

The Tenure Track Project: FAQ

The purpose of this project is to capture in one public document all of the key policies, protocols and best practices related to tenure and promotion at Cornell. Currently, information of this kind is sometimes hard to find, incomplete, inconsistent or otherwise problematic. Here is a 1-2-3 plan for producing improved documentation that works for both the candidate and the faculty, chairs, and others who review the case:

1. The Senate's [AFPSF Committee](#) in consultation with others reviews every process and procedure that is associated with the tenure track. It produces an FAQ "Study Guide" that frames the issues in a way that facilitates faculty discussion and input. (This work is done. Browse the [the 70-item FAQ](#))
2. After the commenting period is over the FAQ is updated in a way that exposes issues where there is broad consensus and issues where there is a variation in thinking. (Feb-Mar)
3. Depending upon the topic, FAQ prose is used to develop (a) practical advice documents, e.g., how to write a good research statement, and (b) guideline text for inclusion in the Faculty Handbook (e.g., procedure for selecting external reviewers). The latter requires an approval process that simultaneously engages the Senate, the Chairs, the Deans, and the Provost. (Mar-May)

It is understood throughout that tenure-related processes mandated by the university cannot be too prescriptive given variations that exist across the colleges. However, the university can and should be insistent in matters that concern transparency and objectivity.

A. Recruitment

The recruiting experience typically has a lasting impact on the candidate. It needs to be positive and broadly engaging of the faculty. The recruitment/hiring process has an important HR component. Familiarity with these [guidelines](#) is recommended.

A1. What is the best way to go about recruiting tenure track faculty?

The [Office of Faculty Development and Diversity](#) has a list of best practice, resources, policies and guidelines [here](#) and [here](#). These include how to describe the position, how to assemble and run a search committee, how to develop an effective search plan and a broad pool of applicants, and how to interview and assess faculty candidates. There are important legal and Cornell Policy considerations that must be followed.

A2. What aspects of the tenure process need to be discussed during the recruitment process?

Long term departmental expectations about teaching, research, and service should be clearly communicated, as such information helps new faculty understand what the first year or two might look like. Timeline issues are particularly important: e.g., how does the tenure clock work?; when does the reappointment process start?; what is the impact of a family-related leave? Candidates vary considerably in their general understanding of the tenure process, so making tenure-related documents that are readily accessible and indicating a willingness to talk about the process send an important message to the recruit.

A3. How should a recruit with incoming experience be advised about a shortened probationary period?

If the candidate comes in with prior experience as a tenure-track assistant professor (or equivalent), the candidate and the department may agree to a shortened pre-tenure time frame. It is essential that such timeframes be realistically set ([C2](#) offers specific advice about early promotion). The agreed-upon timeframe should be spelled out clearly in the offer letter. For example, the offer letter might include a line like “we will initiate the tenure review after X years.” A more flexible arrangement would be “we will initiate the tenure review after X years but are willing to consider an earlier review if requested.”

A4. When is it appropriate to hire someone at the associate-professor-without-tenure level?

In limited circumstances, typically when a candidate has been tenured at another institution but the department wants to appoint the candidate to an untenured position before making a tenure decision, it may be appropriate to appoint the candidate to the rank of associate-professor-without-tenure. It is appropriate that the hiring unit consider the impact of such an appointment on their current pool of assistant professors, some of whom may be highly accomplished and in their fourth or fifth year.

A5. For joint hires, what factors need to be considered?

By a “joint hire” we mean a hire that involves two departments X and Y. Appointments of this nature look exciting in a climate where interdisciplinary research is revered. However, there are risks so it is recommended that both X and Y consider this checklist of questions:

1. Why doesn't Field membership solve the “second department” problem? Would a simple adjunct position in the second department establish the right amount of affiliation?

2. How will the candidate's teaching assignments be determined?
3. Are X and Y on the same "research wavelength"? Do they have the same list of respected journal? Do they have the same respect for interdisciplinary work? Do they support PhD students the same way?
4. If the split is 50-50 at the time of appointment, then what is to prevent an upward creep in the commitment fraction that is "owed" to the participating units?

[More advice on the dangers of joint appointments.](#)

A6. What should be covered in the offer letter?

Offer letters should always be drafted in consultation with the [local HR representative](#) and should follow relevant college and department guidelines. In addition to information regarding compensation, benefits and the like, offer letters should explicitly deal with all relevant substantive aspects of the appointment, including the following:

1. Start date and appointment timeframes (i.e. initial appointment, reappointment, tenure review date).
2. Expectations with respect to research, teaching, service, outreach, and extension including percent-of-effort if appropriate.
3. Percent-of-effort information if the appointment is split with another unit.
4. Specific course assignments, if any.
5. Reduced load arrangements, if any.
6. Mentorship details.
7. Office location and support staff understandings.
8. Start-up details, e.g., discretionary accounts, research support, student support in the form of fellowships, TA positions, etc.
9. Study leave opportunities, if any.
10. Links to online tenure-related documents.

