

Thoughts on promotion to full professor

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Purpose: The purpose of this thought paper is to initiate a discussion with faculty and administrators regarding promotion to full professor. The ideas in this paper are the culmination of numerous discussions with faculty, deans, and the president. It is my hope that these remarks and ideas, through an informed discussion, become institutionalized in RIT policy.

The paper discusses typical time in rank for promotion and proposes minimal expectations for teaching, scholarship (including research, creative work, innovation), and service (including leadership) relative to the promotion process. When combined with compelling evidence that indicates a faculty member has a record deemed excellent overall, these minimal expectations afford a variety of pathways that a faculty member can achieve promotion.

Time at rank: Unlike tenure, there is no predetermined number of years that must pass before a candidate becomes eligible for promotion from associate to full professor. Typically, an associate professor will spend at least five years in rank. However, the candidate must ultimately determine, after consultation with colleagues, when he or she will formally seek promotion to full professor.

University criteria for promotion: RIT Policy E6.0 provides succinct language as to the standards the institution sets when considering faculty for promotion to full professor:

The basis for the promotion of an Associate Professor to Professor is effectiveness of teaching, the quality and scope of scholarship, and service including the leadership in or contributions to professional activities on and off campus.

Since receiving tenure and promotion from Assistant Professor to Associate Professor, candidates shall be judged in terms of whether they have an established record that indicates continued growth, development and accomplishment in teaching; research, scholarship or creative work; and service including leadership, as described in E4.0 Faculty Employment Policies. Candidates for promotion shall be judged in terms of whether they have a record that is deemed excellent overall.¹

¹ <http://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/policiesmanual/sectionE/E6.html>; downloaded: 15 Dec 2013

The language “judged in terms of whether they have a record that is deemed excellent overall” provides committees and other reviewers flexibility in making promotion recommendations. Specifically, this language need not be interpreted to mean that the candidate must be evaluated as excellent in all three areas to warrant promotion.

Therefore, promotion to full professor *not only* requires the candidate to document growth and contributions within each area individually, *but also* requires an assessment of “excellence overall” that may be partially driven by substantial and significant contributions in one or more particular areas.

The minimal expectations, outlined below, are in the form of questions that reviewers should keep in mind when reviewing evidence provided in the three areas of teaching, scholarship, and service. Candidates must successfully achieve all minimal expectations within each category to be considered for promotion. However, these minimal expectations by themselves are insufficient to warrant promotion. In addition, the candidate must provide evidence that demonstrates “excellence overall”. In other words, for successful promotion the candidate must provide compelling evidence beyond what is needed for these minimal expectations to demonstrate that the record, taken as whole, is deemed excellent.

Minimal expectations for scholarship

What evidence exists in the dossier to indicate that the candidate has successfully:

- Grown in their approach and contributions with their scholarship since the time of being promoted to associate professor?
- Used his/her scholarship to enhance student success?
- Had an impact (broadly defined; see the Appendix for additional explanation) with their scholarship?
- Established an intentional and coherent scholarly program or agenda?

Minimal expectations for teaching

What evidence exists in the dossier to indicate that the candidate has successfully:

- Grown his/her teaching effectiveness and competence since the time of being promoted to associate professor, particularly by embracing a continuous improvement approach to their teaching?
- Demonstrated a commitment to student success, including student advising and by providing students with information about performance expectations and course objectives?
- Aligned his/her teaching to support the department and/or program mission?
- Contributed to existing curriculum development or the creation of new programs?

Minimal expectations for service

What evidence exists in the dossier to indicate that the candidate has successfully:

- Grown in their approach and contributions to service and leadership for the university since the time of being promoted to associate professor?
- Contributed to or demonstrated leadership in committees, governance groups, departments, or professional societies?
- Played an active role in mentoring faculty colleagues in teaching, scholarship, and/or service?
- Served to support the effective operations of their department or academic unit?

