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PROVOST SUMMARY ON PROMOTION AND TENURE PROCEDURES

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Decisions to promote faculty and to award tenure are among the most important judgments made by any university. Those decisions determine the future quality of academic programs. As a comprehensive university, our richness is defined in part by the many activities faculty members engage in across the institution. The variety of faculty assignments also contributes to the complexity of evaluating faculty performance. Therefore, the university must provide thoughtful, accurate and thorough guidance to all members of the academic community who participate in the evaluation of faculty members for promotion and tenure. This summary is intended to offer such guidance.

We reaffirm our commitment to the centrality of the educational unit faculty in the evaluation of faculty members for appointment, reappointment, promotion, and the granting of tenure. It is within the educational unit of the individual under review that the criteria for assessing faculty performance are best understood. As a promotion and/or tenure review dossier moves beyond the home unit and college, the Provost Appointment, Promotion and Tenure committee members and others look to the judgments of the educational unit faculty members, and of the external reviewers they invite to participate in promotion and/or tenure cases, for their principal guidance. Indeed, in tenure cases considerable deference will be shown by the Provost to the judgments emanating from the college, especially in cases where those college-level judgments (unit faculty, educational unit administrator, college advisory committee, and dean) are nearly unanimous, either for or against the granting of tenure or promotion. Considering this responsibility, educational unit faculties must engage in the evaluation of their members with an unwavering commitment to the objectivity, rigor, and integrity of the evaluative process, fully cognizant of the fact that a judicious and defensible outcome is predicated on the proper application of the university's policies and procedures on faculty evaluation.

Discipline-specific expectations are often articulated quantitatively and qualitatively (e.g., a scholarly book published by a reputable press, articles in top-tier journals, creative products, professional recognition through grants, invited presentations or performances, evidence of teaching excellence, named inventor on patents). All educational units in which faculty appointment is permitted have established statements for use in guiding evaluations for promotion and tenure, describing the evidences of activity in instruction, research and service that are appropriate to the field(s) represented in the unit.

Such unit-level evidences are useful, although sole reliance on the evidences in a formulaic manner is inadequate. Colleges and departments are advised to periodically review and revise their Statements on Evidences, with special considerations for the value of accomplishments in collaborative team science and the scholarship of engagement, as well as products of intellectual property (e.g., copyrights, patents, discoveries, films, works of art, tangible research property), etc. Please note that revisions of Statements on Evidences require approval by the Dean and Provost before they can be used.

What is paramount and should be the yardstick by which we evaluate excellence, is the impact of an

individual's work during the period in question - on their scholarly community, on students taught or on community members or patients/clients served, or on society through economic development or life-improving outcomes related to innovation and/or entrepreneurial activity. Critically important is the professional trajectory of the candidate and evidence that the individual will be able to sustain the required trajectory, as gleaned from the cumulative profile to date. Written evaluations from individual faculty members, external reviewers, advisory committees, educational unit administrators and deans are most helpful if they are candid and balanced, judiciously identifying and discussing areas of strength and weakness in the candidate's record.

This university's approach to faculty tenure and promotion is based on an underlying assumption of enlightened recruitment, appropriate support and mentoring, and a presumption of success. It is also based on the expectation of significant achievement appropriate to a flagship, land-grant, research university of high ranking. These expectations must be well articulated, communicated, and consistently applied. As the [Administrative Regulations](#) make clear, time in rank is not an appropriate evaluative measure. A faculty member should be considered for promotion or tenure when their educational unit faculty and administrator believe that the individual's record of professional accomplishments across all areas of assigned activity has met or surpassed the appropriate criteria as codified in university regulations and spelled out in the unit's written statements on evidences and/or the position description (but not later than the sixth year for probationary faculty being considered for the granting of tenure). Furthermore, we expect that a faculty member's Distribution of Effort (DOE) has been assigned in a manner commensurate with promotion/tenure requirements.

To maintain an atmosphere of transparency in the promotion and tenure process, this policy memo also is posted publicly and shared with the members of the college advisory committees and Provost Appointment, Promotion and Tenure Advisory Committee.

I strongly encourage everyone involved in the evaluation process to review [AR 2:1](#) and *other regulations related to the appropriate faculty title series* under Chapter 2 - Academic Appointment (Faculty). This memo and additional information on [faculty appointment, promotion and tenure](#) can be found at the website maintained by the [Office for Faculty Advancement](#).