B. The Probationary Period

An individual on the tenure track who does not yet have tenure is said to be in the *probationary period*. This includes all assistant professors and some associate professors. Department actions during this period that are of particular importance include (a) mentoring, (b) informative annual reviews, (c) the reappointment process, and (d) tenure clock adjustments.

The [University's criteria](#) for tenure are generally framed in terms of excellence in both research and teaching. The colleges provide additional detail.

For practical advice, faculty members on the tenure track may wish to consult the following:

[A Short Guide to the Tenure Process](#)

[Tenure Dossiers: Strategies for Success](#)

[What I'd Wish I Had Known Before I Started This Job.](#)

Mentoring

The [Office of Faculty Development and Diversity](#) maintains a comprehensive [mentoring website](#) that discusses how to structure conversations about work-life balance, professional networks, and how to navigate the complexities associated with research, teaching, and service. [What the colleges say about mentoring.](#)

B1. Why is mentoring important along the tenure track?

The hiring of an assistant professor is an investment in the future of the university. From many different standpoints it makes sense to create an environment that enables junior faculty members to realize their full potential. Junior faculty members sometimes perceive an insurmountable conflict between their teaching and research obligations. However, while balancing these obligations can certainly be challenging, it is worth noting that many of Cornell's most outstanding faculty typically excel on both fronts. Indeed, they typically find that each component informs and inspires the other. A laudable goal of any mentoring program should be the communication of this fact.

B2. What's the difference between formal and informal mentoring?

A department culture that is open and fosters natural interactions between junior and senior faculty members sets the stage for rich, informal mentoring spread out over time. But even with an environment like that there is still a place for formal mentoring. Planned, occasional meetings with a nonjudgmental designated mentor who is experienced in the ways of academic life has value. Note that this person does not have to be in the same research area as the candidate in order to be effective. Indeed, having a mentor who is not in the exact same "research space" provides an opportunity for the mentee to refine their ability to talk about their work and their balancing act in everyday terms—a most valuable skill.

B3. What should the mentor communicate to the mentee about research?

Advice and feedback about grant writing, collaboration, research ethics, journal/book publication, external visibility are all worthy topics. The Office of the Vice Provost for Research is a valuable [resource](#) in this regard. The Office of Faculty Development and Diversity maintains a resource of [Best Practices for Mentoring](#).

B4. What should the mentor communicate to the mentee about teaching?

The Center for Teaching Innovation offers [guidelines](#) for the peer review of teaching.

B5. What should the mentor communicate to the mentee about service?

The mentor should explain to the mentee why it is important to render service at the department, college, and university level as well as off-campus through involvement with a professional society. How and when to say “no” to a service request is also an important skill to acquire during the probationary period.

B6. How should the Chair handle mentoring situations that are not going well?

It can be said that having a disinterested mentor is worse than having no mentor at all. Thus, care must be exercised when assigning a mentor to new faculty member. Communication between the Chair and the mentor needs to be regular enough to catch problems before they become serious.

B7. Should the conversations between mentor and mentee be private?

On the one hand, a commitment to privacy promotes forthright discussion. On the other hand, the unrestricted sharing of mentee concerns can create more problems. To strike the right balance any attempt to engage with others on behalf of the mentee must be done carefully and with the mentee’s consent.

Annual Reviews

[What the colleges say about annual reviews.](#)

B8. Why are annual reviews important?

The candidate’s “trajectory” figures heavily in the tenure review and to make a fully informed assessment it is vital to have annual snapshots that tabulate growth in the key directions of research and teaching. The ability of the candidate to modify research directions, take on students, write proposals, learn from classroom mistakes, and interact with colleagues has to be tracked and documented. In addition, annual reviews can be very helpful in clarifying departmental expectations should questions arise during the course of the tenure review about the candidate’s progress and direction.

B9. How should they be structured?

Whatever the chosen format and level of detail, the process must be respectful of both the candidate’s time and the chair’s time. In general, it should have these components:

1. Candidate responds to set questions in writing or online.
2. Chair (or equivalent) and candidate discuss the candidate’s written synopsis.
3. Chair (or equivalent) provides written feedback.

4. Candidate can provide written comments on Chair's feedback.

All documents associated with the annual review become part of the dossier.

Reappointment

The Provost Office provides these [guidelines](#).

[What the colleges say about reappointments.](#)

B10. Why is it important to have a rigorous reappointment review?

