

## May 15, 2023

The May 15, 2023, meeting of the Tenure and Promotion Committee (TPC) was called to order by Provost Epstein in the president's office on Monday, May 15, at 2:30 p.m. Present, in addition to Provost Epstein were Professors Courtright, Hansen, Schroeder Rodríguez, Sitze, and Vigil; President Elliott; and Associate Provost Tobin, recorder.

During the meeting, the members began a discussion of the criteria for promotion to full professor and, to a lesser degree, related questions of process and procedure. Prior to the meeting, Provost Epstein had provided the committee with [information about promotion criteria and procedures at some peer institutions](#). In regard to the specific topic of which schools make use of external reviewers to evaluate candidates' scholarship at the time of promotion to full professor, the provost had sent an inquiry to the deans of institutions in the Northeast ahead of the meeting. [The deans' responses](#), which indicated that Amherst is an outlier in not requiring external reviews, were also provided to the committee. In addition, the members were given background material comprising minutes of prior discussions of this issue by the Committee of Six and [the 2006 report](#) of an ad hoc committee charged with examining promotion policies and practices.

The provost commented that many members of the Committee of Six (which reviewed promotion cases over many years) have been troubled that, while not automatic, the bar for promotion at the college is very low. Those evaluating promotion cases have also pointed out the difficulty of making informed decisions under the current system, given that there is very little information provided and that the criteria for promotion are vague. (In regard to the evidence that is given, it was noted that it consists only of a recommendation from the department [that is, the tenured full professors in the department and, if the candidate wishes, some tenured full professors from other departments]); the candidate's CV; and a letter from the candidate to the Tenure and Promotion Committee that the candidate has the option of writing. Such letters are submitted to the TPC and may also be submitted to the department, if the candidate wishes. It was noted that departments and the TPC do not review scholarship or evidence of teaching effectiveness. (See the procedures outlined [in Faculty Handbook, III., G.](#))

At the outset of the conversation, the members agreed on the importance of clarifying the criteria for promotion to full professor and considering the evidence that should be provided to the TPC and departments. The provost indicated that there has been more support of late for adopting a more evidenced-based evaluation process and for clarifying the criteria for promotion among faculty with whom she has spoken about this topic, including in recent conversations that she has had with some associate professors who will stand for promotion in the coming years.

Discussion focused on the benefits of having promotion criteria that have been clarified or changed to reflect the extent to which research and/or creative work, teaching, and service should factor into the promotion decision. Some members expressed particular appreciation for Carleton College's criteria for promotion and felt that [Carleton's language](#) offered a good starting point for discussion about criteria for promotion at Amherst. After some conversation, some members proposed that the core of the criteria for promotion at Amherst should be continued excellence in scholarly and/or artistic work, in teaching, and in service. Some members felt that there should be flexibility in regard to the relative importance of these areas. Professor Sitze suggested that excellence is too vague and empty an idea to form the basis of such an important procedure. He also suggested that promotion not be viewed as simply a repetition of the tenure process. In his view, the attainment of tenure marks a qualitative change in the career of a professor, and the new freedoms and security connected to tenure can and should correlate to new and different responsibilities. At Williams, he said, promotion seems to be seen as a way to "double-check" or confirm that the tenure decision was correct. At Claremont, it seems to be seen as a way to ensure that tenured professors have not become lazy. At Amherst, he argued, it should be seen as a chance for associate professors to say how they have made use of the new freedom

and security of tenure. In this, he said, he was persuaded by the arguments of Professors Jaswal and Engelhardt in [the Committee of Six meeting of October 1, 2018](#). Professor Schroeder Rodríguez suggested that, after college-wide criteria for promotion are developed and approved, it would be helpful for departments to create departmental-level criteria for promotion, as they have done successfully for tenure. As part of the work of creating criteria at the departmental level, the members agreed that excellence should be defined in this context (e.g., being recognized for doing cutting-edge work, publishing in top peer-reviewed journals, achieving national and international recognition).

