

QUICK QUESTION

Online Newsletter from the Vice Provost for Faculty Development and Diversity



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Documenting Teaching in the Blue Binder

By Ann Austin, Vice Provost for Faculty Development and Diversity



The following outline gives a suggested format for preparing the “Teaching” section in the Tenure and Promotion (Blue) Binder. These comments are offered as suggestions only and should not be construed as “the official word” relative to the documentation of teaching in your T & P binder. Rather, the official word will come from your tenure and promotion committee, Department Head, and Dean, since they best understand the nature and demands of your discipline and the expectations and needs of the students in your college. It is imperative that you follow their advice.

The self-assessment of teaching letter is an introduction to the teaching section of the binder. A shorter version of this self-assessment of teaching should also be included in your overall self-assessment letter, found at the beginning of the binder. The self-assessment letter should contain a statement of teaching philosophy, a summary of teaching assessments, and an outline of your personal program for teaching improvement. After the self-assessment letter will come the various exhibits that provide documentation of your teaching activities, including examples of your syllabi, a table for student ratings of teaching, etc.

1. **Statement of Teaching Philosophy:** One way to begin your self-assessment of teaching letter is with a statement of your teaching philosophy. As you write your teaching philosophy, you may want to include some of the items listed below. Be sure to provide evidence of your practice in an “exhibits” section at the end of the letter.
 - a. What are your expectations of students, both undergraduate and graduate? What is it that you want them to learn, overall, in your classes, and for what purpose

(i.e., to function knowledgeably as a citizen scholar; to prepare for a career in teaching or medicine or engineering; etc.). Refer the reader to items in the exhibit section that document how your expectations shape your practice.

- b. Describe how you think students learn in your discipline. What kinds of opportunities do you provide to facilitate student learning? How do you create conditions in class that support learning? What kinds of techniques and methods do you use that you feel maximize the probability that learning will occur? How do your assigned activities (like research papers, etc.) support your philosophy of how students learn?
 - c. How are students motivated? How do you establish rapport in your classes?
 - d. What is your theory of assessment? How does your philosophy inform your assessment strategies (keeping in mind that class size will also play a huge role in the type of assessment)?
 - e. How does your philosophy inform the kind and timing of feedback you give students?
2. **Assessments of Your Teaching:** You will want to include either in the letter or in the exhibit section, a table of student ratings by class and across time. Include peer evaluations and your own personal reflections and evaluations of your teaching.
 3. **Personal Program for Teaching Improvement:** Give evidence that you are continually working to refine your teaching skills and to understand student learning. Document the teaching workshops you attend; teaching pedagogy books you read; discussion groups you are a part of wherein teaching is the focus of inquiry; data you may have collected in your classes comparing pedagogical methods you have used to foster student engagement, learning, critical thinking, etc.

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Larry's Corner: Tenure and Promotion – What's Happening?!

By Larry Smith, Vice Provost



A number of our faculty colleagues across the university had a busy summer and fall ('08) preparing their dossiers for review by tenure and promotion advisory committees, department heads, deans, and eventually, the members of the Central Promotion and Tenure Committee (or, "Central Committee", for short). The members of their tenure advisory committees, promotion advisory committees, department heads, and deans likewise, were busy throughout the holiday season with the vitally important task of

carefully reviewing the compiled documentation in dossiers to make recommendations for tenure and/or promotion. On Friday, January 11, 2009 (or before), dossiers left the colleges and were delivered to the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost for the next steps in the process. It is not unusual for those who have not committed faculty code Section 405 to memory to ask me questions like the following:

What exactly are all the steps in the tenure and promotion process here at Utah State? What's this Central Committee all about? What's going on with the process right now?

Let's take these questions one at a time and first look at a flow chart of the overall tenure and promotion and review process.

The tenure and promotion process is described in Section 405.7.2 of the USU Policy Manual (of which Section 400 is often referred to as the "Faculty Code") so one piece of advice to anyone intending to pass through the process is...read that section of the code. The steps of the process described in 405.7.2 are outlined in Figure 1. Of interest

