

Promotion and Tenure at Colorado State University

Rick Miranda, 2010

Introduction: why this document may be useful

Each year questions arise among faculty members, promotion and tenure committee members, and department chairs, concerning our promotion and tenure processes for regular faculty. These processes are admittedly a bit complex and there are elements of discretion in the system that make bright lines and formulaic answers difficult to achieve. However, in the main, we have a fair and balanced approach that is consistent with institutional expectations regarding tenure and promotion around the country for research institutions like our own.

The main elements of our process are in place for sound philosophical reasons and include (at least) two primary goals. The first is to build outstanding academic programs that will serve our students and our state and continue to increase in quality and reputation. The second is to support and guide, in a constructive way, the career development and success of our faculty, who we know are the main drivers in attaining the first!

In our efforts to achieve these goals, we work from a strong set of values as well. Of paramount importance to the institution is to enunciate and expect high standards of quality and then to use these standards as a guide for decision-making. Adherence to department codes helps to ensure this; also, external evaluators are essential in calibrating our standards to national norms. In addition, we insist on operating in a fair and transparent way with appropriate communication throughout. For example, we insist that all internal letters of recommendation (from the P&T Committee, Chair, and Dean) are available to the candidate, with options for comment. We strive to maintain a level of honest objectivity in our approach to the evaluation; throughout the process, we look to the written record and documented activity as the gold standard for evidence of quality. We honor the principle that the faculty members have primacy in the P&T decisions and we go to some lengths to place the greatest weight of evaluation with the expressions of the faculty will - through the formal votes and the written recommendation from the P&T Committee of the Department.

This document is intended to give an informal exposition of the process (especially with respect to the central administration's role); this includes an overall explanation of CSU's process and specific discussions about the P&T clock, early promotions, annual and midpoint evaluations, and external letters. I trust you will see that we have striven to design things so that our institution's goals and values are taken into account at every step. Following that, some calibration for the types of decisions that are being made across campus and centrally each year is presented with sections on promotion to associate professor, tenure, and promotion to full professor.

Process at CSU

Upon hiring, the offer letter should indicate the rank of the position and indicate the academic year that a consideration for promotion to the next rank (and tenure, if applicable) will be made. (This is the 'years of prior service credit' detail.) In the year of consideration, the faculty member will assemble their dossier (typically in the summer) and consult with the Chair and/or the department's P&T committee to develop a list of external reviewers from whom reference

letters are sought. There is a template for the dossier provided on the Provost's web site that should be used.

In the late fall, when the dossier and external letters are in hand, the Promotion and Tenure Committee of the Department, in conjunction with the faculty eligible to vote, will make a recommendation to the Chair. This follows procedures outlined in the departmental code, and different Departments have different processes for this step. The best practice seems to be that a small P&T Committee assists the candidate and the Chair in developing the materials, and that Committee makes a presentation to the full faculty who provide a recommendation via a written vote. The Chair of the P&T Committee then summarizes the case in a written memo to the Chair and reports the vote of the faculty.

Occasionally some of the faculty members in the department have serious conflicts of interest with respect to the case (e.g., a relative or a past formal advisor) and in these cases discussions should be had with the Chair and/or Dean that may lead to a recusal. It is of paramount importance in these steps that our faculty candidates have solid assurance of fairness and an expectation of balance in considering clear outlier opinions. Absent this, our commitment to the primacy of the faculty's decision comes with a responsibility to provide good-faith peer assessments based on the factual written record and not to abstain from making recommendations in difficult and/or contentious cases.

The Chair then writes a recommendation to the Dean. The Dean writes a recommendation to the Provost. Again, different Colleges have slightly different processes for this step, but it is typical that the Dean obtains advice from some group, either a college-level committee or the collection of associate deans and chairs. This assists the Dean in ensuring that processes have been correctly followed and helps to standardize (to the extent that this is possible) the metrics and criteria that different Department faculties may be employing in making their judgments. Following each recommendation, the faculty candidate has the right to supply a written comment which also becomes part of the dossier.

The full dossiers (without the appendices), including the external letters, and the recommendations from the faculty, Chair, and Dean, and any responses from the candidate, form the core of the material for the Provost-level review. We have started this year in asking that this material be provided electronically in a .pdf file. At the Provost's level, each dossier is studied by the Provost, the Vice-Provosts, and the VPR and that group meets and discusses each case. Cases that are straightforward are recommended to the President for action. Those that are not as straightforward are set aside for additional review by the Council of Deans.