The reappointment review is a key part of the tenure process. As a formal matter, it is the point at which the initial appointment expires and the department decides whether or not to give the candidate a second three year appointment. Therefore, reappointment should never be regarded as “automatic” and instead should not be approved only the evidence to date creates substantial doubt that tenure will be attained. Therefore, reappointment can be thought of as a “slimmed down” version of the tenure review or as a “beefed up” version of the annual review. Regardless, it is an occasion to systematically assess research, teaching, and service. If things are not going well to the extent that tenure is highly unlikely, then non-renewal is an option. If the candidate is progressing as a researcher and teacher then reappointment is natural. A rigorous review is essential in order to provide a justification for nonrenewal or to provide constructive feedback to the candidate so that he/she can live up to full potential in time for the tenure review. There is an [appeal process](#) in the event of nonrenewal.

B11. What about switching to an RTE track?

In some unusual cases, the department and the candidate may jointly conclude that the candidate's appointment should be transitioned to an RTE track. Under current Trustee policy, such moves are permissible only if they occur before the tenure review has started. For these purposes, current practice is to view the faculty vote on tenure as the point at which moves to RTE appointments are not permitted. Therefore, chairs should be attentive to situations in which the tenure outcome is in doubt but an RTE position would be worth exploring. It is a negotiation that begins with a conversation between the chair and the candidate. Of course, the viability of such transition presupposes that there is a valid need for the destination position. Departments should not take this approach simply because a tenure denial is painful or disruptive.

Leaves and the Tenure Clock

B12. How do leaves affect the tenure clock?

[Policy 6.2.1 \(Leaves for Professors and Academic Staff\)](#) is the resource for this information. Tenure clock extensions for the birth parent and the other parent are detailed. Situations regarding adoption, foster care, care of the elderly and care of special-needs children is also discussed.

C. Launching the Tenure Review

From the Faculty Handbook: “Permission to initiate a review for tenure must be obtained from the dean, because it commits the college or school to long-term support of the position. When a review for promotion to

tenure is conducted, it is required to be thorough and well-documented, since the decision that is made is of far-reaching importance both to the individual and to the university. ”

[Timing](#) (Faculty Handbook)

[Appealing the decision not to initiate a review](#) (Faculty Handbook)

[What the Colleges Say](#)

C1. When is a tenure review normally initiated?

The standard tenure clock at Cornell is six years (except for the Johnson Graduate School of Management, which observes an eight-year clock). Under the six-year clock, the tenure process typically commences with the assembly of a tenure dossier at the end of the fifth year or the beginning of the sixth year. The launch of a tenure review requires Dean approval.

C2. What about staging an early review?

There are a number of circumstances that can prompt a discussion of the normal timelines. The candidate may have an exceptional record and may be actively sought out by other institutions; retention may hinge on the unit being flexible about an early review. Without making any promises, this should be communicated to the candidate with the usual caveat that early promotion typically invites heightened scrutiny during the review process. Specifically, there is no “discounting” of the expectations for tenure simply because the review is early – the candidate must satisfy the same expectations as would be required if the review occurred in the normal time frame. Therefore, an early launch of the review needs to be carefully considered.

C3. What about delaying the review?

According to university bylaws, a faculty member may not hold the position of assistant professor for more than the equivalent of six years of full-time service (eight years in the Johnson Graduate School of Management), unless, in the judgment of the provost, a temporary extension is warranted. Tenure clock extensions are available only in limited circumstances, including family and medical leaves, Cornell Academic Parental Leave (see [Policy 6.2.1](#), Leaves for Professors and Academic Staff, page 39), some forms of government or public service leaves, and situations where there have been substantial impediments to progress that were not in the faculty member’s control. Clock extensions are not available if the sole basis of the request is that the candidate has not made sufficient progress towards tenure. The dean may request provost approval for tenure clock extensions through the Academic Human Resources Office.

C4. What about discouraging or denying a review?

If they are properly executed, then the collection of annual reviews including the one just prior to the tenure review launch should provide the candidate with some information about the chance for promotion. However, it should always be remembered that the pool of external review letters may lead to an upwards revision of tenured faculty thinking about the candidate’s research. Thus, when talking to the candidate about “chances” the chair must careful not to communicate a level of pessimism that is unsubstantiated. It is expected that the chair will consult with the tenured faculty prior to having the pre-launch discussion with the candidate.

It should be noted that the Dean has the authority to deny a review for reasons other than merit. This decision can be [appealed](#) by the candidate.

Candidate-Supplied Documents

Candidates are in charge of certain aspects of the dossier, typically the CV, the research statement, the teaching statement, a list of possible external reviewers, and a no-contact list. The candidate should work hard to make it easy for the reader to assess their accomplishments. A well-organized website with carefully chosen links can be very useful. It is a good idea to be aware of the [FACTA Dossier Checklist](#) at the very start of the review process. [What the Colleges have to say about the candidate's statements and CV.](#)

C5. What should the CV include?

