

Expectations for Promotion from Associate Professor to Professor

Introduction

RIT's mid-career tenured faculty have requested additional guidance for promotion to full professor at RIT. For nearly a decade, a 2014 memo, issued by the provost at that time, has remained the primary source of information.

Over the last decade, expectations have evolved at RIT, particularly for research, and the intent of the current memo is to encourage colleges to clarify expectations for promotion to full professor and to adopt best practices.

University Criteria for Promotion

Two RIT policies are relevant to this topic: Faculty Rank and Promotion [E06.0](#), and Faculty Employment [E04.0](#). E06.0 establishes the basis for promotion from Associate Professor to Professor as a record of teaching, scholarship, and service that is “**judged to be excellent overall**”. Policy E04.0, specifically section II, defines the activities and accomplishments included in teaching, scholarship, and service. Together, these two policies provide the institutional framework for promotion from associate to full professor.

Policy E06.0 provides associate professors some latitude in developing a record of overall excellence, guided by the expectations within each college. After tenure, faculty have more options to take on high-risk projects driven by values and interests, which may take longer than expected to develop a record of overall excellence. It is important to preserve this freedom in the promotion policy.

For promotion from associate to full professor, the most common path is for the faculty member to continue the trajectory that led to successful tenure while continuing to develop a stronger national and international reputation and making significant contributions to service, both internal and external to the university.

Excellence, Growth and Development, and Accomplishment

RIT's promotion criteria contain three critical concepts: **excellence, growth and development, and accomplishment**.

To attain promotion to full professor, a candidate must document post-tenure accomplishments that reach the level of overall excellence.

Current policy also allows faculty to demonstrate overall excellence through a combination of excellent performance in some areas with growth and development, and accomplishment in others.

For a better understanding of the requirements for promotion to full professor, colleges are encouraged to offer both quantitative or qualitative guidance on the criteria expected to demonstrate “excellence”, “growth and development”, and “accomplishment” that are specific to the disciplines within each college.

Excellence is also defined as “outstanding accomplishment” in the policy, which

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requires concrete examples of excellence within specific disciplines. These accomplishments when taken together should contribute to a strong national or international reputation in an area of endeavor.

The specific activities that would lead to an evaluation of excellence will vary by department and college, but some principles are included here to help guide faculty members, department chairs/school heads, and college committees:

- Typically, we expect faculty to present a **balanced** portfolio, with a significant record of excellent accomplishments in research/scholarship/creative activity, teaching, and service that is recognized nationally and internationally.
- As an alternative to a balanced portfolio, a candidate may seek promotion by demonstrating specialized excellence in teaching, research/creative activities, or service. Under this model, the candidate must demonstrate excellence in at least one area that exceeds expectations under the balanced portfolio model. Further, they must also provide evidence of growth and development in the other areas.

For growth and development, documented accomplishment is more important than activity. For example, while the publication of the book is an important activity, the impact of the book is assessed by the prestige of the press, reviews, and citations. Similarly, developing and teaching new courses is an indicator of activity. The impact of teaching is measured through student and peer evaluation of the course, student success in their professions, awards and external recognition. Dissemination of creative teaching practices in peer-reviewed journals is another option for documented teaching excellence. Though there may be exceptions, accomplishment is typically validated through the peer-review process.

When an area is presented as growth and development, it must be substantiated with a demonstrable record of increasing accomplishment in the period after the promotion to associate professor.

Here it is helpful if colleges provided examples of minimum levels of accomplishment required to demonstrate growth and development, which could include quantitative metrics (e.g., minimum of two peer-reviewed publications per year).

- *Scholarship.* Peer-reviewed, externally disseminated scholarly or creative work achieved during the post-tenure period. The amount, impact, and prestige of the venues must fit disciplinary expectations.
- *Teaching.* Clear evidence of continued success in providing quality instruction (e.g., teaching evaluations, observations, syllabi, etc.), demonstrated availability to students outside the classroom, and other related teaching-related accomplishments. While not limited exclusively to one or more of the following, these accomplishments might include: creation or revision of courses or curricula; successful pedagogical innovations – new instructional techniques or approaches that demonstrate continuous improvement to teaching;

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improved student outcomes.; advising and/or mentoring student research, capstone projects, theses, etc.

- *Service:* All applicants for full professor are expected to contribute to service and demonstrate leadership as a part of their service portfolio. This can include chairing an important committee at the department, college, or university, leading a task force, or similar leadership activity. Notable external service to one's discipline or profession, including peer-reviewing or leadership in professional organizations, is also expected.

Time in Rank

RIT's policies do not state a minimum for years served before a candidate is eligible to apply for promotion to full professor. Sufficient time in rank is necessary to generate a post-tenure record that meets the institutional criteria of overall excellence.

Nationally, five years in rank is the minimum, which is also the norm at RIT. A candidate seeking early promotion must consult with colleagues, the department chairperson, or the dean to examine whether the record is substantially superior to candidates with similar years of experience at top institutions.

Accomplishments preceding promotion to associate professor will be considered as part of the overall impact and national and international reputation of the candidate. However, post-tenure accomplishments must stand on their own for promotion to full professor.

Next Step

Each college is encouraged to discuss this memo as they review, revise, or create guidelines for promotion to full professor. Colleges must develop standards and metrics suitable to their disciplinary context. It is also important that both the dean and the provost concur with college-level guidance so that faculty planning to advance to full professor can do so with the confidence that their college's expectations are aligned with the institutional expectations.

To summarize, colleges must offer guidance on the following topics:

- Description of a balanced portfolio of excellence.
- Differences between "excellence" and "growth and development" within the disciplinary context of a college, with concrete examples for teaching, service and different forms of research, creative work, or scholarship.
- Candidates choosing the specialized excellence option must demonstrate overall excellence through excellence in at least two areas (teaching, research, service) and growth and development in one of the three areas.
- Explanation of exceptional performance that qualify a candidate for the specialized excellence option.

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Associate to Full Professor

RIT is committed to the advancement of associate professors to full professors. In addition to annual workshops offered by the Office of the Provost, the following examples of best practices help nurture a culture that promotes career advancement. While these examples may vary by college and be shaped by different disciplinary cultures and practices, all colleges should work toward them.

- Include an option in the annual review process asking a faculty member if they would like feedback from the dean or department chair on progress toward promotion.
- Offer a mentor, mentoring committee or similar support group, that meets annually with faculty members interested in promotion to full professor.
- Publish clear metrics and process guidance for candidates, promotion committees, and department chairs/school heads.
- Train chairpersons and directors on mentoring and nurturing career development and offering constructive and candid annual reviews.

Conclusion

Promotion to full professor is a major milestone for a faculty member. RIT has established a broad institutional framework that gives mid-career faculty latitude in developing an overall record of excellence. Such flexibility is a strength of our promotion system. A university-wide discussion on supporting mid-career faculty begins by offering clear expectations of teaching, research/creative works, and service for the standard of *excellence*, which must be differentiated from the standard of *growth and development*. This work originates from colleges with the active involvement of faculty. I look forward to working with you on this important endeavor.

Resources

- Policy E04.0
- Policy E06.0
- [WPI Handbook on Promotion to Professor](#)