Chapter 1: Appointment of Assistant Professor (Tenure Line)

Updated 9/1/2019

Note: Appointments at Stanford University are governed by the guidelines and procedures set forth in the Stanford University Faculty Handbook and the Stanford University Faculty Appointment Forms, both of which are published by the Provost's Office. The policies and procedures described below are specific to H&S and have been approved by the Provost's Office as consistent with overall University policy. Those carrying out faculty searches are urged to review both University and School policies and procedures.

1.1 Timeline and Checkpoints for Search

Untenured Appointment Checklist [1]

1.2 Search Authorization

Appointments to the tenure-line faculty ranks in the School can be initiated only by departmental or joint departmental action. Recommendations for an appointment at the junior level are to be preceded by a rigorous and comprehensive search.

A department chair must present the case for a new appointment to the Dean's Office and obtain formal authorization before a search can be launched. Every billet that becomes vacant for any reason returns to the Dean's Office. In some circumstances, a billet is returned to the department for a replacement or for a search in another field. In other cases, the Dean may reallocate that billet to another department or hold it in reserve in the Dean's Office.

The cognizant dean meets with the department chair to discuss faculty appointment needs, normally in the spring. After consulting with the cognizant dean, the department chair should submit the necessary search authorization request form, which is distributed to all departments by the Dean's Office at the beginning of the process. Such requests are then reviewed by the deans, and approvals are communicated to chairs in June.

Departmental faculties and the deans must regard every search authorization as a potential long-term commitment. The Dean's authorization is based on an assessment of the department's present and predicted future needs in scholarship and teaching and involves priority judgments both within the department and between departments. Teaching needs of interdisciplinary programs also may play a role in assigning authorizations to departments.
A decision regarding the area of search is among the most important in the process, since this determines the applicant pool for initial appointment and may help to define the group with whom a candidate will be compared at the time of a tenure review. Whenever possible, departments should search broadly rather than in narrowly defined subfields. A search that yields a small number of applicants may signal that the search may not have been defined broadly enough, or that the net may not have been cast widely enough.

It is expected that most searches will be authorized at the assistant professor level. The department chair and the cognizant dean, however, should confer regarding the appropriate rank, which should be determined in accordance with the department's distribution of ranks, long-range hiring plan and programmatic needs.

1.3 Appointment Terms

Assistant professors normally spend seven years in rank and are evaluated for promotion to associate professor with tenure in their seventh year. There are some circumstances in which an assistant professor can delay the tenure review until a later year.

All newly hired assistant professors in the School of Humanities and Sciences follow the 4+3 schedule, which consists of an initial term of four years and, if approved, reappointment to a second term of three years. This pattern is designed to provide time necessary to begin an academic career and to establish a record on which to be evaluated for reappointment.

1.4 Appointment as Assistant Professor (Subject to Ph.D.)

A person hired as an assistant professor who does not complete requirements for the Ph.D. degree before the start of his/her appointment at Stanford is appointed as an assistant professor (subject to Ph.D.) on a lower salary scale. Assistant professor (subject to Ph.D.) is not a rank in the tenure line and an individual appointed to this rank is not a member of the Academic Council. When the degree is received, the parenthetical portion of the title is dropped, the individual is appointed to the initial four-year term as assistant professor, and the tenure clock begins running. The faculty member must provide the department with documentation showing date of the award of the Ph.D. degree. The department will then forward the documentation with the Recommendation for Amendment of Professorial Appointment to the Dean's Office.

1.5 Appointment as Non-Tenured Associate Professor

The rank of untenured associate professor is occasionally used as a means of attracting especially promising individuals who may not yet have the strong credentials required for initial appointment to a tenured rank. In H&S, such an appointment is typically three to five years in length. To be appointed as an untenured associate professor, the person must have distinguished herself or himself in scholarship considerably more than persons appointed as assistant professors and, as with all faculty appointments, must clearly have the potential to be tenurable at Stanford. Such an appointment, however, implies no commitment or prejudgment with respect to tenure. For appointments at this rank, the department chair must meet with the cognizant dean to discuss and clarify issues concerning the tenure clock; expectations of the tenure clock should be made clear to the candidate in writing. The chair should also discuss with the cognizant dean the solicitation of external referees and students. The department
must use the referee solicitation letter template provided by the H&S Dean's Office. Referee letters should be comparative.

1.6 Forming the Search Committee

The search committee has the responsibility for gathering data on scholarship, teaching, and other relevant matters. While the search committee structure varies among departments, normally the minimum is three members with a senior faculty member serving as chair. Any faculty member who is eligible to vote in the department on a new untenured appointment may serve on the search committee. A member of the committee should be assigned the responsibility for overseeing the diversity aspects of the search.