Preparation of the Review Dossier

Office for Faculty Advancement offers training workshops throughout the year on dossier construction covering the responsibilities of all parties and expectations in each title series. Recordings of these trainings are available at: <https://ofa.uky.edu/news/2025-promotion-and-tenure-workshops>

The educational unit administrator, working closely with the dean's office, is responsible for preparing a thorough and accurate dossier in a timely manner. The [Dossier Checklist](#) enumerates the items to be included in the dossier and the order in which those documents shall appear. In addition, the faculty candidate is responsible for submitting in a timely manner those documents identified in *AR 2:1 Appendix II (Matrix of Dossier Contents)*, including the candidate's [teaching portfolio](#). When done correctly, preparing the dossier is straightforward, since it largely consists of materials accumulated during the probationary period by the candidate and educational unit administrator.

I strongly encourage educational unit administrators to give a candidate the opportunity to review all materials in the dossier *before* the external evaluative letters are solicited and the dossier is submitted to the appropriate unit faculty members for their evaluation. If there is a dispute about the inclusion or exclusion of some documents, the matter shall be referred to the appropriate college-level administrator, who shall consult with the Office for Faculty Advancement. It is the responsibility of the educational unit administrator and dean to ensure that no procedural errors occur in the evaluative process.

A candidate under review may also submit to the educational unit administrator a list of University of Kentucky faculty employees who are not members of the candidate's primary appointment unit from whom the educational unit administrator shall request letters of evaluation on behalf of the candidate. No evaluative letters, with of course the exception of those required from qualified unit faculty, are to be included in the dossier without the express written consent of the candidate (this consent, however, need not be included in the dossier but rather should be maintained in departmental records).

It is **not appropriate** to add information to the dossier after it has been reviewed at any level. If new information arises (e.g. receipt of new award, or other similar recognition) the Associate Provost for Faculty Advancement must first be consulted as to whether the additions can be included. If additions to a dossier are permitted, then all prior reviewers must be provided the opportunity to amend their reviews based on that new information.

Selection of External Evaluators

Educational unit administrators are responsible for asking all evaluators to make a substantive, professional judgement of the value and significance of a candidate's performance. All evaluators should also be reminded that a university must be one institution in society where professional judgement of a colleague's work is offered without malice and without fear of retribution. The courts have made clear that judgements that are professionally rendered and free of personal bias are protected. When selecting letter writers external to the university for participation in tenure and promotion cases, an educational unit administrator must apply the policies and procedures enumerated in [AR 2:1-1](#) *Section VII.G*.

The educational unit administrator shall assure all evaluators that their letters will be handled in a confidential manner. However, the educational unit administrator must inform all evaluators that, upon request, the candidate has the right to review all letters placed in the individual's dossier. Please ensure that all letters received from external reviewers, those external to the university and those external to the educational unit, are included in the dossier, and are made available to the consulted unit faculty **before** their evaluative letters are due. Also note that an external reviewer's letter that arrives after the consulted unit faculty letters are due shall not be included in the dossier unless that dilatory letter is shared with the appropriate unit faculty and those faculty are given the opportunity to revise their previously submitted evaluative letters.

Each dossier is required to have a minimum of 6 outside evaluator letters. At least 2 letter writers must have been recommended by the candidate and at least 4 are to be selected by the educational unit administrator. In addition, the following considerations for the selection of, and guidance conveyed to outside evaluators (whether recommended by the candidate or selected by the educational unit administrator) are suggested:

- they are recognized experts in their disciplines.
- they are at peer or benchmark research institutions.
- they stand at arms-length from the candidate.

In general, an outside evaluator may be considered as at "arms-length" if the faculty candidate would not have a conflict of interest with the evaluator when applying for a federal grant. Therefore, thesis and dissertation advisors or committee members, post-doctoral supervisor(s), mentors, and current faculty colleagues are not considered to be at "arm's length." Co-authors and major research collaborators and former faculty colleagues are also not "arm's length" unless the most recent association occurred more than 5 years prior to the promotion and/or tenure attempt. Letters from persons who do not know the candidate, but who may have a clear sense of the significance of the candidate's qualifications, are of the greatest value.

I encourage educational unit administrators to ask candidates beforehand if there are external

reviewers whom they wish to avoid for justifiable concerns about conflicts of interest or potential bias. The unit/college is free to discuss and decide whether to accept any or all the restrictions offered by a candidate. Some educational unit administrators report difficulty in obtaining external reviewers willing to write, so identifying these evaluators early is highly recommended. Most educational unit administrators report greater success when reaching out to prospective external evaluators very early in the promotion cycle.