Generally, we have asked for the additional review in the following situations:

- The case is early.
- The recommendations (faculty, chair, dean) are not in agreement.
- The recommendations are in agreement, in the negative.
- The faculty vote is not a strong majority.
- The external letters express some significant concerns.

Occasionally we bring cases to the Council of Deans even though we do not have significant concerns, but the case has some illustrative aspect that we could all benefit from exploring. To start the discussion, the case is presented by a member of the Council of Deans who is not involved in the decision – usually a dean from another college.

Following the Council of Deans discussion, the Provost makes a recommendation to the President. The Provost and President meet to discuss the cases and the President presents the final recommendations to the Board, generally at the May meeting.

The Clock

Our general policy here is that, after five years in rank, a promotion is considered not to be an early action. For the case of hiring an assistant professor, say in the summer of 2010, the promotion to associate professor would be considered in the fall of 2015. If successful, the promotion would be effective on July 1, 2016, and the rank of Associate Professor would begin then. In the summer of 2021, the faculty member will have had five years at this rank and could be considered for promotion to Full Professor in the fall of 2021 and this action would not be 'early'.

In the case above, the tenure decision would also be made as part of the same process in the 2015-16 year.

The period of time a tenure-track professor spends as a non-tenured assistant professor is called the probationary period and it is a rather strict expectation that this will not last more than six years (with the decision being made in that final sixth year). Our faculty manual provides a mechanism for extending the probationary period, with approval. One common reason might be the need to take family medical leave.

We occasionally hire assistant professors who have had some prior academic experience. We have the ability to shorten the probationary period and give "prior service credit" toward the promotion and tenure clock. This should be explicitly stated in the offer letter – we have been rather strict about not giving prior service credit retroactively after the hiring process.

I have written the above thinking mostly about the hiring of an assistant professor – but similar principles apply when we hire at the associate level. There is not a prescribed probationary period, but the expectations for when a tenure decision or a promotion (to full professor) decision could be made and not be considered early would optimally be spelled out in the offer letter.

Early Promotions

Our process does permit the consideration of early promotions, i.e., in a year earlier than that specified in the offer letter or earlier than five years in rank. Our philosophy has been that such a case must be "well above the bar" – it is not sufficient simply to have a solid case that would be clearly successful if it were on time. Moreover, the standard rises exponentially with the number of years that the case is early. A recent Dean has expressed the opinion that a one-year early case must be well above the bar, one of the best cases seen in the College in the recent past; and a two-year early case must require winning a Nobel Prize! That may be overstating things, but the principle of dramatically escalating the criteria the earlier the case is considered is certainly in force here at CSU.

The rationale is that, as an institution, one of the aspects of the tenure and promotion decision is that we are interested in the ability of the faculty member to sustain productivity over a long time - a career. The shorter the period that productivity is demonstrated, the weaker that 'sustainability' argument may be.

An early case should be discussed at both the Dean and the Provost level before being encouraged to be brought forth.

Annual and midpoint evaluations

Annual evaluations and the 'midpoint' evaluations during the probationary period are important documents for our assistant professors. They should serve to give valuable feedback on performance so that adjustments, if necessary, can be made well before the moment of truth. They also serve as a record of formal communication so that the institution can be sure that a consistent and accurate message to the faculty member was delivered. They become part of the promotion dossier.

The best practice for the annual evaluation is that it is written by the Chair, but has input, in writing, from the Promotion and Tenure Committee of the candidate each year. The midpoint evaluation may also include some external evaluations as well, but should certainly include the P&T Committee's input. For professors with significant interdisciplinary activity or joint appointments, input from others in a supervisory role for that part of the workload on campus should be sought as well. All of these elements can serve as part of an overall mentoring program in the department or college for untenured faculty.

It is essential that candidates be evaluated against their written position descriptions and effort distributions. Although these may be modified slightly year by year, we do not have a "one size fits all" philosophy in our faculty, and our evaluations should reflect that in a careful and individualized way.