In regard to scholarship and/or creative work, the members discussed the possibility of departments reviewing candidates' work since the time of tenure, of the TPC doing so, and of soliciting external letters from experts in candidates' fields. The members agreed that, at present, it is difficult for departments and for the committee evaluating promotion cases to engage with candidates' scholarship as part of their evaluation. The committee felt that departments should review the candidates' work to provide context for the departmental recommendation. The members also expressed a preference for having the TPC review the work and for having external reviewers do so. The committee's initial thought was that there should be three external reviewers for each case, two of which would be proposed by the candidate and one by the department.

In addition, the members noted that, under the current system, no evidence of teaching effectiveness is provided beyond what is discussed in the departmental recommendation and in the candidate's letter, if one is provided. Most members felt that such evidence should be part of the promotion review, and the following ideas were discussed as possibilities: soliciting retrospective letters from students whom the candidate has taught in the three years before standing for promotion; soliciting retrospective letters from a random sample of students whom the candidate has taught since the time of tenure; and/or asking candidates to assemble a teaching portfolio that could include items such as self-reflections on teaching, a sampling of syllabi, a summary of the candidate's contributions to the department's curriculum, examples of pedagogical innovation; and/or teaching evaluations from some of the candidate's courses. Professor Sitze said that he does not think that consideration of end-of-semester evaluations should be a mandatory part of the promotion review. He feels that the period in which a person is a tenure-track faculty member is a probationary one in terms of teaching, and that a positive tenure decision represents a rigorous affirmation of teaching excellence. In Professor Sitze's view, after faculty members receive tenure, they should have room to take risks and have greater freedom with the courses they teach, and experiment with the pedagogical approaches they might use. He feels that mandatory semester-end teaching evaluations post-tenure could have the effect of inhibiting pedagogical experimentation. Concluding, he suggested that end-of-semester teaching evaluations encourage a consumer mentality in and toward students, incentivize grade inflation on the part of instructors, and have been shown to contain systematic race and sex biases. It thus would be a mistake, in his view, to mandate them. Professor Hansen expressed support for including as part of the promotion review a holistic evaluation of teaching, drawing on some or all of the evidence that the committee had discussed. Most other members agreed.

In regard to service, the members found the description that Claremont McKenna uses in its summary of its promotion criteria to be compelling—"service to students through involvement in independent studies, thesis supervision, counseling, formal and informal extracurricular activities, and broad contribution to students' intellectual growth; service to one's profession, such as holding office in a professional association and participation in conferences; and service to the outside community, where related to one's scholarly pursuits." Professor Sitze commented that the results of the last Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) faculty job satisfaction survey suggest that the college needs to find ways to reconcile expectations around scholarly productivity and service, particularly for associate professors, so that they have the time they need to continue to focus on their scholarship and teaching. This will be especially important, he said, if the faculty does eventually decide

to vote to raise the bar on promotion. Concurring, Provost Epstein noted that one idea that the president and she have discussed in this regard is providing associate professors with an additional semester of sabbatic leave after twelve semesters of teaching in rank, so that they can have a full year in which to focus fully on their scholarly and/or creative endeavors. The members expressed support for this plan, agreeing that it would be a generous way of recognizing and alleviating some of the pressures that associate professors face, and reducing some anxiety during the period before standing for promotion. The members stressed that, under such a plan, the leave should be tied to the expectation that faculty would make significant progress on—or complete—a scholarly and/or creative project while on the sabbatical.

The discussion about service concluded with the members agreeing on the importance of service being purpose-driven and having meaning, and the need to find ways to measure the quality, quantity, and significance of service at the time of the promotion review. It was noted that, after receiving tenure, faculty could consider engaging in service that is public facing, making full use of the freedom that tenure provides. Professor Vigil commented on the notion that faculty essentially receive tenure in their fields, a reminder of the expectation that tenured faculty should become intellectual leaders in their fields. As noted by Alexander Meiklejohn, this leadership can take different forms and can include serving the public interest, and not just knowledge itself. Professor Vigil also expressed support for Middlebury College's recognition of "unusually distinguished service" at the time of promotion, suggesting that Amherst should consider doing so as well. As an associate professor herself, Professor Vigil also noted that, if the expectations for promotion change in the ways that are under discussion, it will be important for associate professors to receive more guidance and support in the form of mentoring in the years leading up to standing for promotion. The other members agreed.

