

Rationale and Context for Faculty Handbook Revisions: Promotion to Full

Written by Promotions Committee, February 2025

Rationale:

In the past two years, Promotions Committee has reviewed over 20 cases and we have noted that a significant portion of letters written by internal and external writers was devoted to lengthy discussion of the criteria for promotion in Skidmore's Faculty Handbook. For example, some letters tried to unpack what it meant to be a "pillar of the community" in terms of service. Parallel to this observation, the Committee dedicated a significant portion of its discussions to clarifying these same criteria, suggesting that the Faculty Handbook language on the criteria for promotion to Full Professor is ambiguous. The Skidmore Faculty Handbook language on tenure and promotion to Associate Professor was revised in 2015, but the language on promotion to Full Professor was not revised.

Information gathering and findings:

Consequently, in Fall 2023, the Promotions Committee reviewed the Faculty Handbook Language for Promotion to Full across 10 peer institutions (Kenyon, Gettysburg, St. Lawrence, Dickenson, Bard, Colgate, Hamilton, Vassar, Bates, Union). We found that 8/10 of our peer institutions give some guidance on the timeline to standing for promotion, and in particular these 8 handbooks stated a suggested or hard minimum of time at rank of Associate before standing to full (range of 4 to 7 years). Many institutions used the words "normally" in their language about timeline, and 2/10 specifically stated that a candidate can go up earlier if their case is exceptional. We also found that 4/10 institutions had some language about how candidates may differ in how they balance scholarship, teaching, and service after tenure. Language around criteria for promotion to Full varied substantially across institutions.

In January 2024, we led a Committee of the Whole (CoW) to "discuss how well the Faculty Handbook language reflects appropriate promotion standards for the Skidmore Community". The themes that emerged from the CoW were 1) questions about the timeline to promotion, and in particular how it relates to the criteria of "sustained" achievement across teaching/scholarship/service and 2) discussions about lack of clarity around evaluative criteria, in particular for service and scholarship, and confusion about ambiguous wording/metaphors.

Conclusion:

Based on our experiences evaluating files, feedback from faculty from the CoW, and our review of peer institution handbook language, PC has drafted proposed revisions to the Faculty Handbook language around promotion to Full.

In particular, we have drafted language to address two components of the Faculty Handbook that can be presented to the Faculty as two separate motions:

- 1) Timeline to Promotion to Full: We propose adding a statement that faculty will normally stand for promotion after spending at least five years at the rank of Associate Professor. This aligns our handbook with that of the majority of our peer institutions. More importantly, it provides guidance to candidates about the typical time it will take to build a

file that can successfully address the criteria for promotion to Full. Our proposed revision includes a statement that faculty can stand for promotion earlier if they have an exceptional case. Thus, under our proposed revision, candidates can still stand for promotion when they choose, but the circumstances for early promotion are clearly stated.

- 2) Clarification of evaluative criteria: We propose revisions to clarify the evaluative criteria for promotion to Full. Our goal was to create Faculty Handbook language that is clear, concise, and that can be evaluated with evidence in a candidate's file. We wanted to honor the language in the Preamble (Section VIII), which describes general criteria for tenure and advancement in rank in detail and defines terms such as "sustained" and "service". Thus, in our proposed revision, we deleted language that was redundant with the Preamble and added a reference to the Preamble as providing more detail on criteria and term definitions. Our revision also clarifies language that faculty and PC have marked as vague and unassessable, such as "pillar of the community" and "master of the craft". We also made a small change to the required materials that fixed an error.

Our proposal also includes new language stating that candidates may differ in their balance of scholarship/creative work and service, while reiterating that teaching remains paramount and that there must be achievement across all three areas.

Overall, our revisions aim to make the Faculty Handbook language around promotion to Full clearer for candidates and evaluators and also more aligned with our community values.