

*This is a joint message from RIT's Academic Senate and the Office of the Provost to RIT's Faculty*

April 6, 2020

The arrival of the novel coronavirus in our state and community created sudden and unexpected upheavals in our personal and professional lives. In the first few weeks of this crisis, the attention of RIT's faculty was rightly on our students and we performed an impossible feat: in just over 10 days, we converted more than 3,500 undergraduate and graduate class sections to remote learning modalities, thereby ensuring our students would complete their academic semesters.

Now that we are in the third week of remote instruction, it is time to take stock of some of the short- and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on our academic community and its members. One question that may be on the minds of many faculty is how the principles of shared governance can be enacted during a disruption such as this. Last week, the Executive Committee of the Academic Senate and the Provost agreed on a framework for executing our shared responsibilities in the months ahead. In this joint memo, we outline this framework and discuss two areas where it applies.

## **Framework**

During unsettled times, collaboration between administration and governance groups is an important part of sustaining our institutional strengths and being able to emerge as a more cohesive and resilient community. At the same time, fast moving and often unexpected circumstances can make it difficult to maintain the depth of deliberative culture that characterizes normal collaboration between faculty and administration. Both the Academic Senate and the Office of the Provost are committed to maintaining the spirit of shared governance as we also cope with the disruption in our joint missions of instruction and scholarship.

RIT's governance policies remain the basis for navigating questions of procedure and fairness. At the same time, it is critical that we all support one another, act to expand our sense of solidarity, and emphasize humanity and sympathy in our treatment of individuals. In support of these aims, the Executive Committee of the Academic Senate and the Office of the Provost agree that this is a period in which policies may need to be reframed, processes streamlined, and selected requirements suspended. We applied this philosophy in decisions as to how to treat two important areas of faculty life: tenure and promotion and the collection and use of student evaluations.

## Tenure and Promotion

COVID-19 has brought substantial disruption to the tenure and promotion preparation of many of RIT's faculty, particularly pre-tenure faculty. Applying the framework listed above, the following adjustments to current policy are approved:

1. Any pre-tenure, tenure-track faculty member may receive an automatic one-year extension of the tenure clock. The faculty member simply needs to make their desire known in writing directly to the provost, with copies to the department chair and dean. This is the same procedure used for extensions due to the birth or adoption of a child.
2. Faculty scheduled to undergo tenure evaluation in the 2020-2021 academic year are eligible to request an automatic one-year extension at any point up to June 1, 2020, using the procedure outlined above.
3. Faculty scheduled to go up for tenure next year, and who choose to submit their materials, may have until June 1, 2020, to do so. In colleges where the deadline for material submission is after June 1, faculty should submit by the college deadline. This provision will also apply to faculty submitting for promotion alone (e.g., associate to full professor or senior to principal lecturer).
4. An automatic one-year extension due to COVID-19-related disruption can be requested at any point through May 15, 2022. After that date, faculty who desire an extension can make application through the normal "Extraordinary Circumstances" justification in the current tenure policy ([Policy E05.2.c.4.d](#)).

These procedures for requesting an extension of tenure related to COVID-19 disruption will be evaluated again if the current disruptions persist for an extended period of time.

For this academic year only, there will also be some changes to the schedule for issuing tenure and promotion decisions as well as mid-tenure review feedback. Tenure decisions will come out no later than April 15. Promotion decisions may be delayed; this is due to the need to allow the university promotions committee sufficient time to provide their recommendations and to prioritize mid-tenure feedback, which must come out with sufficient time to allow deans to discuss the review with faculty prior to the end of the academic year. Salary increases associated with promotion will occur on schedule.

In some colleges, faculty evaluations may also be delayed but will be completed no later than May 15.

## Collection and Use of Student Teaching Evaluations

Given this semester's instructional disruption, some of you have expressed concerns about teaching evaluations. In crafting a path forward on this topic, the Academic Senate and the

Provost agreed that two principles are important: that students have the right to provide feedback as to how they have experienced this transition and that faculty are entitled to consideration of the difficult circumstances under which instruction took place this semester.

With these two ideas in mind:

1. Student evaluations will begin on Wednesday, April 8. They were delayed by two days to provide time for additional questions to be added to the survey regarding the transition to distance learning. The surveys will still end the day before final exams begin.
2. Questions will be added to the evaluations that specifically invite students to provide feedback on their experience of the transition to remote instruction. The Academic Senate endorsed the addition of three questions through a vote taken March 30-April 1.
3. The Provost will work with Academic Senate, deans, and department chairs to develop guidance on how student feedback from this semester should be used in annual evaluations, as well as in tenure and promotion recommendations. This guidance will make clear that data collected must be used in a fair manner that accounts for the unique circumstances of this semester.

We hope these adjustments to current policies will be helpful as you move through the remainder of the semester. Please continue to raise your questions and provide feedback as to what we can do to help you through this period. Thank you, as always, for your dedication to RIT's students and to the intellectual and creative mission of our university.

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