The candidate should approach the CV content and format decisions in consultation with their Chair and mentor. Obvious for consideration are (a) academic degrees and dates, (b) previous academic appointments, (c) publications suitably classified, (d) funded grant proposals, (e) presentations and talks, (f) awards, (g) courses taught by semester including enrollments, and (h) students formally supervised in a research or project capacity (undergraduate, masters, doctoral).

C6. What are some guidelines for writing a good research statement?

The basic idea is to write in plain English and show that your work has direction and that you have thought about its connection to the “big picture” in your field. That is, you should:

1. Write for the general academic reader rather than simply the experts in your precise field.
2. Highlight your most important work and its connection to the major research themes in your field.
3. Tell a story that reveals a positive trajectory and which makes “future plans” plausible.

Sometimes there is merit in discussing unfunded proposals.

C7. What are the attributes of a good teaching statement?

As appropriate, the teaching statement should discuss:

1. Teaching philosophy.
2. Modifications made to existing courses.
3. New courses developed and the rationale for developing them.
4. Approaches to graduate student seminars.
5. Expository/outreach writings.
6. Management of teaching assistants, when applicable.

C8. What are the attributes of a good extension statement?

As appropriate, the extension statement should discuss

1. Goals, accomplishments, and methodology.
2. Specific types of activities including in-service education.
3. Extension-related publications and other examples of scholarship.
4. Unique and creative aspects of the extension program.
5. Administrative and leadership responsibilities that relate to the extension effort.

C9. How should service and external engagement contributions be documented?

Service divides neatly into campus-related activity and professional society activity. The following should be documented

1. Committee participation at the department, college, and university level.
2. Participation within a professional society.

Community-engagement that relates to the candidate's research, teaching, or extension work should be mentioned in the CV and more thoroughly documented in the research statement, teaching statement or extension statement as appropriate.

C10. How should a commitment to diversity and inclusion be expressed?

Candidates should use (as appropriate) their statements on research, teaching/extension, and service to describe activities and accomplishments that reflect a commitment to diversity and inclusion. The [Office of Faculty Development and Diversity](#) has assembled a list of sample activities that is available through this [advice webpage](#) that is provided to faculty candidates. Note that applicants for faculty positions are required to submit a [Statement on Contributions to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#). Alternatively, the candidate should be allowed to include in the dossier a free standing statement on diversity and inclusion if they think that is the best way to communicate their accomplishments.

C11. What are the rules about updating the various documents that are supplied by the candidate?

For the sake of portraying the "same candidate" to all who participate in the review, the dossier is considered closed at the start of the tenure process. For these purposes, file closure occurs at the point of engagement with the external reviewers. The file can be updated during the process but only for the purposes of adding information that corroborates the quality of the work already reflected in the file: e.g., the acceptance of a submitted manuscript, the award of a submitted grant application, etc. The file cannot be updated to include new work completed after the closure date.

D. External Reviewer Selection

By “external letter” we mean any letter written by an individual who is not a voting member of the candidate’s department. Note that by this definition an external letter can come from within Cornell, e.g., a letter from a graduate field member in a different unit. [What the colleges have to say.](#)

D1. What is the purpose of the external letters?

The purpose of the external letters is to determine outside perceptions of the candidate’s research. Collectively, the letters should inform the reader about the breadth, depth, impact, and trajectory of the candidate’s research program.

D2. Who should be involved in the production of the external reviewer list?

Because of the importance of this dossier component, the candidate should be able to suggest reviewers. The broader the engagement of the voting faculty the better. However, it is understood that in the larger units the task may be delegated to a subset of the voting faculty.

D3. What are some of the key factors to consider when thinking about a possible external reviewer?

Research Distance. The “distance” between the reviewer’s research area and the candidate’s research area is important. One purpose of the external letters is to assess the candidate’s radius of impact. This can only be ascertained by getting letters from reviewers who work around the fringe of the candidate’s proclaimed research area.

Collaboration History. The history of reviewer-candidate collaborations will affect how the letter is evaluated. Collaborations include co-authoring a paper, a book, or a research proposal as well as co-organizing a workshop, a conference, or a panel discussion. All of these activities concern the advancement of knowledge and as a group the collaborators are well equipped to offer important insights into the candidate’s ability to work with others. That said, claims like “we changed the world with this paper” need to be assessed for their self-promotion content.

Research Stature. The impact of an external letter is highly correlated with the research stature of the writer. Stature is a perception that depends on the actual research reputation of the reviewer, the reviewer’s local circle of colleagues, and the reviewer’s institution. It is not a simple summation. There are many examples of great researchers whose stature exceeds that of their academic home.

