Evaluating Faculty, Librarians on the Continuous Appointment Track, and P&A Teaching Specialists and Lecturers During 2020-21: Recommended and Required Practices

All members of the University community have been impacted in some way by recent and continuing events, whether by the pandemic and its impact on our lives, by racism and the associated social conflict, or by existing economic challenges. Caregivers, women, Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) and those with significant service demands have been particularly affected. This awareness and the University’s commitment to inclusive excellence and equity requires that we think carefully about our evaluation practices for all employees.

This guidance focuses on the evaluation of tenure system faculty, contract faculty, continuously appointed librarians and P&A lecturers and teaching specialists. The practices discussed in this document rely on the premise that equality (or sameness) is not the same as equity (or fairness). Instead, they are meant to help academic leaders advance evaluations that uphold expectations for faculty productivity and recognize that the nature and quantity of productivity is shaped by the circumstances of faculty lives and our larger society.

Annual Reviews Between Now and December 2021

- Annual reviews should take place, though the timing and process can be modified if the majority of faculty in a given unit and collegiate leadership agree on that modification. Colleges should ensure that any modification does not impede the consideration of normally scheduled promotions.
- Probationary faculty who were at the University in 2019-2020 received an automatic extension of their probationary period due to the coronavirus pandemic; the 2020-2021 contract year should therefore be tabulated as the continuation year on a faculty member’s Form 12. Units may not recommend termination during a faculty member’s continuation year (the contract year following confirmation of an extension of the probationary period), and a continuation vote is therefore discouraged.
- Review processes should focus on ensuring that those being reviewed have what they need to contribute to the research, teaching and service missions of the University. If productivity is unusually low, unit leaders should try to understand the challenges (e.g., difficult transition to a new modality, unusually high student needs, lack of dedicated work space, lack of sufficient equipment for work) and provide support if possible.
- The process should evaluate faculty members’ accomplishments in relation to criteria specified in the unit’s governing documents. Assessments of productivity should take into account any Impact Statements submitted (see below).
- When merit increases are offered in the future, we recommend that multiple years of performance be incorporated into decisions.
- Units are encouraged to continue conducting 4-year promotional reviews of their associate professors. However, if a faculty member requests a delay of this review, we encourage unit leaders to grant it.
Evaluation of Teaching

- As indicated in the tenure regulations and the University’s policy on Evaluation of Teaching, units should not rely solely on results from the Student Rating of Teaching survey to assess teaching effectiveness. We recommend that evaluations use multiple measures, to include the Student Rating of Teaching survey, Peer Review of Teaching, and teaching narratives explaining a faculty member’s investment in teaching and how they have sought to adapt their teaching to existing circumstances. Faculty may wish to comment on adapting courses to remote or hybrid teaching, developing new courses and different course content, participating in professional development, assisting colleagues in the transition to online teaching, and supervising teaching assistants.

- For evaluations of performance during 2020, faculty may decide whether to include their spring and summer SRTs as part of their evaluation material. Fall 2020 SRTs should be included as evidence of teaching, though SRTs and all teaching evidence should be considered in light of the challenges that instructors faced in 2020-2021.

- Evaluations should take into account that both racial conflict and the pandemic may have led to heavier mentoring and advising responsibilities for some faculty; that work should be explicitly recognized and valued in the evaluation process.

Impact Statement

- Faculty members should be encouraged to document the effects of the current circumstances on their productivity in annual reviews and during promotion and tenure review. This guidance can help faculty organize their documentation. Further, units may wish to offer a field-specific tool to help faculty better articulate the effects of this time on their scholarly productivity. The annual narrative section in Works includes a section for faculty who wish to document in their annual activity report any disruptive effects of the coronavirus pandemic or other extraordinary circumstances on their work.

- In order to provide information about the context of their work lives, units should use the language below to invite faculty members to submit an Impact Statement as part of their review processes. While all faculty members may submit such a statement, probationary faculty are especially encouraged to do so.

As part of your review process, you are invited to submit a statement articulating the impact of the pandemic on your professional work. This statement, which should normally be limited to one page, should explain how your research, teaching, or service has been affected since March 1, 2020. Examples include:

1) Changes in research or creative effort. Indicate if there was a shift in research or creative focus, whether voluntary or directed; diversion of laboratory capacity to pandemic-related work; changes related to travel restrictions; effects of changes in teaching or advising conditions, etc. This statement should provide details about the nature and extent of the scholarly impact.

2) Personal situations affecting productivity. State the nature of the circumstances (e.g., medical, bereavement, family responsibilities, etc.). Details about personal situations, such as details of an illness, should not be included. For example, stating that you were unable to work or worked at a reduced capacity during a specified period of time due to medical reasons is sufficient for the impact of the circumstances to be taken into consideration.
Unit leaders must consider an Impact Statement if one is submitted and explain how the statement influenced the unit’s assessment. This explanation should be included in an individual’s Form 12 or, during promotion and tenure, a unit head’s letter.

Since disruptions during this time will likely impact productivity for several years, Impact Statements should be included in the materials considered by the department, college, and University in annual and promotion reviews until the faculty member’s next promotion review. They should not be included in materials sent to external reviewers.

Extensions

- All probationary tenure system faculty and librarians on the continuous appointment track who were in their positions in April of 2020 were granted a one-year extension to their probationary clock. Faculty may choose to be considered for promotion at their normal time.
- New faculty and librarians on the continuous appointment track whose appointments began after April 2020 and who did not receive an automatic extension may apply for one.
- Although many faculty have received an automatic extension, the pandemic may result in an extraordinary disruption in scholarly progress for some of our faculty. Requests for a second extension will take into consideration the extent of disruptions experienced by the individual.

Equitable Promotion and Tenure Evaluations

- While granting extensions is an important way to support probationary faculty, extensions might also have inadvertent negative effects, such as delaying promotion, leadership and scholarly opportunities, and compensation increases. We urge units to consider other strategies to mitigate the effects of the pandemic beyond extensions. For example, units may formally recognize increased service demands during the pandemic or provide faculty development leaves or other support for faculty to re-establish their typical productivity once the pandemic is over. Additionally, units may wish to consider more broadly what constitutes productivity during the unique circumstances of this time.
- Current circumstances promote greater recognition of inequities that have existed for some time and suggest the need to re-examine 7.12 policies to ensure that those policies accurately represent the unit’s values and expectations. For example, research, teaching or service that advances our aspirational goal of inclusive excellence should be explicitly valued.
- We ask that units include sample text in instructions sent to external reviewers describing the effect of the pandemic related extension of the probationary period. In order to ensure that faculty members are evaluated in the context of their individual circumstances, they should not request that reviewers compare a candidate to others in their cohort or assess whether a candidate would be tenured at the reviewer’s institution. Faculty receiving extensions should not be evaluated based on higher standards because of their longer time in rank.

The University of Minnesota values inclusive excellence, a standard of quality that requires both outstanding work and an equitable approach to assessing that work. Current circumstances provide us with the challenge and the opportunity to ensure that our evaluation processes support the achievement of that standard. If you have questions about this guidance, please contact Vice Provost Rebecca Ropers (ropers@umn.edu) or Associate Vice Provost Ole Gram (gram@umn.edu).