The members agreed to continue their discussion about promotion at the committee's next meeting, and that next year's TPC should develop a proposal to clarify the criteria for promotion to full professor and to articulate the evidence that should be provided to inform the promotion review; it will also be important to address flaws in the promotion procedures, it was noted. The committee suggested that, after a proposal is developed, the TPC should seek the feedback of department chairs and faculty at all ranks (in separate conversations) before bringing the proposal forward to the full faculty. The members felt that framing such discussions about the proposal with guiding questions would be an effective way of generating conversation. As examples, the committee suggested the following: "As we reformulate what promotion criteria should look like at Amherst, do you think that excellence is a sufficiently flexible and clear criterion? Are you open to other criteria? "How should we ask candidates to demonstrate excellence in scholarship and/or creative work, teaching, and service?"

The meeting adjourned at 3:50 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty

## June 1, 2023

The June 1, 2023, meeting of the Tenure and Promotion Committee (TPC) was called to order by President Elliott in his office on Thursday, June 1, at 8:30 a.m. Present, in addition to the president, were Professors Courtright, Schroeder Rodríguez, Sitze, and Vigil and Associate Provost Tobin, recorder. Provost Epstein, who was traveling for the college, and Professor Hansen were absent.

The meeting began with a discussion of some personnel matters. In the time remaining—following up on [their conversation of May 15](#)—the members discussed how best to move forward with developing a proposal for criteria for promotion to full professor that are robust and clear, and for revising some of the related promotion procedures. It was noted that many Committees of Six members over the years have raised concerns about the lack of substance and absence of standards that characterize Amherst's promotion process currently. After reviewing [the criteria and procedures of peer institutions](#), the members concurred that the college is an outlier among its peers in this regard, and that the moment has arrived for raising the standards for promotion to full professor at Amherst.

The ensuing conversation focused on ways to engage the faculty in the consideration of this important matter. The committee decided that the best way to solicit perspectives, and also to demystify the current promotion process, would be for next year's TPC to host a series of separate meetings with faculty at different ranks, for example, colleagues who were recently promoted to full professor, associate professors, and assistant professors. In addition, the committee felt that having meetings with the chairs of departments and programs would be helpful. There would be no predetermined outcome of these meetings. To make the committee's own process for considering promotion more transparent, the members agreed that, in advance of these gatherings, the faculty would be provided with the compelling background materials (some of which has already been linked from the minutes) about promotion that the TPC has reviewed.

Continuing the discussion, the committee decided that, if next year's committee agrees, the provost's office could be charged with organizing these meetings with professors, and that the committee could extend invitations to the different groups. The plan would be to have the meetings take place early in the fall, with the goal of the TPC developing a proposal over the course of the next academic year, after engaging in further discussion by the faculty, and bringing a motion to the faculty in the spring (ideally, by March). The committee agreed that the best way to generate discussion about promotion would be to ask attendees guiding questions such as the following at the fall meetings: What is the purpose and value of promotion? What considerations should the TPC take into account as the committee thinks about revising the promotion criteria? What should the expectations and standards surrounding scholarship and/or creative work, teaching, and service be? What relative weight should be given to these areas in the evaluation process? Taking into consideration the views expressed during these initial conversations, the committee could develop a proposal for college-wide criteria for promotion and ways to strengthen the evaluation process (e.g., the committee discussed the idea of having external reviews of scholarship and/or creative work). Once institutional criteria for promotion are adopted, the members agreed that it would be helpful for departments to create departmental-level criteria for promotion, as they have done successfully for tenure.

In conclusion, the members urged the president to consider providing associate professors with an additional semester of sabbatic leave after twelve semesters of teaching in rank, if expectations surrounding scholarly productivity and accomplishment by the time of promotion are raised. In this way, associate professors could have a full year in which to focus fully on their scholarly and/or creative endeavors. President Elliott said that he would discuss this matter with the provost as part of the consideration of the promotion process.

Turning to another topic, Professor Vigil, who is leaving the committee to assume her appointment as dean of new students, thanked the members for being such wonderful colleagues and commented on the positive experience she has had as a member of the TPC this year. She expressed the

view that TPC members should receive two course releases for this important and demanding work. Professor Schroeder Rodríguez, who is completing his second and final year of service (one year on the Committee of Six and one year on the TPC) concurred.

The meeting adjourned at 10:30 A.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty