

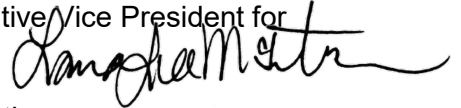
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

FALL 2025

MEMORANDUM

TO: Tenure System Faculty, Deans, School Directors, and Chairpersons

FROM: Laura Lee McIntyre, Ph.D., Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs



SUBJECT: Guiding Policies on Faculty Tenure and Promotion

This memorandum reaffirms the criteria and guidance established by the Interim Provost and distributed on July 8, 2025, with no revisions to the document. I recognize the ongoing challenges that faculty continue to experience and want to assure you that the Office of the Provost and the Office for Faculty and Academic Staff Affairs remains attentive to these issues and their impact on faculty work.

Purpose of This Memorandum

This memorandum provides annual guidance for deans, department chairs, school directors and faculty on the standards, criteria and expectations for reappointment, promotion and tenure (RPT) reviews.¹ The purpose is three-fold:

- To affirm our institutional commitment to transparency in RPT decision-making.
- To provide a framework to support the continuous creation of an environment that fosters success in RPT processes and informs the recommendations made; and
- To offer updated guidance for the current academic year in light of current disruptions to faculty work.



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Just as this memorandum is issued annually, each college is expected to review this University statement each year and ensure that its internal processes and expectations are aligned to support positive outcomes.

Contextual Considerations for This Year

I write this memo amidst notable uncertainty in the broader higher education landscape. Since the beginning of the Spring 2025 semester, faculty across the University may have encountered disruptions to their research, teaching, and service activities due to recent federal actions and executive orders. These disruptions have taken various forms, including stop-work orders and cancellations of federal grants, restricted access to datasets or databases maintained by federal agencies, and

¹ This document is shared annually with the University Committee on Faculty Tenure and the University Committee on Faculty Affairs each year, who are invited to recommend changes that promote a shared understanding of the underlying value proposition.

limitations on travel to present scholarly work at conferences typically supported by federal funds, as well as other hurdles around international travel.

Community-engaged scholarship, teaching and service activities may have been interrupted due to reductions in programmatic funding and operational changes across public and private sector partners. Additionally, faculty whose work addresses topics that may now be subject to heightened scrutiny may find themselves navigating an increasingly complex environment in advancing, publishing, or presenting their scholarship.

Additionally, to better reflect our efforts to support an engaged, equitable, diverse and vibrant university community, we are transitioning toward terminology that fully and accurately describes the nature and impact of our programs and faculty contributions. As part of this shift, units have been [directed](#) to discontinue the use of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) statements or questions in hiring, evaluation, reappointment, promotion, tenure or related employment processes.

Moving forward, evaluation processes should focus on allowing faculty to describe their scholarly contributions, teaching approaches and service activities through specific, substantive descriptions rather than categorical labels. For example, evaluation materials should describe faculty contributions using descriptors that capture the substance of the work itself, such as community engagement, collaborative partnerships, inclusive pedagogy, mentorship activities, or public service initiatives.

This approach allows units to continue recognizing faculty contributions that align with and demonstrate commitment to the university's land-grant mission and strategic priorities while using language that focuses on measurable outcomes and concrete activities. The University remains steadfast in supporting faculty in their efforts to create effective and inclusive academic communities.

The University Committee on Faculty Tenure, deans, campus administrators and the Office for Faculty and Academic Staff Affairs recognize the challenges that many faculty are currently facing. These difficulties are being taken seriously, and we are actively engaged in conversations about how to best support faculty and ensure a fair and thoughtful approach to the RPT process. While core criteria for RPT remain unchanged, the University affirms that faculty should be evaluated based on their assigned duties, the quality of their contributions, and the circumstances in which their work was conducted.

For the 2025-26 Reappointment, Promotion and Tenure (RPT) cohort, faculty preparing dossiers will present accomplishments achieved during the review period that may include work impacted by federal developments since January 2025.

To inform both internal and external reviewers, faculty are encouraged to create a work-interruption impact statement to be included in their reappointment, promotion and tenure dossiers as a standalone document. In such statements, faculty may create a record of interruptions and challenges to the areas for which they are appointed. Candidates should also include a plan to address the challenges they have faced and if there is mentor support that would be helpful in their efforts. Inclusion of a work-interruption impact statement is optional. External

and internal reviewers are expected to give due consideration to the interruptions noted in the impact statement and seek guidance from the RPT chair if they have questions.²

Foundations of Reappointment, Promotion, and Tenure at MSU

The reappointment, promotion, and tenure process is grounded in the foundational principles of academic freedom, shared governance and peer review. These principles reflect the core values of the academy and ensure that faculty are evaluated through a rigorous and equitable process, one that upholds both individual excellence and the collective responsibilities of the academic community.