External Letters

Our practice here at CSU is to ask for at least five letters of reference from external reviewers; five is a strict minimum, and more are encouraged. Each letter should be from an individual who clearly understands academia well, and if (as is usual) they are in the professoriate, they should be at a rank equal to or greater than the rank being sought. The paramount criteria should be the quality, experience, and reputation of the reviewer, and we should all strive to get the most distinguished possible reviewers to write. A brief description of each reviewer indicating why he or she is appropriate and why their opinion should be compelling should be included in the dossier. The reviewer should ideally be from a peer institution (at least). Occasionally, a nationally known scholar who all agree would be an appropriate reviewer is not at a peer institution and the dossier description should address this. We have a tradition of allowing the candidate to suggest reviewers, but of the five, no more than two should have been suggested by the candidate.

The external reviewers should have no professional relationship with the candidate. There are some situations where a letter from a co-author might be an appropriate addition to the list. Such a letter should be an 'extra' letter and clearly labeled as such in the dossier.

Promotion to associate professor

In this and the next sections I would like to delineate some of the criteria and issues that we look for in evaluating promotion and tenure proposals. I do not mean to co-opt the rightful pre-eminence of the faculty in doing this. However, I believe that it is instructive to see how a

common philosophy can express itself in a variety of ways across our inhomogeneous institution, and how we can arrive at decisions that are both fair and department-specific, in the main. In evaluating a successful and well-rounded faculty member, we have expectations in teaching effectiveness, in research and scholarly accomplishments, and in service contributions (any of which may include engagement activity). Let us consider each of these in turn.

Evidence of teaching effectiveness:

We strive to determine whether the candidate has demonstrated a commitment to, and a capacity for, delivering quality and quantity in their instructional efforts. Our mission as a student-centered university demands that we not undercut our institutional goals by compromising on this important dimension.

The types of evidence that demonstrate competence in the instructional role that are most convincing -include: thoughtful peer and student evaluations, especially when these are driven by a department-level program of assessment; estimates of student learning, both in the classes taught by the professor and in subsequent classes, if possible; enrollments in courses taught by the professor; well-organized syllabi that indicate course expectations with clarity; and indications of course development (even if minor). We also look for a certain amount of breadth in the instructional assignments: success at a variety of courses and at a variety of levels (lower division, upper division, and graduate) gives more confidence than evidence of effectiveness in only one course for several years.

Mentoring of graduate students is an important part of our role and we would expect to have participation in graduate student committees and evidence of the successful advising of Master's degree students to completion as part of the dossier. For PhD-granting programs, it may not be possible to have graduated a PhD student during the probationary period, but having PhD advisees is certainly a plus.

It can often be the case that the instructional roles that our assistant professors take on may be their first such experiences in their careers. Effective teaching is not easy, and although engaging a classroom can come more naturally to some than to others, some of our faculty can be expected to have a difficult experience at first. We should not, and do not, demand perfection at the outset, but when problems are identified, we expect to see acknowledgement and adjustment with the goal of continuous improvement. Professional development in this arena is encouraged and should be highlighted in the dossier.

Evidence of research and scholarly accomplishments:

Our overall goal in the evaluation of research and/or scholarly accomplishments is to obtain external validation of the quality and impact of the work. Quantity is also important, but I have been pleased to see, over many years, that here at CSU we have avoided a strict bean-counting approach to these matters, in the main.

It will come as no surprise that basic metrics for success include: refereed publications in respected national or international outlets, or published monographs as appropriate to the discipline; presentations at regional, national, and international conferences; invitations to visit and present at peer (or higher) institutions; external funding activity (writing of proposals, obtaining awards, and obtaining renewals); measured consideration of citations by other authors; meaningful collaborations whose value can be documented; activity in applied research (invention disclosures, patents, etc.); and development of a concrete portfolio of juried creative scholarship in (inter)national venues. These are quite differently expressed, and differently weighted, in different disciplines and departments – but the overriding philosophy of the external

validation of quality and impact and a measure of national recognition, as measured by evidence in the dossier, is present across the institution.

We are especially interested in knowing that the assistant professor has moved well past the research of their terminal degree and is successful at establishing new and productive lines of inquiry.

Here at CSU we have a well-deserved reputation for interdisciplinary activity. We value that, and at promotion and tenure time we are in a position to reward it. Such work can cause a CV to look a bit different and we know that. We would never devalue a strong grounding in one's discipline and the building of a disciplinary reputation with quality and impact. However, we do try to take interdisciplinary work into account in a positive way.

Evidence of service contributions:

Most service contributions break into two types: internal and external. Internal service might include membership on departmental, college, or university committees (a good example of the latter would be a Faculty Council committee). External service might include activity in one's professional society, assisting in organizing a workshop, or membership on a grant panel review.

It is common that during the probationary period, assistant professors are called on to do a less-than-average amount of service. Internally, department chairs and P&T committees tend to advise individuals to concentrate on teaching and research activities. Externally, one may not be well-known enough in the national community to attract such assignments. We generally take this into account – but we do expect to see some service roles being successfully dispatched. It is not healthy to isolate our assistant professors from the normal activities that promote the academic value of shared governance.

Evidence of engagement activity:

We have recently revised our Manual to allow departments to consider separately, engagement or outreach activities as part of the normal workload of a faculty member. In this dimension we will expect the same attention to providing evidence of the quality and impact of the work.

Tenure

We typically act on the promotion-to-associate and on the tenure question at the same time and with the same dossier (but not always). What is the difference? We know the practical result: promotion comes with a new title and generally a raise; tenure comes with the expectation of a long-term University commitment to the position. There are several ways to think about the difference in the criteria though, and I find it useful to think in the following terms.

Promotion should acknowledge prior accomplishment and be a recognition of achievement to date. The conferring of tenure is a significant commitment by the institution to the faculty member, for (hopefully) many years to come, and a strong element of the criteria for tenure is therefore the promise of future accomplishment. Now of course, some of the best evidence for future potential can be prior achievements, and the two decisions are naturally conflated. There is, though, a subtle distinction in play which is useful to keep in mind.

One way that we have seen this philosophy expressed is when we ask about someone who has demonstrated success at another institution or in another career path: can this faculty member

be successful here at CSU? For this reason, for example, we may well look more closely at the establishment of a CSU-based research and scholarship program for the tenure decision.

Additional questions that I have heard posed for a tenure case are: Would we be honored to have this person represent our department, our college, and our University? Will we be delighted to invest significant resources in the professional development of this candidate for the benefit of our students, our programs, and our institution? Will this action be improving the department, college, and university? Are we 'raising the average' in the unit by the tenure decision? If we are convinced that we are, then we start asking about how much. If we are not convinced, then we have problems; and at the Provost level, we will look very critically at cases that come without a strong positive consensus.

Promotion to full professor

A full professor at CSU is expected to be a university leader, contributing in a major way to the mission of the department, college, and the entire institution. Solid activity in most of the major sectors of activity (teaching, research, service, engagement) may be expected.

As noted above, promotion to full professor would generally begin to be considered after five years in the rank of associate professor. Much of the same philosophical criteria for teaching, research, service, and engagement that were noted above for promotion to associate professor are still appropriate: national/international recognition with external validation of the quality and the impact of the work, for example, in the research domain, is still paramount. One question does arise: is it enough to be successful at a level of productivity that was sufficient for promotion to associate professor for another five years of activity?

Generally, our answer to this is no: we look for more. There is an expectation of some qualitative difference in the scope and level of contributions for the promotion to full professor. For example, in the instructional arena, the types of activity that would be convincing of university leadership would include: teaching a broader range of classes; designing new courses, or participating substantially in curriculum development; mentoring of several PhD students to graduation. In research, one might expect: undertaking longer-range projects; the establishment of a substantial body of work that cements an expert's reputation; having multiple streams of inquiry in play; invitations to give keynote or other special presentations at conferences or universities, with national and international scope; leading interdisciplinary teams on more complex projects; collaborations with an expanding circle of colleagues, both in and out of CSU. Service contributions could include: chairing committees at the departmental and college levels; regular refereeing and panel reviewing; membership on editorial boards of good journals; leadership in professional societies.

Closing

This document was intended to clarify the basic elements of the process of promotion and tenure here at Colorado State with special attention paid to the central administration's role. In addition to procedural matters, we tried to expose some of the general criteria that have been used in the recent past to make decisions. Further specific information can be found in our Academic Faculty and Administrative Professional Manual, especially sections E.10-13.