American University
Tenure, Promotion, and Reappointment Guidelines Updates

Resource 3
GENERAL THEMES

Guidelines committees can use the three core goals (see *Resource 1*) to check progress:

1. Are we expanding criteria for assessing teaching, service, and scholarship[1] to recognize and reward inclusive and cross-disciplinary accomplishments which standard metrics tend to marginalize?
2. Are we ensuring academic freedom for all faculty by removing needless and discriminatory obstacles to the free choice of topics, themes, genres, methods, protocols, collaborators, and venues (etc.) for scholarship, teaching, and service?
3. Do the updated guidelines highlight multiple pathways of excellence and impact for faculty?

Proposed changes to the guidelines that do not meet those three tests may need further scrutiny. Other factors to consider include the following.

Audiences

Guidelines serve several different audiences. First and foremost, guidelines tell candidates for promotion and tenure what is expected of them and how they will be evaluated. Second, long before any faculty member applies for reappointment, promotion, or tenure, knowledge of what is and is not in the guidelines can exert powerful influence on which intellectual and pedagogical paths they choose to follow.

Third, prospective new hires who have done their homework (by reviewing the DOF's website or hearing about our guidelines from others) may feel more, or less, inclined to apply and accept an offer of employment from AU based on what they know about AU's approach.

Finally, guidelines provide both internal and external reviewers with criteria for assessing faculty files. Because internal (AU) reviewers in the CFA and provost's office hail from a broad range of disciplinary backgrounds, the individual unit TPR guidelines provide important clarity about which criteria should be applied to each file. External reviewers receive the relevant TPR guidelines along with the AU faculty file materials and are asked to adhere to the criteria outlined in the unit's guidelines—and not those of their own institutions—when evaluating an AU candidate. Both internal and external reviewers need guidelines that are written plainly and forthrightly, without unnecessary field-specific jargon or department-specific shorthand.

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[1] In this and related documents, the terms scholarly and scholarship always include research, creative, and professional activities and outputs, as per the *Faculty Manual's* glossary.

Checking Biases

Refreshing all academic units' TPR guidelines in 1.5 years offers a rare opportunity for faculty and administrators across campus to help each other develop greater intercultural competency and cross-disciplinary appreciation. Doing so requires concerted efforts to identify not only obvious, but also more subtle ways in which long-standing academic norms may systematically disadvantage whole areas of excellence and whole subsets of the faculty population.

Consultation

Because TPR guidelines are such important expressions of collective standards, committees are encouraged to consult as many faculty colleagues as possible throughout the revision process.

Consulting with colleagues outside AU may also be helpful, especially regarding scholarship guidelines. Some fields and disciplines have made more progress than others in expanding criteria for excellence. Committees can benefit from models and examples offered by disciplinary associations and/or other universities.

Customization

Disciplinary imperatives, organizational styles, and philosophical emphases vary from unit to unit. Committees should tailor guidelines to the distinctive needs and priorities of the academic unit while honoring core values and principles. There is no template for TPR guidelines.

Diversified Measures

Unidimensional, summary-type measures often fail to capture the breadth of possible accomplishments. For example, SETs scores in the teaching sphere and journal impact factors or h-index scores in the scholarship sphere have significant blind spots. Multi-dimensional and mixed-methods criteria may do a better job of identifying excellence in all its forms. (See *Resource 9* on metrics for assessing the impact of scholarly outputs.)

Examples

Balancing specificity and expansiveness is a challenge in TPR guidelines. Committees may be tempted to set benchmarks (such as preferred journals or specific pedagogies, etc.) to make standards clearer, but doing so risks creating a narrow, one-size-fits-all definition of high-quality work. Narrow definitions tend to institutionalize historic biases.

One way to clarify standards without ingraining biases is to accompany statements of priorities with illustrative, non-prescriptive examples of multiple ways faculty might meet the criteria. Examples can be used to emphasize a broad array of different pathways to career advancement.