White Paper
Revised Tenure and Promotion Procedures
Spring 2019

What is the scope of the proposed policy? The proposed policy applies to the procedure for tenure and/or promotion. It does not apply to the substantive criteria for tenure and promotion. The proposed policy creates a single, unified process for tenure and promotion. If adopted, this procedure will apply at all levels (unit, college and university). It will supersede all provisions in college and department/program bylaws regarding the process for tenure and promotion. The policy brings together provisions that were spread out over four or five policies regarding the timing of tenure and promotion, extensions for promotion and tenure and the procedure (such as the required documents that must be submitted and the composition of committees).

Why do we need a revised tenure and promotion procedure policy? UI has developed a complex web of overlapping and inconsistent policies regarding the process for promotion and tenure. Not only have our policies on tenure (FSH 3520) and promotion (FSH 3560) become very complex, they also have subtly diverged from each other and become inconsistent with other UI policies such as the ranks and responsibilities policy (1565), the position description policy (3050), and the annual evaluation policy (3320). The complexity in the process makes it difficult for us to follow our own policies. We make mistakes on basic issues such as the composition and role of committees, and the timing of submissions.

The complexity also creates problems for faculty members seeking tenure and promotion. They often find the process daunting, off-putting and unnecessarily duplicative. It is too easy for candidates to make mistakes in their packets or to be victimized by unwitting mistakes made at their departments and colleges. The process gets in the way of candidates putting forth their strongest case for tenure and/or promotion.

The process is also unnecessarily time consuming and stressful for candidates and for faculty involved in reviewing candidates. It often requires an inefficient investment of faculty time in service on review committees and to mentor candidates by trying to figure out exactly what must be submitted, when, and by whom. Hours are wasted and delays occur, trying to reconcile policies and seeking clarification from department chairs, deans, the faculty secretary’s office, the provost’s office and general counsel.

The complexity of the process makes it difficult for the faculty secretary’s office, provost’s office, and general counsel to support faculty, departments and colleges as they work to advance candidates. The provost’s office is also placed in the confrontational position of having to “police” an overly complex and ambiguous process. Provost office staff must be familiar with every set of unit and college bylaws. The provost’s office often ends up intervening in the process after the fact, where bylaws are inconsistent with the FSH and/or unit and college bylaws are inconsistent with each other. This can upend a candidate’s application. Because of the complexity and diversity of college and unit procedures, the provost is unable to develop a single, coherent set of guidelines for candidates, departments and colleges to support tenure and promotion. It is also impossible for the provost’s office to provide effective training and support to unit and college administrators and staff. The result is that many mistakes are made every year.

The problems become the most severe when disputes arise. It is true that many faculty navigate the tenure and promotion process successfully. Other faculty present such strong cases for tenure and promotion that any mistakes in the process are harmless. The biggest problems with our process arise
when an application for tenure and promotion is perceived to be weak (legitimate or not). Then, mistakes and ambiguities in the process can become surrogate reasons to deny promotion and tenure, distracting from the substance of the application. The flip side of the problem is also true. Mistakes in the process can become the basis by which an un-meritorious candidate leverages additional time or opportunities to present a successful application.

The complexity of the process also undermines our internal faculty appeals process and creates problems for both faculty and the university when litigation erupts. Ambiguities and complex nuances in the system create increased numbers of cases in which the various review committees and administrators disagree with each other. Each party to such a dispute relies on different nuances in the policy, often resulting in impasse. The FAHB is placed in a difficult position as it tries to apply the various conflicting rules and procedures. It is often left with no clear way to interpret the web of policy implicated in a case. This can mean that the FAHB’s recommendation can appear to be unprincipled or capricious – just one more conflicting take along side all the other committees and administrators. As a result, in such cases, the president is more likely to decline the guidance of the FAHB and undertake his or her own independent evaluation. These problems are magnified, if litigation follows.

What policy changes are included in the proposal? The proposal includes many small changes in procedure. However, it also includes several relatively significant changes in UI policy and procedure regarding the tenure and promotion process.

1. **Promotion & Tenure Linked.** The new policy explicitly links promotion and tenure. Our current policy does not directly make this link, although, for the most part, our practice has been to link promotion and tenure. The goal of linking tenure and promotion in this policy is to reduce extra reviews, committees, and administrative overhead. The linkage will also resolve unusual situations that can arise such as what happens when an assistant professor is tenured but not promoted to associate professor.

2. **Promotion and Contract Renewal for Term Faculty Linked.** The proposed policy links contract renewal of term faculty with promotion – i.e. the policy provides that the university can’t renew the contract of a term faculty member who is not promoted from assistant to associate or from instructor to senior instructor. Again, a value judgment is involved. Promotion signals success at the responsibilities in a faculty member’s position description. If a faculty member is not successful in performing PD responsibilities, it is not in the institution’s interest to continue to renew that person’s contract. One argument against this approach is that such term faculty do not have time to go up for promotion. This argument opens the door to imposing unreasonable and unworkable responsibilities on a term faculty member.

3. **Review Committees Limited to UI Employees.** The proposed policy excludes students and individuals from outside the university from service on promotion and tenure committees. This exclusion is not a statement that student and/or external input is not important. Rather it is an attempt to respect the confidentiality of the personnel process. Individuals who are not UI employees are not bound by confidentiality rules and other UI employment responsibilities. We need to secure their input to the process through other methods such as student evaluation of teaching and external peer review of scholarship rather than through service on confidential personnel committees.
4. **Uniform committee structure across all units and colleges.** Each candidate will have the same committee structure, votes, and evaluation from the department level through the college and at the university level. This uniform process should minimize mistakes. It will allow the faculty secretary’s office, provost’s office, and general counsel to provide better support to departments and colleges.

5. **Uniform Tenure and Promotion Dossier.** The policy provides for one comprehensive tenure and promotion dossier containing all the documents/files/data needs to support third year reviews, tenure and promotion. Committees/reviewers at all levels of the university will have access to the entire dossier. The practice of making copies of publications and other evidence available as “supplemental materials” in the unit office has been eliminated. This practice was most likely a relic of paper T & P files and no longer serves an important purpose. Once a dossier is submitted, it cannot be changed except under limited circumstances.

6. **Extensions Clarified.** The proposal clarifies the process for obtaining extensions. It makes clear that the process applies to both tenure and to promotions. It clarifies that when an extension is granted for third year review, tenure/promotion are synced with the extended time-frame.

7. **Special Circumstances Clarified.** The processes are clarified for awarding credit toward tenure and/or promotion, making appointments with tenure or at rank, the impact of leaves of absence, time spent at another institution, breaks in service and transfers between departments and colleges.