

Important process practices for Tenure and Promotion Committees Guidance from a campus-wide workshop for members on P&T committees at RIT

Context and objectives: In September 2014, the Office of the Provost sponsored a two-hour workshop for all faculty who are members of college tenure and promotion (P&T) committees. The purpose of the workshop was to focus on good process practices for committees to follow. Because the campus is transitioning between versions of the current tenure policy (RIT policy E5.0), the workshop only addressed processes relevant to the current (non-revised) policy.

The key objectives were:

- Facilitate a sharing of information on P&T committee practices;
- Articulate upper administration ideas on important process practices for P&T committees; the focus is on process and not criteria;
- Undergird core responsibilities and practices;
- Provide guidance and not prescription.

The purpose of this document is to provide this guidance in written form and to provoke discussion as colleges make revisions to college policies on tenure.

The guidance on good process practices for P&T committees is divided into two parts – topics where there is strong consensus and topics that require more discussion. It should be noted that committee members are strongly advised to follow their current written college policies and practices, especially where these policies may be in conflict to the guidance below. However, colleges are encouraged to revise their policies to bring them in line with these good practices.

Agreed-Upon Overall Committee expectations: The following topics have the unanimous support of the deans and provost:

- Dossier responsibility: The candidate is responsible for ensuring that required documentation (with the exception of the external reviewer letters) is included in the dossier and submitted on time. Granting a submission extension to a candidate is not appropriate.
- Dossier additions: Additional materials should not be added to a dossier after the dossier is submitted. In cases, where a candidate receives notification regarding such things as a publication of a book or article or receipt of an honor after the

- dossier submission date, the candidate can send this additional information to the Committee chair. At a minimum, the chair of the committee should acknowledge receipt of the information and communicate that the committee will determine whether or not the additional information will be considered.
- Confidentiality: No portion of the committee discussion or confidential materials included in the dossier may be shared except when needed by the dean and provost.
 - Objectivity: The committee deliberation and outcome must be objective and based on the materials of the dossier and college expectations and University criteria.
 - Role of External letters: External letters are required and useful for the review; these letters should primarily address the quality of the scholarship.
 - Candidate Interview Option: The committee should not interview candidates. If additional information is needed, the committee chair should communicate with the candidate in writing.
 - Committee Review of Candidate Documentation: It is expected that each member of the committee will conduct his or her own review of the candidate materials. It is not acceptable to assign this task to one member of the committee nor is it acceptable to have each piece of evidence reviewed by a single individual. All materials should be reviewed by all members of the committee to ensure that multiple informed perspectives are considered during discussions.
 - Committee Recommendation Letter: Committee letter must be unambiguous in communicating the summative evaluation of the candidate's qualifications for tenure. The committee decision must be based on evidence, university criteria and college expectations.
 - Committee Recommendation Letter Writer: The representative from the candidate's department should not write the committee recommendation letter.
 - Dissenting Vote(s): If the vote of the committee is not unanimous, the letter must address issues raised by those dissenting; however, a separate dissenting letter is not appropriate.
 - Policy/Procedural Precision: To be fair to every candidate, it is imperative that the committee follow policy and procedures in an exacting fashion in order to ensure that no violation of due process occurs or grievable issue arises.

Open discussion topics: The following topics should be discussed within a committee prior to the start of dossier review:

- Departmental Peer Recommendations (Votes): What type of supporting rationale should the tenure committee look for in these recommendations? Often, department faculty write one or two lines in each of the performance categories...is that sufficient? If the committee weighs departmental peer recommendations differently based on the evidence that the peer uses to make judgment, should the peers know this at the beginning of the process?
- External Letters: What should the committee look for and/or consider in the external letters? The quality of the institution of the reviewer? The rank or stature of the reviewer? The thoroughness of the letter to assess quality of the

scholarship? Should these or other standards be applied to all 4 letters or only those reviewers recommended by the candidate?

- Sources of Evidence: Should the committee decide what weight to give to different sources of evidence? If yes, how should this determination be done?
- Annual Reviews: What role does the annual evaluation play in committee decisions? Should the mid-tenure review have more or less importance than annual reviews?
- Departmental Peer Recommendation/Voting: Policy dictates that every committee member must vote and the vote must either support the granting of tenure or the denial of tenure. The committee should discuss whether the department representative has the right to also cast his or her vote as a faculty departmental peer or should recuse him/herself from the departmental recommendation stage.
- Unconscious bias: It is strongly advised that the committee discuss the topic of unconscious bias prior to deliberations. What are some signs of such bias? When processes are biased in subtle, often invisible ways, or when processes fail to provide equal protection and transparency for all faculty, they may result in inequity that serves to maintain the status quo. Committees are encouraged to consider several high-quality videos on this topic; for example, the [video](#) from Ohio State is highly recommended.
- Collegiality: Collegiality can be used in decision-making but evidence must be presented as to how the lack of collegiality has undermined effectiveness in the three areas of faculty work – teaching, research and service. Collegiality may not be used as a fourth category of expectations. What types of evidence would the committee consider to demonstrate how lack of collegiality undermines the candidate's effectiveness? Could unconscious bias creep into discussions of collegiality?

The work of the promotion and tenure committees is extremely difficult and important; it has tremendous implications for candidates, as well as for the college and university. The attention to these guidelines, when not in conflict with written policy, will support a climate of thorough and thoughtful objectivity.