Once the department chair has selected the committee, he or she must consult with the cognizant dean, who retains authority to approve its membership. By School policy, a department may permit emeritus faculty and a graduate student to serve on and vote in a search committee. However, emeritus faculty and graduate students are not allowed to vote at the departmental (as opposed to the committee) level. The department chair retains final approval regarding the selection of students for committee membership.

1.7 Advertising

Searches should include advertising in professional journals or other widely-disseminated professional publications. All advertisements are to be forwarded to the cognizant dean for approval. A sample advertisement is provided by the H&S Dean's Office and should be followed closely.

Search committee members and other department faculty are encouraged to call and write colleagues at other universities in order to identify applicants and to encourage them to apply. Solicitation letters should be carefully phrased to make certain that recipients understand Stanford's eagerness to receive applications from all highly qualified candidates. A sample letter is included is provided by the H&S Dean's Office and should be followed closely.

The School encourages contact with institutions that have significant minority enrollments, as well as professional groups of women and minorities, including advertising in special journals so that such groups are alerted to a search.

1.8 Candidates with Stanford Affiliations
Persons who hold, or have held, acting or visiting titles at Stanford, or who have been at the University in other capacities occasionally become candidates for regular professorial appointments. The credentials of such persons may be more easily assessed than those of others, but the search committee is still required to undertake a thorough search in order to consider by all appropriate means the credentials of candidates having no prior association with the University. This obligation should be made clear to candidates who hold, or have held, Stanford appointments.

Faculty members from outside the department but internal to Stanford may serve as a reference for such candidates. The number of such letters should not exceed two in addition to the three external referee letters required. Please see the sample letter to internal referees provided by the H&S Dean's Office. A faculty member within the department also has the prerogative to write a letter on behalf of the candidate. If this option is exercised, however, he or she may not participate in departmental deliberations regarding the search and must recuse himself or herself from voting. Exceptions to this requirement may only be granted by the cognizant dean.

1.9 Criteria

Excellence in both scholarship and teaching are important prerequisites for faculty appointments at Stanford because the University is dedicated to outstanding achievement in both. The purpose of the appointment evaluation is to appraise, on the basis of the record to date, the candidate’s standing and potential in his or her scholarly discipline broadly defined and the candidate’s quality or promise as a teacher. Decisions on initial appointment are subject to the exercise of scholarly and professional judgment and discretion by the University’s departmental faculty and academic leadership.

The first criterion for an appointment at Stanford is that the individual is the best available at his or her level of professional development for the proposed rank. All appointments have in common the requirement of excellence, however measured. Factors to be considered in assessing research performance or promise include (but are not limited to) the following: scholarly activity and productivity; impact, innovation and creativity; and recognition in the field; ability to work effectively as part of a research team (if relevant); effective communication with colleagues, staff and students; and professionalism, institutional compliance and ethics.

The second criterion for an appointment is evidence that the candidate is capable of sustaining a first-rate teaching program during his or her career at Stanford. Teaching is broadly defined to include: the classroom, studio, laboratory, or clinical setting; advising; mentoring; program building; and curricular innovation. Teaching may include undergraduate, graduate, and (if appropriate) postdoctoral instruction, of all types. Factors considered in assessing teaching performance or promise include (but are not limited to) the following: knowledge of the material; clarity of exposition; style of interaction with students; availability; professionalism, institutional compliance and ethics; effective communication skills; helpfulness in learning; and ability to stimulate further education.

In judging candidates for appointments whose work involves creative writing, dramatic or musical composition or performance, works of art, and the equivalent, special criteria must be defined and applied. In general, the judgment of teaching quality for these fine arts faculty can follow normal procedures applicable to all faculty.

Uniqueness of function is not a criterion for an appointment. The fact that a candidate is the only faculty member teaching in a specific area, or doing scholarship on a certain subject, is not relevant to the process of judging the quality of scholarship and teaching. A department's faculty and/or the dean may on occasion decide that a candidate does not warrant an appointment even though that person may be the best available within a field. That is, the reviewing group may decide that the best candidate in a weak or overly narrow professional field should not be
appointed to a position at Stanford. Deans and department chairs must try to avoid such situations by ensuring that initial searches, appointments, and reappointments are made in areas in which the quality of scholarship is relatively strong, and in which the subject area is sufficiently broad. If teaching needs exist in potentially weak areas, then non-faculty appointments should be considered until that field improves or a strong candidate in it emerges.

1.10 Department Faculty Review of Candidates

Should a faculty member write a personal letter for the file evaluating the candidate before the case is discussed or voted upon, he or she may not participate in departmental discussions regarding the search and must recuse himself or herself from voting. Exceptions to this requirement may only be granted by the cognizant dean.

