Merit Criteria for Consideration in Tenure and Promotion Decisions
Rank and Tenure Committee
Department of Psychology / CAS
Effective: September 8, 2015

Our objective is to find indications of performance worthy of tenure, promotion, or both. These indicants may take many forms. The absence of any particular sign of excellence may be unimportant, but the presence of worthy accomplishments, in whatever form they take, is crucial. Overall evaluation of faculty accomplishments and recommendation for tenure and promotion are based upon Research and Scholarship (very important), Teaching (very important), and Service (meaningful, but less important than the first two categories).

Within each category, we use neither a detailed hierarchy of criteria nor a quantitative point system, because each measure available to us is subject to influences other than the ones we are trying to detect — variation in faculty excellence. We, therefore adopt a somewhat holistic approach in considering the entire record brought forward by the faculty member. Nevertheless, we can at least roughly group our criteria according to whether they are given primary versus lesser consideration. These groupings are described below. In all cases of data which are countable, such as journal articles published and committees chaired, quality as well as quantity are important.

Research and Scholarship Criteria for Consideration in Tenure and Promotion Decisions

For promotion to Associate Professor, candidates should be widely recognized as outstanding and as having a substantial impact on the field. For promotion to Professor, this excellence should be sustained and internationally recognized.

In all cases, in reviewing files emphasis is given to work completed while at American University. For faculty bringing substantial credit toward tenure, the balance can be adjusted accordingly. We note that submission of the file for action to the Rank and Tenure Committee is the last date for placement of scholarship material in the file, though updates are allowed for reporting publication acceptance(s) of material already referenced in the file.

Primary Criteria

Almost all research and scholarly contributions to Psychology appear in scholarly journals or in books (sometimes as entire books). Our objective is to evaluate scholarly work in ways that are thorough but not formulaic. We will consider the two primary sorts of publication in turn.
Refereed journal articles. Most of our faculty’s research contributions take the form of articles in refereed journals. In assessing a person’s productivity, we attend to the articles’ number and, more importantly, their quality. Assessment of quality can be based on many indicants, but with recognition that all of them require contextual information for their interpretation. Some indicants assess the journal of publication rather than the article in question; common ones for this purpose include rejection rates, impact factors, and prestige ratings. Less common but imaginably useful measures are assays of the eminence of the people on the journal’s editorial board or the people whose articles appear in the journal. Individual articles can be assessed using citation counts. Expert outside evaluators of the faculty member’s record are liable to comment on the quality both of the journals and of the faculty member’s individual contributions, as well as on the faculty member’s eminence in the field. The modality in which the journal may be published, e.g., electronic or print, is inconsequential, because modality does not serve as a clear indicator of quality. We also may consider such measures of scholarly impact as a faculty member’s "h-index" or a journal’s eigenfactor (reflecting, among other characteristics, rates of citation). We know full well that all citation-based indicators need to be interpreted in light of knowledge of the size of the relevant literature. Research on little-studied topics cannot be cited as much as can research on more mainstream topics. For that reason, we cannot create any single set of criteria that will be appropriate for all of our faculty members.

Books and chapters in books. In general, books and book chapters receive somewhat less weight than refereed journal articles, in part because the thoroughness of editorial scrutiny is not so reliable as it is in academic journals. Nevertheless, books and book chapters often can be evaluated in a manner similar to journal articles. For example, citation counts for books and book chapters are available in Google Scholar and Scopus (though their use is subject to the same limitations as citation counts of journals and journal articles). Books may be part of a series with a prominent editor. Some publishers (e.g., Oxford University Press) strike us as universally respected. Books and chapters sometimes get editorial reviews either prior to acceptance or during development, indicating the same sort of quality control that journals exercise. All of these can be informative and useful. Editorship as well as authorship of a book is understood to be a potentially important contribution. Editorship and authorship of books that advance a field are viewed more favorably than are textbooks or trade books that primarily summarize accomplishments in a field for a broader audience.

Funded grants and contracts. Candidates for tenure or promotion must have applied for external funding. In reporting grant application activity, candidates may, at their discretion, include information concerning the scores and reviews their submissions received. Although all grant applications are considered important in the evaluation process, we particularly value applications to nationally and internationally recognized funding agencies, and applications for which the candidate is the Principal Investigator. While seeking funding is required, it may not be appropriate in all subfields and it is the candidate’s responsibility to make that case. Further, should the candidate receive a
high score indicating a positive peer review, but funding not be made available, this will be considered in the review.

**Secondary Criteria**

Indications of the respect afforded the faculty member by the field are important, but secondary criteria for tenure and promotion. Secondary criteria supplement, but do not replace, primary criteria. These indicants include: honors and awards from professional organizations; appointment to Editorial Boards, selection as editor of a special issue of a journal; appointment to grant review panels or task forces; selection as reviewer of journal manuscripts or reviewer of records of candidates for tenure or promotion at other universities; positions in the governance of scholarly and professional organizations; invitations to speak at other universities or conferences; and invitations to contribute articles or chapters to books or journals. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of secondary criteria.