A one-paragraph synopsis of each reviewer should be provided in the dossier to help the reader assess the content of each external letter.

D4. What about having more than one reviewer from the same academic unit at a different school?

There is no reason to have a blanket rule against this; the reviewers involved may be able to write about widely separated components of the candidate’s research agenda. On the other hand, a pair of great letters from a pair of tight collaborators is likely to have diminished value because of redundancy.

D5. What about letters from Cornell faculty?

A letter from someone in the same graduate field can be valuable if it sheds light on collaborative skills or service qualities. An on-campus co-PI can certainly shed light on research contributions. Note that the act of

including a letter from a Cornell faculty member disqualifies that individual from serving on an ad hoc committee.

D6. What about letters from individuals who are unfamiliar with the tenure system?

The research credentials of the reviewer are what is important. It doesn't matter if they work in industry or a museum or haven't a clue about the American tenure system. However, it may be harder to interpret the enthusiasm (or lack of enthusiasm) in a letter from such a reviewer. Care must be exercised.

D7. How many letters from external reviewers should there be in the dossier?

"10" is a typical number but it varies across the colleges: AAP(at least 10), CALS(9-13), CAS(at least 7), JCB(at least 10), COE(10-14), CHE(9-13), ILR(10), LAW(8-10), CVM(8-13). Of course, the anticipated return rate needs to be factored into the equation. Thus, it may be necessary to send out a dozen requests in order to get nine responses. Steps that are taken to make up for a shortfall need to be documented.

D8. How should the department go about actually producing the list of external reviewers?

The candidate should produce a complete list C and (separately) the department should produce a preliminary complete list D. The department then uses these two lists to produce the final list. The dossier indicates which of the reviewers appear only in C, only in D, or in both C and D. This approach to reviewer selection prompts the candidate to think more broadly about what is to be deduced from the external letters. It also minimizes gamesmanship, e.g., "if I do not include this obvious reviewer from my list then the department will most likely pick that individual".

There are several numerical parameters that need to be publicized: the targeted length of the final list, the length of the candidate's list, and the minimum and maximum number from candidate reviewers that are to be included in the final list.

D9. How should the candidate go about producing a list of potential external reviewers?

The candidate should take into consideration the points that are raised in D3-D6. Letters from fellow assistant professors are likely to be disregarded. A letter from the thesis advisor is often a nice gesture but there may be a down-weighting of its impact because of potential conflict of interest. The candidate should be encouraged throughout the probationary period to connect and share their work with others who could evaluate their reputation as a researcher. These individuals can turn into the crucial external reviewers who can assess that reputation.

D10. What about the candidate's do-not-contact list?

Candidates should be allowed to submit such a list with a brief rationale next to each name. Several colleges mention the no-contact list in their documentation (AAP, CALS, CAS, JCB). If provided, the list should be part of the dossier. Legitimate reasons for including an individual on the do-not-contact list are (a) concern that the reviewer might "scoop" some partially developed research idea, (b) some kind of professional fight that occurred in the past, or (c) some kind of conflict of interest, e.g., both involved in competing proposals. It is not a sufficient grounds for elimination if the candidate believes an outside reviewer will not view his/her work favorably. The department is not bound to honor the do-not-contact list. However, it should provide an explanation in the dossier should it choose to use a reviewer from that list.

D11. Should the solicitation letter be public in template form and should its content be visible to the candidate and the tenured faculty?

As a service to its departments, several colleges provide advice on the form of the letter (CALS, CAS, JCB, CHE, ILR, CVM).

The solicitation letter frequently includes a high-minded paragraph or two that articulates how the department thinks about research and research trajectory. These encapsulations of department philosophy are important to share but they should not reflect a bias for or against the candidate's research area.

Even though the chair (or equivalent) is ultimately responsible for the letter, the candidate and the tenured faculty should be given the opportunity to review its contents and suggest edits. The goal is to prompt the generation of a fair and professional assessment of the academic record.

D12. Are there certain questions that should or should not be posed to the external reviewer?

Three situations require care. (a) It is believed that female candidates are disadvantaged when the reviewer is asked to weigh in on direct one-to-one comparisons. (b) All too often the question "Would X get tenure in your department" leads to more of a discussion about departments rather than the candidate. (c) References to other researchers who are in the same "age group" is risky because family leaves may torque how the reviewer "computes" productivity.

D13. How much of the dossier should be made available to the external reviewer and in what form?

