

# Navigating the Tenure & Promotion Process: Advice to Candidates April 28, 2009

Prepared by the University Committee on Tenure & Promotion (UCTP)

## Candidate's Responsibility

The primary responsibility for preparing the file and making the case for promotion and/or tenure is on you, the candidate.

- You must thoroughly document your activities and accomplishments in the areas of teaching, service, and research/performance. Investing the time and effort to do this well can make the difference between success and failure.
- The candidate's personal statement is an important part of the file and it would be very unwise to omit it (even though page TP-20 says that this is *optional*). It gives you the opportunity to explain aspects of your record that may be unclear, such as your role in collaborative or co-authored work. It gives you the opportunity to address any aspects of your record that might be perceived as weaknesses by reviewers outside your unit. And it gives you the opportunity to interpret your record and emphasize how it meets unit criteria. When a question arises in the minds of UCTP members, a primary place to seek the answer is the candidate's personal statement.
- Remember that many people who will read your file, including the majority of the people on UCTP, will have no familiarity with your area of scholarship or the culture of your discipline.

## Centrality of Unit Criteria

The unit criteria will be the reference point for evaluation of your file by the provost and the UCTP (as well as the external referees who will be sent a copy of the relevant criteria and asked to evaluate you with reference to those criteria).

- Be sure that the criteria included in the file and used by all persons reviewing your record are the **correct** ones.
  - For tenure, the criteria to be used are those that were in effect at the time you were hired.
  - For promotion, independent of tenure, the criteria to be used are those in effect at the time promotion is sought.
  - There is one exception: Faculty hired into the tenure track prior to January 1, 1995, may choose to be considered under pre-1995 criteria.
- Failure to use the correct criteria may lead to remanding of the file back to the unit and possibly the solicitation of new referees' letters. Almost every year, files are sent back because of the use of the wrong criteria.
- Unit criteria only become official when they are approved by UCTP. Your unit may have started a revision process before you were hired but they were approved only after you were hired. These revised criteria do not apply to you.
- The information in the file should be aimed at demonstrating that the *applicable* criteria for tenure and/or promotion have been met.

## **Hiring Date**

Since the correct criteria depend on when you were hired into the tenure track, it is important that you compare your hiring date with the date of the criteria. There are two tenure start dates per year: January 1 and August 16.

## **Scholarship**

- It is vital that your role in collaborative research and co-authored publications be made clear. Otherwise, this work may be discounted by some reviewers. Letters from your collaborators addressing this issue are helpful. You should describe your contribution in your personal statement and it may also be useful to indicate percentage contribution to co-authored papers in the refereed publications list.
- The way in which paper authorship is organized differs from discipline to discipline. In some cases, authors are simply alphabetical, in others the senior author may be last and it is customary to put a graduate student or post-doc who did the work first. This should be stated in, for example, the personal statement.
- In some fields, single author papers are the norm; in others such as many of the sciences, they are comparatively rare. It would be wise to clarify this in your personal statement.
- It is particularly important that your contribution be documented when you have continued to work with your dissertation chair or others at the institution from which you obtained your degree or at which you were a post-doctoral fellow. The file should demonstrate the originality of your work to the extent possible.
- The letters of external referees are given a great deal of weight in the review process. In some units, some of these referees are, or may be, chosen by the candidate. You should be aware that some reviewers of the file discount positive comments by referees chosen by the candidate, and should bear this in mind when making decisions about nomination of referees.
- Make sure that publications are accurately represented on the form (e.g., books vs. book chapters, refereed vs. non-refereed, sole authored vs. co-authored). Authors should be listed in the same order that appears in the publication. Inaccuracies give the impression that you felt it necessary to pad your record.

## **Teaching**

- The file must contain a summary of your teaching evaluations. This will be written by a senior member of your department. The teaching evaluations generally play an important role in assessment of your teaching; therefore, you should review the summary and make sure that it presents a clear and accurate portrayal.
- If your evaluation scores are compared with some other group of scores, make sure that any such group is clearly identified – e.g., the unit average, the unit average for undergraduate courses, the unit average for all sections of the same course, etc.
- Supervision of PhD students is another important aspect of teaching. To allow meaningful evaluation of your record in this area, be sure that information is provided about the number of PhDs typically graduated by your unit. If you are an assistant professor and it is not usual for assistant professors to have PhD students in your unit, this should be pointed out.
- In some instances, it may be useful to provide information about the proportion of students who completed the evaluation forms.

## **Service**

This comprises service to your department, to your college, and to the university as a whole (in the form of committees etc.). There may also be reference in the criteria to service to the profession (e.g. participation in your professional society, work on grant study sections, organization of

conference sessions etc). Normally service is emphasized less than teaching and scholarship, especially in tenure and promotion to associate professor decisions.

### **Organization and Contents of the File**

- To assist reviewers in finding information in the file, use tabs to identify the material in each section. The tabs should contain words as well as section numbers (the Provost's Office has a model file with such tabs).
- Solicitation of letters of support by the candidate is generally not worth the time and effort. However, there are exceptions in letters that address specific issues in the file:
  - Your contribution to co-authored publications
  - Your contribution to multi-investigator grants and grant applications
  - Your contribution to team-taught courses
  - Why the evaluation scores do not accurately reflect the quality of your teaching.

### **Going Up Early**

- Early awards of tenure and promotion are unusual, and some reviewers look for particularly high achievement from early files. If you have not completed the probationary period and have a compelling reason for not waiting another year, be sure to document thoroughly why an early decision is warranted.

### **A Final Reminder**

PLEASE:

- ❖ Do not send in a badly organized file
- ❖ Run the spell checker! Typographical errors make you look bad and are interpreted by some reviewers as a lack of a professional approach
- ❖ Make sure all parts of the file are included
- ❖ Make sure they are in the correct order
- ❖ Correct tabs make things easy to find

### **Further information**

Faculty Manual (<http://www.sc.edu/policies/facman/>)

USC T&P web site (<http://www.sc.edu/tenure/>)

UCTP Guide to Criteria and Procedures (Goldenrod Manual)  
<http://www.sc.edu/tenure/doc/goldenrod.pdf>

Current criteria: <http://www.sc.edu/tenure/unitcriteria.shtml> (N.B. The current criteria may not apply to you)

### **Contact**

Richard Hunt: [richard.hunt@uscmed.sc.edu](mailto:richard.hunt@uscmed.sc.edu), 803 733 3218  
(2008-2009 chair, UCTP)  
James Knapp: [knapp@geol.sc.edu](mailto:knapp@geol.sc.edu), 803-777-6886  
(2009-2010 chair, UCTP)