The educational unit administrator (and perhaps the dean) must explain in their letter any deviations from the expected norms identified above (e.g., the leading expert in the world within the candidate's field happens to be at a four-year college, or why the inclusion of outside evaluators from prestigious baccalaureate institutions is appropriate for a review candidate whose research focuses on the scholarship of pedagogy).

Promotion and Tenure Procedures for Teaching STS Faculty:

In choosing external reviewers for Special Title Series faculty members, chairs might need to use a bit more diligence to ensure that the external reviewers are faculty members who are known to be advanced in their field as relevant to the candidate's area of responsibilities (for example, if the candidate is primarily teaching, an appropriate reviewer may have published pedagogically oriented research articles; if the candidate is primarily providing clinical service, then documentation of the reviewer's clinical expertise would be expected). The reviewers might not necessarily be faculty members at R1 universities. Instead, the chair may need to look for reviewers from institutions that specialize in undergraduate education or clinical service, as fits the case. External reviewers should be sent the teaching statement and all evidence of teaching excellence or clinical excellence (e.g., the complete teaching portfolio; redacted clinical case reports) in addition to the research statement and materials. Please advise candidates to include as much evidence of teaching or clinical excellence as possible in their portfolios. The chair should also be sure to educate the external reviewers about what the STS title series means in our university and what the faculty member is actually being judged on with regard to promotion and tenure. In other words, explicitly ask the reviewers to address the candidate's work to the best of their ability. Similarly, internal writers in the department should be reminded of this as well.

Chairs may also rely more heavily than is typical on reviewers/letter writers who are external to the department but internal to the university. For example, they may ask faculty members in other departments who have collaborated with the tenure candidate or who are familiar with their work to evaluate the candidate. Remember, these individuals *may only be asked to write letters if the candidate approves*.

Solicitation of Letters

To ensure consistency and fairness throughout the process, the educational unit administrator shall solicit all letters from external evaluators. The educational unit administrator shall be responsible for:

- Sending the candidate's CV, personal statements about the individual's major areas of assignment, and samples of work (e.g., publications or other products as appropriate). As delineated in [Appendix II \(Matrix of Dossier Contents\)](#) of AR 2:1, the educational unit administrator and the candidate under review have a shared responsibility for the assembly of the review packet that the educational unit administrator sends to the outside evaluators.
- Enclosing a copy of the appropriate statements of evidences and university criteria for promotion and tenure (see [AR 2:2-1](#), [AR 2:3](#), [AR 2:4](#) and [AR 2:7](#)).
- Asking the evaluator to describe any professional or personal relationships they have/had with the candidate.
- Requesting a brief biographical sketch (not a CV) of the evaluator. (Note: If an external

evaluator submits his or her CV, please use it to prepare a brief biographical sketch for inclusion in the dossier).

- Asking the evaluator to analyze the candidate's contributions in the appropriate work areas (e.g., instruction, research, and service); and to indicate the extent to which the candidate's accomplishments have contributed to the candidate's scholarly field.
- Asking the evaluator whether the candidate's work in the areas that the outside reviewer has been asked to evaluate meets or exceeds the unit's statements of evidences for promotion and/or the granting of tenure. Since institutional expectations differ, *the educational unit administrator should not ask the evaluator whether the candidate would receive tenure at the evaluator's institution.*
- A recommended template for letters to external evaluators may be found [here](#).

Educational Unit Responsibilities

Once the external evaluations are received and added to the dossier, the educational unit administrator, in accordance with University regulations and any applicable policies in the educational unit's *Rules*, shall solicit written judgements from [consulted individuals](#) on matters of promotion and/or tenure. It is a faculty responsibility to provide independent, written judgement on promotion and/or tenure dossiers. Templates and pro forma letters should not be used. Faculty should clearly state their opinion, for or against the promotion and/or tenure, and why.

The educational unit administrator shall produce a thoughtful, balanced and comprehensive evaluation of the candidate's record, informed by the letters from outside reviewers and unit faculty and guided by the unit's statements on evidences. The educational unit administrator's letter shall also address, where appropriate, the following:

- significance of the candidate's DOE in judging the quality and quantity of the individual's record of accomplishment in each area of assignment;
- split views for and against promotion and/or tenure, as reflected in the letters submitted by external evaluators or the unit faculty;
- the evidences that speak to excellence within the candidate's interdisciplinary area for those individuals whose work is highly interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary.