The candidate has the right to determine the exact subset of their scholarly work that is accessible to the external reviewer. Recommendations to the candidate:

1. The chosen content should be discussed with the chair and/or mentor and it must include the CV.
2. Mindful that external reviewers have limited time, the organization of the chosen content should be easy to navigate with important items highlighted accordingly. Providing a single pdf with navigation links is a widely used format.
3. The research, teaching, and extension statements should be considered for inclusion as they provide handy overviews of your work and your philosophy.
4. If the visibility of a publication requires payment of a fee or the purchase of a book, then steps must be taken to provide access.
5. Do-not-share stipulations should attend those documents that are not (yet) intended for free public viewing.

6. External reviewers are not in a position to interpret course evaluations so that data should never be included. On the other hand, course syllabi should be considered for inclusion especially if they reflect a measure of innovation or some novel way of bringing research ideas into the classroom.

E. Student Letters on Teaching and Advising

Student letters and course evaluations provide snapshots of the candidate's teaching and advising skill set. The information must be carefully acquired and presented. [What the colleges have to say.](#)

E1. How should the peer review of teaching be organized and reported?

Most useful is to have several senior faculty members participate in the peer review to diffuse the workload and provide different points of view. Classroom observation by an experienced colleague is valuable as is an assessment of course materials and assignments. The peer reviewer(s) should produce a brief summary of their experience that is shared with the candidate included in the dossier.

E2. How should course evaluation data be presented?

Course evaluations vary from college to college but some concise summary needs to be provided for each course that is taught during the probationary period. The summaries should include the course evaluation response rate. The department should be ready to provide raw course evaluation data (e.g., written student comments) should it be requested at any time during the review process.

E3. Should some number of former students be asked to write a letter?

Letters from current and students is an essential part of the dossier. Letters from individuals suggested by the candidate need to be so identified. If the department selects a group of students to write teaching evaluations, then the methodology needs to be unbiased and documented. In all cases the solicitation letter should be included in the dossier. Sample questions to pose can be extracted from the course evaluation form. If students write about the candidate's teaching in a particular course, then they should be asked to share the grade that they received.

E4. How should the candidate's ability to supervise students in research and project work be assessed?

The previous suggestions apply but obviously a different set of questions need to be asked. Did you advance your skills as a researcher and/or independent thinker? Did the candidate provide sufficient guidance and encouragement? Was joint work properly portrayed as such?

E5. How should the candidate's mentoring and advising skills be assessed?

Mentoring is deeply connected to both teaching and research advising. Thus, a broad assessment of those skills is bound to shed light on the candidate's ability to act as a mentor. With respect to advising, degree programs require faculty to provide academic advice and support to its students. A sampling of letters from current and former advisees is the best way to evaluate the candidate's talents in this important direction.

F. The Department Deliberations

From the Faculty Handbook:

The aim of the review is to assess the achievements of the individual during his or her probationary period, as well as the promise shown for growth and further achievement. The detailed procedures by which the department conducts its assessment vary, but they must include the basic elements mentioned above as well as: (1) making the documentation gathered during the review available to the tenured faculty members of the department, (2) holding a meeting of the tenured faculty members for the announced purpose of discussing and voting on the promotion in question, and (3) taking the vote.

[What the colleges say about departmental deliberations.](#)

Evaluation Principles

F1. How do you evaluate research?

There are no formulas. Publication counts, citation counts, amount of external funding, number of walk-on-water support letters in the dossier, and other metrics do not by themselves signal excellence in research. Context has to be factored in, e.g., the reputation of the publication venue, the level of competition for grants, the stature and letter-writing habits of the external reviewers, etc.

[What the colleges say about research evaluation.](#)

F2. How do you evaluate teaching?

It is important to think broadly when it comes to teaching as there are many ways that the candidate can display excellence. Course evaluations are necessary but without context they are a deeply flawed mechanism for assessing excellence. This [Weiss Award](#) webpage provides a useful list of the many manifestations of teaching excellence. Systematic peer evaluation is a key component. (See B4). Expository talents that are observed by the external reviewers are relevant and should be noted.

[What the colleges say about the evaluation of teaching.](#)

F3. How do you evaluate service?

In terms of on-campus service, the quality of the candidate's participation on committees and in department meetings should be evaluated. The ability to work effectively with academic authorities (Chair, DGS, DUS, etc.) on issues that relate to the "greater good" is also important insofar as it signals an appreciation for collegiality.

Similarly, it is important for the candidate to have a modest record of service within their professional society (or equivalent). Leadership in a field requires the ability to identify quality research. That skill is developed in part by serving in capacities that require judgement of scholarly activity, e.g., reviewing papers that have been submitted to journals and conferences, reviewing applications that have been submitted to a fellowship board, reviewing proposals that have been submitted to a funding agency, etc.

[What the colleges say about service and external engagement.](#)

F4. How do you assess commitment to diversity and inclusion?

