

Questions about Faculty Activity and Promotion & Tenure
Office of Academic Affairs
Mississippi State University

(This document represents some thoughts from The Provost about Promotion and Tenure and is a handout that he uses at lectures and workshops).

How should the Promotion and Tenure System reward teaching?

- Promote and tenure faculty on the basis of excellent classroom teaching as measured mostly by student teaching evaluations? (not consistent with the MSU P&T document requirement for a national reputation of Board policy)
- Consider excellent classroom teaching as an important contributor to the P&T dossier when making decisions?
- Consider excellent classroom teaching (as measured mostly by student teaching evaluations) as satisfying one area of excellence for promotion to full professor (but not satisfying a national reputation in the absence of peer reviewed works)?
- Recognize the scholarship of teaching (pedagogical research) as being equally important as research or scholarly contributions in other areas and disciplines?

What is National Reputation?

A national reputation generally results from the production of peer reviewed materials such as exhibits, publications, books, grant proposals, conference presentations and the like. It is not likely that one can achieve a national reputation with activities that are restricted to the MSU campus.

It is also recognized that the expectation for a national reputation might be adjusted somewhat by departmental programming. A regional reputation might be a more reasonable expectation for departments with masters or only undergraduate level programs.

What is Scholarship?

The general route to a national reputation is scholarship whether it is the scholarship of teaching, the scholarship of research, or the scholarship of service [i.e., the Boyer model (“Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professorate,” E. I. Boyer, 1990, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching)]. Generally, scholarship follows the patterns below:

- Scholarship is the creation of new knowledge.
- Scholarship requires the expertise of the faculty member within his/her discipline, and the work makes a contribution to the discipline.
- Scholarship must be disseminated in an appropriate way (journals, books, exhibits, conferences, etc.), be subject to critical evaluation (i.e., peer review), and represent a significant contribution to the discipline.
- Successful scholarship is often recognized through awards, external funding, appointments to positions of responsibility in professional societies, etc.

What is the difference between Service and the Scholarship of Engagement?

- Service – typical departmental and professional service (expected of all faculty and supports, but generally does not earn, promotion and tenure).
- Scholarship of Engagement – Discovery of new knowledge and the production of something that is subject to critical review (usually results in publications, conference presentations, exhibits, reports, grants, etc.).

Why do most universities struggle with issues involving service and engagement?

- Some people don’t understand the difference between service and the scholarship of engagement.
- Some activities fall in the crack between service and the scholarship of engagement and things get murky.

What is the ideal distribution of faculty emphasis on teaching, research and service/engagement?

- It is not the same for every faculty member and should be a matter of departmental need, faculty talents, etc. Department Heads should work with each individual faculty member to reach an understanding about assignment.
- In some cases the distribution is determined by the offer letter or by the source of funds within the salary line (but configurations will not be approved if they do not provide a reasonable distribution of activities to allow success in P&T).
- Where heavy emphasis on service or engagement is needed, departments and other units often rely on non-tenure track faculty including, but not limited to, extension faculty.
- Assistant professors are not expected to be heavily engaged in service unless engagement is their area of scholarship.

What is early promotion?

Many universities are quite explicit about time in rank and early promotions. However, the MSU document states “no specific term in any rank is required for promotion to the next, but a reasonable time must elapse for the faculty member to demonstrate sustained productivity and have it confirmed by annual evaluations.” This is not very precise and hence judgment is left to those involved in the evaluative process. For promotion from assistant to associate, it is typical to consider promotion at the same time as the tenure decision (during the 6th year). It follows logically that the same period of time, more or less, would be expected for consideration for promotion to full professor. Hence promotion prior to the completion of five years of service is considered early by the Office of Academic Affairs and especially strong cases are expected.

Is credit given for work completed prior to joining MSU?

Faculty joining MSU, who have held tenure-track appointments at other universities may be awarded credit toward tenure and, in such cases, will have their probationary periods adjusted accordingly. However, with respect to credit for previous work toward promotion, the MSU document simply states “professional achievement at another academic institution may be considered for promotion.” This is not very definitive and hence credit for prior work becomes a matter of judgment for the parties making recommendations in promotion cases. The expectation of the Office of Academic Affairs is that while a dossier is strengthened by prior achievements, there should also be a reasonable body of work accomplished while at Mississippi State University. In cases where faculty members have completed all of the requirements for an advanced rank before joining MSU, they should be hired at that rank.

Who are our peer institutions?

We do have an “official” list of peer institutions filed with the IHL Board. They are: Auburn, Clemson, Iowa State, Kansas State, New Mexico State, North Carolina State, Oklahoma State, Oregon State, Purdue, Utah State, Virginia Tech, and Washington State. However, for purposes of external letters supporting promotion and tenure, we usually consider universities that are classified as Research Universities (very high research activity), or Research Universities (high research activity) by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. A list of these universities can be found in the annual Almanac addition of the Chronicle of Higher Education.

Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) Board Policy

402.03 PROMOTIONS IN RANK

Heads of institutions in making decisions regarding ranks and promotions in rank shall take into consideration evidence of professional achievement and academic growth to include but not necessarily be limited to the following:

- Professional training and experience;
- Effectiveness of teaching;
- Effectiveness in interpersonal relationships, including professional ethics, cooperativeness, resourcefulness and responsibility;
- Professional growth, such as research, publications and creative activities; and
- Service and other non-teaching activities which reflect favorably upon the institution.