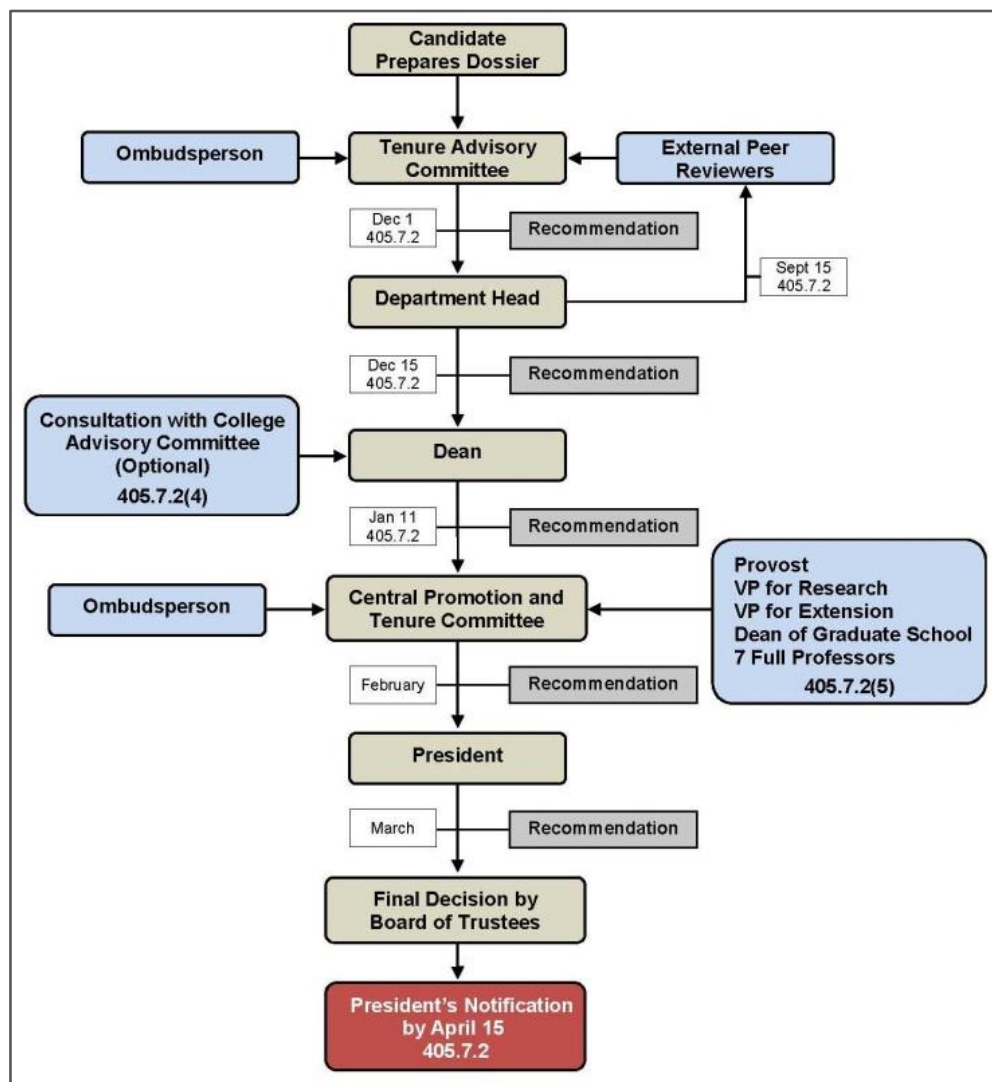


Figure 1: Tenure and Promotion Process - Year 6

may be the dates by which each step must occur and that the process results in a series of recommendations where each takes into consideration the preceding one. Note that there is code language in 405.7.2 that allows college deans to utilize an ad hoc advisory council. Some deans take advantage of this and some do not.

Once the dossiers come to the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost, they are then available for review by the members of the Central Committee. The faculty code (405.7.2(5)) states the following about the composition of the Central Committee:

“The Provost shall convene a committee including the Vice Presidents for Research and Extension, the Dean of the graduate school, and others of his or her choosing. The President may attend and participate in meetings of the committee. All members must hold the rank of professor with tenure.”

In theory, the Central Committee could consist of only a very few members should a provost so choose. In practice, however, provosts at Utah State have, for some time, made the reasonable and responsible choice of appointing tenured professors from across the academic colleges to serve on the Central Committee, thus, providing significant representation from the faculty ranks. Incidentally, former members of the Central Committee are a rich resource of information about its operations. The list of the Central Committee members is made public each year and the names of current members can be found on the Provost’s website at <http://www.usu.edu/aa/faculty/promotion.cfm>. In addition, ombudspersons drawn from the ranks of USU emeriti faculty are present “at the table” during the course of deliberations by the Central Committee.

The Central Committee begins to review dossiers as soon as they arrive in the Provost’s Office and has several weeks to do so. The Central Committee this year will convene for several days during the week of February 16 to discuss the dossiers. Although all Central Committee members are required to thoroughly review every dossier, one member of the committee is assigned to be the first reviewer and another member is the second reviewer for each dossier. At committee deliberations, the first and second reviewers describe what they perceive to be the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence in the dossier for the case that the candidate’s performance has or has not reached the level of excellence in their major area of emphasis or has or has not reached the level of effectiveness in the other areas of responsibility (that is for those seeking tenure and promotion, 405.2.2). A similar procedure is used for those seeking promotion from associate professor to professor. After these initial reviews, the entire committee joins in a discussion of the case. Using this process, every dossier is discussed to the point when the committee is prepared to render a recommendation. According to the faculty code, the Provost then reports “the collective action of this committee to the President” (405.7.2(5)).

The President makes a recommendation to the Board of Trustees who has the final authority on these actions. The President is bound by policy to notify candidates of the university decision by April 15.

The seriousness of the process is not lost on any involved; making the right tenure and promotion decisions has an enormous impact on the university and the faculty community. So, that is a brief overview of Utah State's tenure and promotion process and what is happening now with "T & P". Lastly, I would strongly recommend that every faculty member who is engaged in the promotion and tenure process, as a candidate or as a reviewer, should familiarize themselves with Section 405 of the USU Policy Manual to ensure that we are following not only the letter, but also the spirit of the code.

For further clarification of these issues or if you have other questions, Vice Provost Smith can be reached at 435.797.0718 or at larry.smith@usu.edu.

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