As a standard practice, the supporting documentation should be made available to Academic Council departmental faculty who are eligible to vote on the appointment for their review only after the file is substantially complete, that is, after most of the referee letters have been received. It is expected that each voting faculty member in the department will carefully and objectively evaluate this material before the case is discussed or voted upon.

1.11 Developing the Short List

When the search process has resulted in a short list of candidates, the department chair should consult with the cognizant dean to discuss the search (including the diversity aspects of the search), the quality of the applicant pool, and the ranking of the candidates. If at this stage the candidate pool is judged insufficiently strong, no appointment should be made; the deans may authorize another search in the same or another field during a subsequent year.

Diversity Action Plan. All candidates known to be women or minority group members are to be discussed by the search committee. If the short list does not include women or minority candidates, the department chair is to provide the cognizant dean with a careful explanation. If a woman or minority candidate, whose qualifications do not fit the opening, but are consistent with the standards and future direction of the department, is identified in the search process, the cognizant dean should be informed.

1.12 Bringing Candidates to Campus

The search process will include visits to the campus by the leading candidates, who should have an opportunity to speak with faculty and students. Normally, three candidates are invited; in some cases, the dean may approve more than three. The department chair must obtain the approval of the cognizant dean to invite any number of candidates for a campus visit. The cognizant dean should also be given an opportunity to meet with the finalists. Background materials on candidates (including a curriculum vitae, transcripts, evaluative letters and teaching evaluations) should be assembled and made available to faculty and deans who are scheduled to meet with the candidate.

1.13 Guidelines for Student Participation

Student perspectives are important to the appointment process, especially when there is little evidence available about the candidate’s teaching. During the search, students should be asked to participate in seminars, colloquia, and other public occasions where the candidates present their research. This gives students an opportunity to interact with the candidates, both as part of a group and individually. Departments are encouraged to provide a systematic process for students to give feedback and input, and to include this input for consideration in the faculty’s deliberations.
1.14 Department Discussion and Confidentiality Issues

The information to be included in the appointment papers should be read carefully and objectively prior to the formal vote by every faculty member voting on the candidate. The search committee will then present its recommendations for discussion and consideration by the department's faculty. To underscore Stanford's policy of vigorously protecting the sources of information contained in third-party evaluation, department chairs are required to read the following statement to their faculty before every discussion of an individual's appointment or promotion:

"The entire appointment proceedings during which specific individuals are discussed are to be held in strict confidence by all participants. The University takes extensive measures to protect the privacy of the candidate by preserving the confidentiality of the information it receives regarding the candidate. Similarly, it is Stanford’s policy to protect vigorously the sources of information and evaluations used in these proceedings. The opinions expressed by the school or department faculty or by internal or external referees shall not be discussed with the candidate or with other parties. The chair of the department or his/her designee shall convey whatever information needs to be transmitted to the candidate. A breach of confidence by a participant in an appointment and promotion matter may be considered to be a serious violation of professional ethics."

If the proceedings take place by video-conferencing, the A&P Video-Conferencing Guidelines [3] should be reviewed and followed.

Any inquiry about the search should be directed to the department chair.

1.15 Voting

Individual departments have the authority to determine the eligibility of Academic Council members to vote on appointments. Emeritus professors (whether or not recalled to active duty) may not vote on the appointment of outside scholars.

Departments must have a clear and consistent voting policy. Any modification of the policy must be discussed in advance with the cognizant dean. Eligible department members are expected to vote. Faculty not on leave should make every effort to attend the department meeting. They are expected to read all of the written materials related to the recommendation and to vote. Although faculty on leave are not expected to participate in the appointment review process, the department chair and cognizant dean may request that a person on leave participate in the process by reviewing all materials and voting. In such cases faculty away from campus should ensure that their votes are received by the chair in advance of departmental balloting. Some faculty must recuse themselves from voting, including spouses, domestic partners, those who have written a letter on behalf of the candidate prior to departmental discussion and voting, and others who have conferred with the cognizant dean and reached an agreement with him or her regarding recusal prior to the departmental vote. Emeritus faculty and graduate students serving on search committees may (at the discretion of the department) vote on appointments at the committee level, and/or participate in the department's deliberations, but they may not vote at the departmental level.

School policy allows for either secret or open ballots on appointments. Departments should adopt one system and apply it consistently in all cases. The practice of conducting a "straw vote" which, if positive, is followed by a final "unanimous vote" is prohibited. Votes should be taken independently for each candidate considered by the
department. The actual yeas, nays, abstentions, and non-votes must be recorded and reported in all votes on faculty appointments. In cases involving split or negative votes, every faculty member who votes is encouraged to include a written explanation of his or her vote in the papers submitted by the department.

Split Votes. In cases where the vote is split or negative, the department chair retains the authority to decide whether or not to forward a file to the Dean's Office.