As with the evaluation of teaching, it is important to think broadly when assessing the candidate's commitment to diversity and inclusion as there are many ways to make meaningful contributions. The [guidance](#) that the [Office of Faculty Development and Diversity](#) provides search committees is relevant to the assessment of a candidate who is being considered for tenure.

F5. How should the external letter "rate of return" be interpreted?

When asked if they are willing to write a letter, a potential reviewer may decline for a number of reasons. (a) Too busy in general. (b) Too busy responding to similar requests from other schools. (c) Reluctant to write a negative letter. (d) Lack of familiarity with the candidate's work.

Correspondence from individuals who declined to serve as an external reviewers must be part of the dossier.

Likewise, if an individual agrees to write a letter but fails to deliver, then that fact needs to be reported together with all associated correspondence.

All instances of declining-to-write and failure-to-write must be taken at face value; no automatic conclusions should be drawn if there is a low return rate.

Meeting and Voting

From the Faculty Handbook: "There is no general prescription for interpreting the vote; some departments do not consider such a vote positive unless the margin of positive over negative votes is quite large. In any case, the department chairperson is not bound by the vote, though he or she must report it to the dean. The chairperson represents the department in making and explaining to the dean the department's recommendation for or against the promotion." [What the colleges say about "the vote"](#).

F6. When does the Chair call for the first meeting and how should it be structured?

Typically it is after all the external letters are in hand. However, it is sometimes a good idea to meet in advance of that to go over procedures.

F7. Should "straw polls" be part of the deliberations?

Straw polls that are taken before there has been a full airing of the dossier are strongly discouraged. The premature articulation of a "yea" or a "nay" by a senior faculty member can stifle discussion and work against the idea that the candidate deserves an objective day in court. On the other hand, a straw poll staged late in the process with no pressure to get on board with the majority may have some value if highlights complicated assessments that require further discussion.

F8. Should the final vote of the tenured faculty be by secret ballot?

It can be argued that secret ballot voting promotes "honest" voting in a climate that is free of intimidation. On the other hand, a case can be made that frank deliberations would make it very hard to have a truly secret ballot. Whatever the chosen voting mechanism, it must be publicized and consistent across cases.

F9. How should votes of those unable to attend be viewed?

Whatever the recommendation, it should provide an incentive to be physically present. We note that being available by Zoom is far better than nothing, but nowhere near as valuable as being in the room. Many units follow the custom of having separate tallies for those not present at the final vote. It doesn't discount the vote, it simply gives the reader of the dossier an extra piece of information when assessing the reasoning behind a vote. Being "in the room" builds collegiality.

Another practice is for the Chair to provide an "engagement table" in association with the vote tally. Each row would be associated with a tenured faculty member. The columns would tabulate things like "Attendance at Meeting 1 (Yes/No/Zoom)", "Attendance at Meeting 2 (Yes/No/Zoom)", "Read the External Letters", "Read the Research Statement", etc. Again, one must appreciate the shortcomings of such a mechanism. How do you assess contributions to a discussion? How much do you understand the research papers? Etc.

The Chair's Letter

What the colleges say about the Chair's letter.

F10. How should the final vote be interpreted by the Chair and others?

While the outcome of the vote is an important numerical fact, its interpretation is more complicated. All voting faculty should provide the chair with a confidential letter explaining the reasoning behind their vote. Those letters become part of the dossier and provide valuable information for the chair and for participants at the college and university stages of the review.

F11. Should the results of the final vote be known only to the chair and to those downstream in the review process?

The final tabulation that includes the votes of those unable to attend the meeting should be shared with the voting tenured faculty.

F12. Should the Chair's letter be shown to the tenured faculty voters before it is sent to the Dean?

Making the letter visible to the voting faculty for fact-checking is recommended as it guards against misrepresentation, supports the principle of transparency, and reinforces the idea that the decision is more than just the Chair's decision. The Chair has to make sure that the content of the letter respects the secret ballot principle (if that is the voting methodology) and that it does not exacerbate tensions should the case be controversial. Note that making the letter visible to the tenure faculty is simply for fact checking—it is not an invitation to serve as a co-author.

The visible letter can be accompanied by a confidential letter in which the Chair can offer to the Dean a personal assessment of the deliberations and vote.

G. The College Deliberations

What the colleges say about the ad hoc committee.

What the colleges say about the Dean's letter.

Note: The School of ILR and the Law School have special college level procedures because those units do not have departments.

G1. What is an ad hoc committee?

The Ad Hoc Committee is a small committee appointed by the Dean to assist in the evaluation of the dossier that has been forwarded from the Department.

G2. What are the rules associated with the size and make-up of the ad hoc committee?