At MSU, the criteria and expectations for faculty advancement are closely aligned with the University's mission as a land-grant institution. Based upon MSU's values of collaboration, equity, excellence, integrity and respect, the University is dedicated to advance knowledge and transform lives by providing outstanding undergraduate, graduate and professional education; conducting research of the highest caliber; and advancing outreach, engagement and economic activities. Through its faculty, MSU fulfills its land-grant mission - driving innovation, educating and mentoring future leaders, and engaging with local, national and global communities to address complex societal challenges and improve quality of life across Michigan and around the world. Our land-grant mission grounds and guides MSU to continually improve.

College leaders are responsible for engaging in meaningful guidance and establishing a culture that is expectant of success, and inclusive of new scholarship that expands the field. The test of any department lies in the success of its recruitment, tenure and promotion process, not in exclusionary practices designed to maintain the status quo. It is important to nurture our community of scholars, as our individual and common achievements are tied to how healthy and supportive our culture is overall. Indeed, we need to continually strive to create, preserve and foster a culture that allows all to thrive, since the value of our community of scholars is intimately tied to the breadth of the many walks of life, lived experiences and varying perspectives that we bring into this community.

Tenure Philosophy

The tenure system is grounded in the principle that faculty must have the freedom to pursue innovative – and at times, controversial – research without the risk of dismissal. It serves as both a safeguard for academic freedom and a recognition of sustained scholarly and professional achievement. By protecting the freedom to challenge prevailing ideas, engage in critical inquiry and participate fully in public discourse, tenure enables faculty to generate and disseminate knowledge that advances their disciplines and enriches student learning. This protection is essential now more than ever, not only for the advancement of knowledge, but also for the broader functioning of a democratic society, where universities are charged with fostering independent thought and the open exchange of ideas.

Tenure also reflects a mutual commitment between the institution and the faculty member – an investment in a long-term relationship that supports continued growth in scholarship, teaching and service. It is both a privilege and a responsibility, requiring faculty to uphold the highest standards of professional conduct and to contribute meaningfully to their academic communities.

Tenure at MSU marks an important point in a faculty member's academic journey, one grounded in shared values and sustained excellence. Rather than an endpoint, tenure at MSU represents

² If the impacts have significantly slowed progress, candidates can consider requesting a tenure clock extension, per [policy](#).

a key progression along a broader trajectory of academic achievement and professional growth. Our philosophy of tenure calls for regular reflection and evaluation on the standards used to assess faculty throughout their career. In as much as accomplishments that advance the effectiveness, climate and culture of the unit, college, university and discipline are attributes for a positive outcome, significant or repeated behaviors that are inconsistent with these values are reasons for institutional interdiction at any point in the lifetime of a tenure-system/tenured faculty. Tenure can never be used as a shield to hide or permit behaviors unbecoming the title *faculty*. Moreover, the environment in which tenure is earned is therefore tested as part of the system as well. Thus, the standards we set for earning tenure are a reflection of the University *writ large*, a measure of the accomplishments of a person, and a measure of the success of all tenured or promoted faculty as stewards of this process.

Core Criteria for Evaluation

The review of faculty for reappointment, tenure and promotion must reflect the multifaceted nature of academic excellence and be grounded in fair, rigorous and contextually aware evaluation. Faculty contributions are evaluated across teaching, research and/or creative activities, and service and/or outreach – each essential to fulfilling the University’s mission. Evaluation processes must consider the myriad ways excellence is demonstrated, including collaborative work, leadership, innovation and contributions to an inclusive academic community. The criteria below offer guiding principles for assessing faculty performance across roles and career stages, and they serve as the foundation for unit- and college-level expectations.

I. Domains of Evaluation

It is expected that multiple methods for evaluating performance be used in assessing teaching, research/creative activities and service/outreach. They should address the scholarship, significance, impact and attention to context of the faculty member’s accomplishments. Assessment should account for the quality and quantity of outcomes and the core criteria noted below; it should also acknowledge the creativity of faculty effort and its impact on a broad range of students, on others the University serves, and on the field(s) in which the faculty member works.

- **Teaching.** The sole use of student evaluations of teaching is inappropriate as a means for assessing teaching effectiveness. In addition to student evaluations, multiple measures for evaluating teaching could include teaching statements, syllabi, innovative course assignments, methods to foster accessible learning environments and inclusive pedagogy for students of all backgrounds, class artifacts, curricula programming to reach broader groups and expand experiences, peer observations and teaching portfolios.³
- **Research and/or Creative Activities.** In many cases, faculty demonstrate excellence through individual scholarly activities. Collaborative scholarly efforts, creating a scholarly community and environment where all can flourish, more expansively diversified objects of study, emerging cross-disciplinary activities, successful mentoring and the integration of scholarship into the creation, application and dissemination of knowledge are also recognized as relevant dimensions of faculty performance.⁴

³ This does not preclude that a unit provide some guidelines concerning normal performance metrics that are common in evaluation.

⁴ While collaborative scholarly efforts are recognized and encouraged where appropriate, reappointment, tenure, and promotion decisions are individual to the faculty member and so evidence of the faculty member’s contribution to collaborative efforts is critical in making these decisions.

- **Service and/or Outreach,** Service may occur at the unit, college, University, disciplinary and/or societal level. In addition to the traditional markers of service (e.g., committee work, professional association efforts), activities that advance core values and culture for faculty, students and staff, must be recognized in assessing faculty performance, as should collaborations with groups/organizations of all backgrounds, on and off campus. Bringing people together to solve University, community and societal challenges is part of our land grant mission and related efforts are an important aspect of faculty work and should be counted as such.

The Reflective Essay

Each candidate for reappointment, tenure and/or promotion must include a maximum five-page reflective essay about accomplishments over the reporting period as a part of the dossier. This essay should highlight how accomplishments in research/creative activities, teaching and service are significant and impactful and have contributed to the mission of Michigan State University. The Reflective Essay should not be a narrative of the individual's CV, but rather provide information on how previous and current activities and accomplishments have impacted their growth and represent excellence. (See Appendix A for a full list of required materials.)

Core Values Related to Conduct

Faculty responsibilities extend beyond scholarship and teaching; they include a commitment to the highest standards of professional behavior and the enablement of a culture and climate that is respectful of all individuals. Accomplishments that advance the effectiveness, climate and culture of the unit, college and University, consistent with University core values, must be considered in all promotion and tenure decisions, as must significant or repeated behaviors that are inconsistent with these values.

The statement on Academic Freedom and Responsibility within the [Faculty Rights and Responsibilities Policy](#) in the Faculty Handbook emphasizes that academic freedom and responsibility are intertwined:

"Michigan State University endorses academic freedom and responsibility as essential to attainment of the University's goal of the unfettered search for knowledge and its free exposition. Academic freedom and responsibility are fundamental characteristics of the University environment and are always closely interwoven and at times indistinguishable."

The University Committee on Faculty Affairs' [Statement on Professional Integrity](#) describes and encourages behaviors that will foster an equitable, safe and respectful workplace for all. Actions inconsistent with MSU's values erode trust and damage the institutional culture. Faculty have a duty to be accountable, to hear critique, to be self-reflective and responsive to the harm caused by unprofessional conduct. Inaction allows corrosive behaviors to take root, impeding excellence in research, teaching and service. At every stage of review – appointment, annual evaluation, reappointment, tenure and promotion – we must uphold personal and institutional accountability. While some missteps may be self-corrected, others may require formal intervention. Faculty and institutional leaders alike share responsibility for maintaining a climate where integrity and accountability are central to our academic mission. Faculty members of MSU have a particular duty to hold themselves accountable. Institutional leaders have the duty to hold the faculty accountable. These duties are within the purview of the reviews that occur in the context of appointment, annual reviews, reappointment, tenure and promotion.

II. Standards by Career Milestones

The following criteria establish University-level standards for evaluating tenure-system faculty at key milestones in their academic careers.

- **Reappointment to a Second Probationary Appointment** – Each reappointment recommendation should be based on clear evidence that a record is being established of progress toward becoming an expert of national and/or international stature, a solid teacher and a contributing member of the unit, college, University and/or discipline.
- **Reappointment with Award of Tenure** – Each tenure recommendation should be based on a clear record of sustained, outstanding achievements in scholarship, teaching and service⁵ across the mission, consistent with performance levels expected at peer universities. The record should provide a basis in actual performance for predicting capacity to become an expert of national or international stature and long-term, high-quality professional achievement and University service.
- **Promotion from Assistant Professor to Associate Professor with the Award of Tenure** – A recommendation for promotion from assistant professor to associate professor includes the award of tenure, and should be based on several years of sustained, outstanding achievements in scholarship, teaching and service across the mission, consistent with performance levels expected for promotion to associate professor at peer universities. A reasonably long period in rank⁶ before promotion is usually necessary to provide a basis in actual performance for predicting capacity to become an expert of national or international stature and long-term, high-quality professional achievement and University service.
- **Promotion to Professor** – In as much as the University invests in an individual at the time of tenure, the measure of promotion to “full” is the investment the individual has made in the University. As such, a recommendation for promotion from associate professor to professor in the tenure system should be based on several years of sustained, outstanding achievements in scholarship and education across the mission, consistent with performance levels expected at peer universities. Moreover, it is an expectation that individuals should provide leadership within the department, mentorship to junior faculty and graduate students (where appropriate), teaching of undergraduates (where appropriate), service on committees and contribute to a flourishing intellectual life for those in the broader discipline, unit, college and Institution. A reasonably long period in rank⁷ before promotion is usually necessary to provide a basis in actual performance to permit endorsement of the individual as an expert of national and international stature and to predict continuous, long-term, high-quality professional achievement and University service.

As a tenured faculty member, a professor must not only demonstrate disciplinary

⁵ Service includes accomplishments that advance the effective functioning, climate, and culture of the unit, college, and University, consistent with MSU core values. It also includes service to the profession, or in support of outreach and engagement in the greater Lansing community, across the state of Michigan, nationally, or internationally. The definition of ‘service’, similar to research and scholarship, varies by faculty member, but can be intellectually described and reviewed by members of the academic community.

⁶ Over the past several cycles, the average time in rank before promotion to associate professor has been 6.4 years.

⁷ Over the past several cycles, the average time in rank before promotion to professor has been 6.4 years.

excellence, but also demonstrate commitment and effectiveness in larger institutional missions such as improving the breadth and depth of our community of scholars and culture, both in the academy and more broadly in society. Innovation brought to teaching and interdisciplinary teambuilding that enables broader groups of people from the widest possible disciplinary or college perspective are also part of a move from individual work to being a university professor. Such a responsibility is even greater for those who earn promotion to full professor.

Expectations of Unit and College Review Committees

Each department and school is required to establish procedures so that its faculty can provide advice to the chairperson/school director regarding recommendations for reappointment, promotion and tenure. Similarly, each college is required to have a college review committee, consistent with the policy [College-Level Reappointment, Promotion and Tenure Committees](#). Members of review committees are expected to make recommendations to the chairperson, director or dean that are based upon full and frank discussions about candidates that are confidential, respectful and evidence-based. All share the responsibility of building a unit characterized by inclusive excellence.

Expectations of Department Chairpersons, School Directors, and Deans⁸

The first responsibility for chairpersons or school directors is to ensure their department has developed a set of fair standards and evaluative criteria for use in making RPT recommendations. These standards must take into consideration peer evaluations that have established a fair set of evaluative factors. As a general rule, faculty members should be evaluated based on the responsibilities outlined in their appointment and the percentage of effort assigned to each area of their role (e.g., research, teaching, service). Assessments should align with the faculty member's workload distribution and reflect the expectations appropriate to their specific assignment.

Chairpersons, school directors, and deans are also responsible for ensuring that the process for soliciting and managing external review letters is conducted fairly and by the following university policies: [External Letters of Reference and Confidentiality of Letters of Reference for Reappointment, Promotion and Tenure Recommendations](#).⁹ The process of soliciting external letters of reference must incorporate the principles and procedures outlined in the preceding policies, and referees must have no conflict of interest.

As provided in the *Bylaws for Academic Governance*, the faculty, operating in an advisory mode, is to provide advice to the chairperson/director as described in unit bylaws. Each department, school, and comparable unit is required to have procedures and criteria that are clearly formulated and relevant to evaluating the performance of faculty members (see [Statement on Non-Tenured Faculty in the Tenure System](#), Faculty Handbook). The Bylaws for Academic Governance includes the following statement that is of fundamental importance:

"A department chairperson or school director serves as the chief representative of his or her department or school within the University. He or she is responsible for the unit's educational, research, and service programs – including the outreach components of all three; budgetary matters, academic facilities, and personnel matters, taking into account the advisory

⁸ For those colleges which are not organized into departments and schools, the dean, as unit administrator, holds the responsibilities that are required of chairpersons and school directors in other colleges.