Collegiality: One expectation that does not appear in the above list is collegiality, because it transcends all faculty categories of work. Some institutions have set collegiality as a fourth dimension of promotion criteria. However, the position of this paper is that collegiality undergirds effective performance in the three categories of faculty work and as such it is not best represented as a fourth area. The AAUP supports this position: "...collegiality is not a distinct capacity to be assessed independently of the traditional triumvirate of teaching, scholarship, and service. It is rather a quality whose value is expressed in the successful execution of these three functions."²

Nonetheless, the RIT Honor Code, which is articulated in policy P3.0, provides ample guidance to faculty considering promotion. The key language is excerpted here:

Integrity and strong moral character are valued and expected within and outside of the RIT community. As members of the RIT campus community, including students, trustees, faculty, staff, and administrators, we will:

- Demonstrate civility, respect, decency and sensitivity towards our fellow members of the RIT community, and recognize that all individuals at this university are part of the larger RIT family, and as such are entitled to that support and mutual respect which they deserve.
- Conduct ourselves with the highest standards of moral and ethical behavior. Such behavior includes taking responsibility for our own personal choices, decisions and academic and professional work.
- Affirm through the daily demonstration of these ideals that RIT is a university devoted to the pursuit of knowledge and a free exchange of ideas in an open and respectful climate.³

All RIT faculty should adhere to the spirit and intent of the RIT Honor Code and a discussion of such adherence is appropriate during the promotion review.

Final considerations: While this paper is intended to provoke a discussion about promotion consideration that will serve in a majority of promotion cases, there may be some exceptional cases that simply do not fit these expectations yet clearly make

² "On collegiality as a criterion for faculty evaluation", <http://www.aaup.org/report/collegiality-criterion-faculty-evaluation>, downloaded: 15 Dec 2013.

³ <http://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/policiesmanual/sectionA/honorcode.html>, downloaded: 15 Dec 2013.

a compelling case for promotion. As a result, we should be flexible in our interpretation of these expectations so that these exceptional cases are not casualties of strict bureaucracy.

To summarize, these ideas are put forth for discussion purposes with the hope that the essence of these ideas become adopted as policy. It is my intent and hope that by doing so we clarify pathways that faculty can navigate towards promotion to full professor.

Appendix: A brief discussion on impact

With its experiential nature as well as its history that includes the blending of the arts and humanities curriculum of the Athenaeum and the technical training of the Mechanics Institute, RIT has, in its fundamental character, a commitment to make an impact on the world. It stands to reason, then, that RIT aspires to see that the research and scholarly work of its faculty members also have impact. A single scholarly activity may impact the faculty member's discipline, the domain of application, a specific group of stakeholders, or some combination. For example, mathematical research could impact the field of mathematics itself, but it could also impact other physical or social sciences as an application. Similarly, the work in some creative arts fields could impact the public at large or a more narrowly defined audience of some other kind.

As a result, the audience matters when talking about scholarship impact and the audience may not be solely our peers in academia. For example, many creative fields will use the review of critics, the popular press, open-channel comment areas, ratings systems, etc., to gauge the impact of the work. It is important to note that the objective is not to measure strict popularity but rather to assess how well the work engages the intended audience.

It comes as no surprise, then, that the digital environment is changing the way the scholarly world measures impact. Traditional measures including peer-review and citation indexes will continue to be used, but new alternative metrics are also emerging. These 'altmetrics' will become increasingly important and persons in review positions must be open to these alternative methods. For more information on altmetrics, read the [Chronicle of Higher Education](#) article⁴, the "[Altmetrics Manifesto](#)⁵", or [the article from the London School of Economics and Political Science](#)⁶. It is healthy for RIT that we are open and flexible to measuring impact using a variety of methodologies.

⁴ http://chronicle.com/article/Rise-of-Altmetrics-Revives/139557/?cid=at&utm_source=at&utm_medium=en; downloaded: 15 Dec 2013

⁵ <http://altmetrics.org/manifesto/>; downloaded: 15 Dec 2013

⁶ <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/12/17/scott-altmetrics-central-digital-whats-missing/>; downloaded: 15 Dec 2013