Abstentions. If there are any abstentions, the chair should summarize the reasons for them, if known.

Dissenting Votes. If there are dissenting votes, the chair should summarize the reasons for them, if known. Dissenting voters are strongly encouraged to write a letter for the file.

Communications to the Dean regarding the case. Faculty members who vote may communicate directly with the Dean's Office about their vote, and their written statements will be added to the papers that are considered by reviewing bodies. In such instances, the faculty member must provide a copy of his or her letter to the department chair, who will have the option of forwarding a written response that will also be added to the file. Both the faculty member's letter and the department chair's response must be held in strictest confidence and not shared with other members of the department's faculty.

In extraordinary situations, however, faculty members, graduate students and postdocs may communicate in writing to the Dean's Office with the assurance that their communication will be held confidential from other members of the department, including the chair. Letters of this type may be added to the papers that are considered by reviewing bodies if, in the opinion of the cognizant dean, (1) the letter discusses information or views that are relevant to the review of the appointment or promotion; (2) the letter clearly states the reason why the writer desires to communicate confidentially; and (3) the reason for confidentiality is a compelling one.

If such a letter is included in the file, the file should note that the letter is confidential and has not been reviewed by the department chair. Where appropriate, the cognizant dean may gather any additional information that he or she believes is helpful to verify the accuracy of any problematic statements in the letter and record his or her findings in the file.

1.16 Assembling the Appointment Papers

Scholarship. Evidence of scholarly excellence and potential is essential. When candidates for first-term assistant professorships have letters of reference sent, either through placement offices or by asking references directly, the department does not need to follow up on these letters. Normally, the department should ask candidates to provide three letters of reference. If the department receives more than three, all of these letters are included in the file. In cases where candidates are asked to provide the names of referees from whom the department will solicit evaluations, the sample letter shown provided by the H&S Dean's Office should be followed closely.

Teaching. At the beginning assistant professor level, the file should include whatever evidence can be obtained about the candidate's teaching. Many candidates will have taught as graduate students or as postdoctoral fellows, and data on that teaching performance should be gathered. Faculty members for whom the candidate has served as a teaching assistant should be asked to provide commentary about teaching. Students of the candidate may also be asked to provide letters; the sample letter provided by the H&S Dean's Office should be followed closely.
1.17 Submission of the Appointment Papers

The chair of the search committee is responsible for assembling the documentation necessary to complete the file. The appointment papers should be assembled in accordance with the guidelines set forth in Stanford University Faculty Appointment Long Form (Appendix B of the Stanford University Faculty Handbook). The department administrator (or person responsible for faculty affairs within the department) will have the required forms and can assist the faculty in assembling the file.

The department chair is responsible for writing the cover letter to the cognizant dean for the file. The letter should include the pertinent reasons for the candidate’s selection and the effective date of the appointment, which is normally September 1 of the following academic year. The department chair should not simply summarize letters or excerpt text from letters. Instead the chair’s letter should identify and evaluate any criticisms raised in referee letters or teaching evaluations, and provide any relevant information not included in referee or student letters.

1.18 The Review Process

When the file has been completed, the department administrator should send the file in draft form to the Faculty Affairs Officer in the Dean's Office for review. After reviewing the materials for adherence to policy and procedure, the Faculty Affairs Officer will return the file to the department for any revisions before copying. The department administrator will then send the original file plus the necessary number of copies to the Dean's Office. The Dean's Office, in its discretion, may solicit additional information regarding the file. The following steps occur after the file leaves the department:

- H&S Faculty Affairs Office (review and forward to Cognizant Dean)
- Cognizant Dean (review and approve for Dean's consideration)
- Dean (final approval at the School level)
- Provost (review and approve for Advisory Board consideration)
- Advisory Board of the Academic Council (review and approve)
- President (approve and report to Board of Trustees)

1.19 Negative Decisions at the School Level

If the decision is negative at the School level, the Dean must inform the department chair of that decision and the reasons for it. Reconsideration of a negative decision by the Dean will be considered only if the department presents convincing evidence of new and material data that could not have been available in the original evaluation. Reconsiderations are rare and may be avoided by consultation between the chair and the cognizant dean at appropriate intervals in the search process.

1.20 The Written Offer
A draft of the written offer letter may be prepared by the department chair after the departmental vote and must be forwarded to the cognizant dean for final approval. A draft of the complete appointment file or the final version of the file must be submitted to the cognizant dean at the same time as the draft of the written offer letter. The offer letter must contain an explicit statement reminding the individual that such an offer is contingent upon approval of the Dean's Office, the Provost, the Advisory Board, and the President. Candidates may be referred to the Stanford University Faculty Handbook for rules and policies relating to the faculty. A sample offer letter is provided by the H&S Dean's Office.

Links