⁹ These policies are currently under review, with revised versions expected to be implemented within the next month.

procedures of the unit. The chairperson or director has special obligation to build a department or school strong in scholarship, teaching capacity, and service. (2.1.2.1.)”

Unit administrators are responsible as individuals for the recommendations made to the dean. Deans review each recommendation for reappointment, promotion, and tenure, and independently make a recommendation to the Provost, taking into account unit, college and University criteria. Bearing in mind the University's continuing objective of an excellent, diverse faculty, the unit and college must ensure well-grounded, well-justified recommendations of reappointment, tenure or promotion.

Principles of Evaluation for the Provost-Level Review

The Office of the Provost's review of each recommendation concentrates primarily on the evidence of the individual's effectiveness in the performance of academic responsibilities and duties. The review also ensures that the appropriate processes have been followed and considers the clarity of unit-level expectations and criteria, as well as the feedback provided to the faculty member through annual evaluations.

As enunciated above, the University expects of faculty a fidelity to the highest standards of behavior, the enablement of a culture and climate that is respectful of all individuals, and personal responsibility for behavior and the associated unit and University environment that is created. Consistent with this philosophy, the Provost may use all information available in shaping final determinations.

Appendix A: Required Materials and Timeline for RPT Reviews

Comprehensive guidance can be found in the published policies, procedures and criteria outlined in the [Faculty Guide for Reappointment, Promotion, and Tenure](#).

Required Materials for Review by College Committees

Because tenure is in the University, not the college or department/school, there is some level of uniformity in how college committees function. Thus, in addition to the dossier (Form on Progress & Excellence in RPT, CV, reflective essay) for each candidate, each case should include:

- Unit reappointment, tenure and promotion bylaws and policies
- Information concerning the expectations for the faculty member, e.g., appointment letter for reappointment cases, annual review letters since last RPT action, deans' developmental letter at time of reappointment, letter explaining why a promotion case was previously denied
- Written reports from all unit peer review committees that include the votes to support the recommendation
- Chair's summary statement (within the Form on Progress & Excellence in RPT and/or a separate letter)
- External review letters (where applicable)
- The external reviewer invitation letter and any accompanying guidance sent to external reviewers (where applicable)
- Abstentions in all votes should be restricted to conflicts of interest

All college committees are required to have each member vote on RPT actions and report the college vote to the Office of the Provost.

The Process and Timeline

Unit peer review committees make recommendations to the chairperson or school director. Chairpersons and directors then make unit-level recommendations which are reviewed by the college peer review committee, which makes a recommendation to the dean. Deans make the college recommendation to the Provost by February 28 each year. Because tenure at Michigan State University is in the University and not in the department, school, or college, every action prior to the Provost's review is a recommendation. Only the faculty member can stop a reappointment, tenure, or promotion case from moving forward to the next higher level of review. A negative recommendation by the chairperson, director, or dean does not eliminate the review at the Provost level. Recommendations are to be based on explicit unit and college criteria and quality evaluations that are consistent with unit, college, and University policies and goals.

The Office of the Provost reviews occur each year during March and April. Faculty are to be notified of the recommendations from their chairperson/director and dean when those recommendations are forwarded to the next level for review. Faculty will normally be notified of the final recommendation for reappointment, promotion, and tenure actions during May. Official notice of final decisions will normally be sent to faculty members in June, after the President has approved promotion actions and the Board of Trustees has approved tenure actions at its June meeting.

The effective date for reappointment with tenure (including faculty appointed initially as an associate professor in the tenure system) is the first of the month following final approval by the Board of Trustees (usually July 1). The effective date for reappointment without tenure is August 16 of the year following the recommendation, e.g., for recommendations made in April 2026, the effective date is August 16, 2027. The effective date for promotion with or without the award of tenure is the first of the month following final approval by the Board of Trustees (usually July 1). The effective date for non-reappointment is August 15 of the year following the recommendation, e.g., for recommendations made in April 2025, the effective date is August 15, 2026.