidelines for AC 23 (<https://vpfa.psu.edu/>) – This policy is updated annually and is best found by searching for ‘AC23 Administrative Guidelines <academic year>’.

College of IST P&T Committees

- **Promotion and Tenure Committee Structure** - The pool for membership in the committee for tenure consists of all tenured faculty members with a majority appointment in the college. The committee is comprised of five tenured faculty members.

Each Faculty Area shall elect one member. The electorate in each Faculty Area consists of all faculty members who are tenure-track or tenured with a majority appointment in the college, and a primary affiliation with the Faculty Area. Individuals may self-nominate or be nominated by a member of the electorate. Elected members serve two-year terms. The Dean appoints one member. The appointed member serves a one-year term. Members can serve multiple terms. Elections take place prior to the member appointment by the Dean. The Dean will select the committee chair once all five members are in place.

- **Faculty Area Review Committee Structure** - The pool for membership in the Faculty Area Review Committee for tenure consists of all tenured faculty members of Penn State, excluding members of College P&T committee. Area review committees shall be comprised of at least three and no more than five members. Initially, all Faculty Area Review Committees shall be comprised of three members. Upon approval of these guidelines and in each subsequent spring semester, the tenured and tenure-track faculty of the area may choose to revise the size of the Faculty Area Review Committee, up to a maximum of 5.

The electorate in each Faculty Area consists of all faculty members who are tenure-track or tenured with a majority appointment in the college, and a primary affiliation with the Faculty Area. Any member of the pool for membership in the Faculty Area Review Committee may be nominated to serve on the committee by a member of the electorate for the Faculty Area. The electorate of the Faculty Area shall elect all but one member.

Elected members serve two-year terms. The Dean appoints one member. The appointed member serves a one-year term. Members can serve multiple terms. Elections take place after the formation of College P&T committee, and prior to the member appointment by the dean. The Dean will select the committee chair once all members are in place.

More information related to the structure and responsibilities of both committees can be found in [IST AC-19 Administrative Guideline: Structure of Promotion and Tenure Committees](#).

College of IST P&T Resources

The College of IST provides numerous resources for P&T including annual workshops, frequently-asked-questions documents, and links to a variety of university-level resources. The information is available at <https://ist.psu.edu/about/offices/faculty-affairs/promotion-tenure>.

Guidance on the Narrative

The narrative allows a candidate to communicate to evaluators the high-level substance of their career that transcends information in the record. It is a unique opportunity to reflect on one's career and communicate the importance of their vision and goals. Narrative statements that repeat numerical summaries of the content of the dossier are strongly discouraged.

Instead, candidates should aim to answer critical questions, such as: What are their career goals and how are they advancing toward these goals? What do they want the impacts of their teaching, research, and service to be and why? What is their progress along this plan, what are the successes thus far, and what metrics do they use to assess this impact?

The narrative provides the opportunity to place your goals in the broader context by pointing to synergies between the candidate's impact and the goals of other important stakeholders, such as the College and University, academia, government, industry and society.

Candidates might also take the opportunity to discuss any synergies between their teaching, research, and service that might not be evident from the record. They might also want to discuss the underlying values driving their teaching, research, and service goals and, where appropriate, their overlaps with Penn State's and the College's values.

In areas of the record where impact might be harder to assess, such as teaching a course or serving on a standing committee, the candidate might want to describe activities, roles, or instances where they have been particularly effective or made an impact.

The primary audience for the narrative is evaluators at the College and University levels, who are likely to lack domain-specific expertise. Accordingly, the narrative should be free of jargon and appeal to a broad audience. As with all writing, internal consistency is key. A goal statement supported by clearly relevant examples is particularly persuasive.

The University provides additional [Guidance for Promotion and Tenure Narratives](#).

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