From the Faculty Handbook: The ad hoc committee must consist of no fewer than three members, either from inside or outside the university. When feasible, the inclusion of external scholars is recommended. Members of the department from which the recommendation for tenure originated are not eligible to serve. If possible, at least one of the members of the committee should be selected from outside the college of the candidate.

G3. Is the Dean obliged to form an ad hoc committee?

From the Faculty Handbook: After the department's initial review and any reconsideration are completed, the decision is reviewed at the college level by the dean. If the department's recommendation is positive, the dean must appoint an ad hoc committee of faculty members outside the department to study the evidence and advise him or her in reaching a decision. Even if the department's recommendation is negative, the candidate may still request that the dean appoint the ad hoc committee

G4. How might the Dean charge the Ad Hoc Committee?

Modified from [CALS](#):

The charge to the committee should be broadly outlined by the dean. In making their decision, the members of the committee should take into account any criteria for promotion promulgated by the college or provided to the candidate in the original letter of appointment. In accordance with University policy, no consideration or discussion can be given to sex, marital status, race, ethnic background, religion, or age (although the length of time since the degree is a legitimate factor in considering the amount of work that has been accomplished.)

In its evaluation the committee uses the material supplied by the department and the dean. The committee members evaluate the evidence and the candidate's scholarly work to the degree they are qualified to do so. Expert opinion from scholars in the field outside Cornell may also be sought. The committee should focus on the excellence of the candidate's scholarship, teaching, and service including the contributions to diversity and equity that are realized through these activities. An assessment of the candidates trajectory and likelihood of making future contributions is also important.

To eliminate any confusion about the basis for its decision, the committee should concern itself only with the qualification of the candidate, not with other factors such as department staffing patterns, tenure ratios, or the future of a particular sub-discipline. If advice on these matters is required, the dean should seek it by another procedure or by giving a separate charge to the committee, requiring a separate report.

G5. Can the Ad Hoc committee request additional information?

If it believes that adequate information has not been supplied, it may request that the dean obtain additional information from internal or external sources.

G6. What happens if the Dean's decision is positive?

The Dean forwards the dossier to the Office of Provost that includes (a) the report of the Ad Hoc Committee and (b) a cover letter by the dean that substantiates the positive decision.

G7. What happens if the Dean's decision is negative?

From the Faculty Handbook section on [appealing a negative tenure decision](#).

If a dean reaches a preliminary decision to deny tenure to a non-tenured faculty member whose promotion to tenure has been recommended by his or her department, the dean within three weeks of that decision furnishes the candidate and the department with a preliminary written statement of the reasons for that decision and the nature of the evidence within the limits set by the need to preserve confidentiality.

For a two-week period following receipt of the dean's statement, the candidate and/or department has the opportunity to respond to the dean.

If, following this response, the dean is not persuaded to change the decision to deny tenure, the dean forwards the file, together with an explanation for the decision, to the provost.

H. University Deliberations

H1. What is FACTA?

The [Faculty Advisory Committee on Tenure Appointments](#) (FACTA) advises the Provost on all proposed promotions to and appointments with tenure as well as proposed denials of tenure by a dean after a positive recommendation from the department.

H2. How does FACTA work when the Dean's recommendation is positive?

If the Dean's recommendation is positive, it is reviewed by FACTA. Four members of the committee are chosen at random to read each file. If all four members are positive with no concerns or reservations, a positive recommendation is forwarded to the provost.

If any one of the four has reservations, each member of the full committee reviews the file. The committee's decision is sent to the Provost within four to six weeks of receiving the file.

H3. What happens if the Dean's provisional decision is negative?

If the Provost does not have any concern or reservation about the Dean's proposed decision, she or he informs the Dean, and the decision becomes final and subject to appeal.

If the Provost does have a concern or reservation, she or he forwards the file to FACTA, for consideration at a meeting of the full committee, following the procedures used by the committee in cases following positive recommendations by the Dean. After receiving FACTA's recommendation, the Provost consults with the Dean. Until the Dean has received a response from the Provost, the Dean's decision remains provisional.

H4. How does the case get to the Trustees?

A negative decision by the Provost is final and not subject to any further appeal process within the university. If the Provost's recommendation is positive, the Provost sends the recommendation to the [Board of Trustees](#) for final action several weeks prior to one of the Board's regular meetings. Tenure actions are considered at the October, January, March, and May meetings.

Following the meeting, confirmation of the tenure decision is communicated to the candidate as quickly as possible, typically via the following chain:

Trustees → provost → dean → chair → candidate

If the Trustee action is positive, then it is appropriate for the dean and/or chair to share the good news with the faculty. The President also sends a congratulatory letter to the newly tenured faculty member.

Tenure-related issues are covered in [Article XVII,2\(a\)-\(c\)](#) of the University Bylaws.