The educational unit administrator should remember that a dossier will be evaluated by university colleagues from other academic departments. Therefore, the educational unit administrator is responsible for educating faculty reviewers outside of the candidate's home department whose disciplines share equally rigorous but different evaluative measures for judging excellence and impact. The educational unit administrator's responsibility goes beyond a summary of the opinions of the unit faculty to include the perspective of the administrator and any additional information that helps to explain key issues related to the faculty.

Documenting the Procedural Steps in the Conduct of the Review

The educational unit administrator shall include in the dossier an outline of the procedural steps that were followed in the conduct of the unit-level review process. When the educational unit administrator is advised by a unit-level faculty committee, the members of such an advisory committee shall be identified in the dossier by the educational unit administrator. In addition, if member(s) of a committee have a conflict of interest, they must be excused from all deliberations of the committee discussions about the candidate. Furthermore, the committee should explain who was recused and why; and the educational unit administrator should document this as well.

Documenting and Explaining Differences of Practice and Opinion

Faculty activities in instruction, research and service vary considerably across colleges, departments, disciplines, and subfields. While the custom in one discipline might be for the lead author to be the

most junior, in another it might be an alphabetical list. While a student evaluation score below the unit's overall norm might be typical for teaching a notoriously difficult or large introductory course, this score might be seen as problematic in other courses. The educational unit administrator and dean have a joint responsibility to identify and carefully explain those differences in their evaluative letters. Such explanations become particularly critical when the candidate works in an emerging or highly interdisciplinary field. In dealing with collaborative work, the educational unit administrator should solicit specific comments about the *role* of the candidate in the collaboration and the significance of the candidate's contributions. Educational unit administrators may also consider how performance evaluations, progress reviews, and other evaluative measures (e.g., teacher course evaluations, patient satisfaction scores) are contextualized for women and for underrepresented minority faculty members.

Furthermore, in contentious cases that are characterized by a mix of favorable and unfavorable judgments at the unit and college levels, the educational unit administrator and dean must include in their letters of evaluations balanced and thoughtful commentaries on the strengths and weaknesses of the case.

Good Practices in Promotion and Tenure Evaluation: Clarity, Consistency, Candor, and Confidentiality

- The judgements from all evaluators should provide a balanced analysis.
- The educational unit administrator is expected to explain the reasoning behind divergent opinions among the unit faculty. Similarly, it is incumbent upon the dean to explain (1) the college advisory committee's response to negative or mixed evaluations expressed in letters from unit faculty and (2) a negative response from a college advisory committee to a positive evaluation emerging from the unit.
- Unit faculty, college and Provost advisory committees and faculty administrators must strive for unerring fidelity to the policies and processes on promotion and tenure evaluation as articulated in [Governing Regulations](#), [Administrative Regulations](#) and established unit/college procedures.
- The contents of the tenure dossier must contain the proper information as specified in the [university regulations](#), and those contents must be retained after the decision as described by the [regulations](#).
- An institution will likely create a more positive environment for faculty retention by providing tenure-eligible faculty with clear explanations of the requirements for tenure and clear advice about their progress.
- Letters solicited by the educational unit administrator in addition to those for which consultation and written judgments are required by regulation should only be included with the documented concurrence of the candidate and should be placed under a separate tab in the dossier. Examples include letters from collaborators from other UK educational units or from entities external to the university, emeritus faculty members, faculty with a secondary appointment in the candidate's home department, etc.

Pursuant to [Kentucky Revised Statutes KRS 61.878\(3\)](#), the written judgments of persons consulted in connection with appointments, promotions, and tenure decisions are handled in a confidential manner. However, under the Kentucky Open Records Law, a faculty employee undergoing a personnel action (e.g., tenure, promotion, reappointment, etc.) is entitled to inspect at any time the entire contents of a dossier that was compiled for the purpose of conducting an evaluation of the faculty person's performance, including all letters of evaluation submitted by faculty reviewers. Against this backdrop of access granted by law to the candidate under review, all persons who are asked to participate in the review of an individual must be diligent in maintaining confidentiality with respect to the materials and conversations related to that review. After the decisional process on a tenure and/or promotion case is complete, all letters of

evaluation must be placed in the candidate's Standard Personnel File. A faculty employee must have unimpeded access to his or her Standard Personnel File.

Proposed 2026 – 2027 Calendar:

Spring - Summer 2026:	Assembly of dossier and solicitation of external evaluations
Summer - Fall 2026:	Department and college reviews of dossier
January 8, 2027:	Recommendations for promotions and/or tenure due to the Office of the Provost
March 26, 2027	Provost Appointment, Promotion and Tenure Advisory Committee recommendations due to the Provost
April/May	Letters to deans notifying of final decisions