**Other Criteria**

Non-refereed journal articles can provide information about a faculty member’s program of scholarship. However, non-refereed journal articles will generally be less valuable in tenure and promotion evaluations than are refereed articles. Although conference presentations are helpful indications of active involvement in the field, they will rarely count as much in decisions on tenure and promotion as do published papers that are full reports of research. Selection as a consultant (e.g., to an organization or on a grant application) is a sign of recognition, but will rarely receive much weight in evaluation. Research work in progress (e.g., manuscripts under review, studies being run) is understood to be a sign of activity but rarely will receive much weight in evaluation until it is completed.

**Teaching**

High-quality teaching is an important factor in decisions regarding tenure and promotion. The missions of our Department and University emphasize the importance of direct faculty involvement with students both inside and outside the classroom. In evaluating faculty for tenure and for promotion to Associate Professor and to Professor, we value the entire portfolio of teaching-related activities and accomplishments. For promotion from Associate Professor to Professor, we expect continued excellence in teaching. This would be manifest through the metrics of classroom teaching and non-classroom activities by which faculty members contribute to the intellectual development of students.

**Classroom Activities**

A faculty member’s effectiveness as a teacher can be assessed in many ways. At the time of consideration for tenure, and for promotion to Associate Professor and to
Professor, a faculty member’s portfolio of the University Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) scores is evaluated both in an absolute and relative context. Although we emphasize SET measures of overall teaching effectiveness, particularly overall ratings of course and instructor, we also may consider how demanding the course is, other SET items, SET return rates, and other modes of evaluation. These can include assessments of the knowledge and skills acquired by students from the teacher, and the quality of her or his instruction in class as judged by fellow faculty. Development of new courses and innovations in teaching methods, such as the use of advanced information technology, can be noted as well. The trend in teaching effectiveness over time also is considered in tenure and promotion decisions.

Non-Classroom Activities

Classroom activities alone do not suffice for the teaching portion of the portfolio. Our Department places particular value on supervision of undergraduate and graduate student research. Research supervision involves oversight for dissertations, theses, honors capstones, independent study projects, and other research activities. We consider both the quantity and quality of research supervision. Among the factors we consider are the number of undergraduate and graduate research supervisees, whether the faculty member serves as chair or in another role on the thesis or dissertation committee, students' feedback on the quality of the professor's supervision, timeliness of students' completion of their degree program, and number and quality of publications and conference presentations with students.

Although many faculty conduct research in areas pertinent to our doctoral students in the Clinical Psychology and BCAN programs, some faculty work in the many subareas of psychology other than those two. For such faculty, effective supervision of doctoral student research may not be an important criterion in evaluating teaching, although these faculty still would be expected to supervise the research of undergraduate and Masters students. Non-classroom activities of secondary importance include, but are not limited to, receiving awards, honors, or recognition and taking part in development of educational programs.

All faculty are expected to provide timely, fair, and objective assessment of student performance, both classroom activities and non-classroom activities.

Service

Criteria for Promotion to Associate Professor with Tenure

Candidates for tenure and promotion to Associate Professor should participate actively and effectively on department committees. Although it is not required, candidates for promotion to Associate Professor with tenure often will have begun to establish a record of service to the profession outside of AU. For example, they may be active members of professional societies, and they may have
begun to complete ad hoc editorial reviews for scholarly journals or granting agencies. Such involvement would be seen as a positive feature of the File for Action. Because Assistant Professors should devote most of their time and attention to developing their programs of research and scholarship, as well as to their teaching, it is not expected that a candidate for tenure and promotion to Associate Professor would have already served in leadership roles within the department (e.g., committee chair, program director, or department chair) or in the profession (e.g., as a journal Editor or as a board member for a professional organization). For the same reason, it is not expected that candidates will have served on College or University committees.

Criteria for Promotion to Professor

Candidates for promotion to Professor are expected to have continued to serve in the manner expected of candidates for tenure (i.e., regular and effective participation on departmental committees). Additionally, candidates for promotion to Professor would be expected to shoulder a heavier service load than during their pre-tenure years. This enhanced contribution could take the form of one or more of the following: (a) leadership within the department, (b) service to the University beyond the departmental level, or (c) service to the profession.

Leadership within the department could be shown by serving effectively as department chair or as head of a program within the department, creating new initiatives within the department, mentoring junior faculty, or chairing departmental committees. Service at the University beyond the departmental level might include membership, or especially leadership, on College or University-wide committees. Service to the profession can take many forms, including but not limited to membership on editorial boards or grant or fellowship review panels, as well as leadership roles in professional organizations. Thus, there is considerable flexibility in how a candidate for promotion to Professor meets the service criteria, but the unifying theme is that she or he should have gone beyond the routinely expected departmental committee membership in order to make a stronger mark on AU and/or on the field. The candidate is responsible for documenting how this service contribution has been made and for making the case that such service has been performed well.