Chapter 4: Promotion to Full (Tenure Line)

Updated 9/1/2019

Note: Promotions to full professor 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 promotion reviews are urged to review both University and School policies and procedures.

4.1 Timeline and Checkpoints for Promotion Activities

Promotion to Full Checklist [1]

4.2 Criteria and Timing  

Criteria: In order to be promoted to full professor, a faculty member should have achieved recognized distinction in his or her field, broadly defined, and compiled a significant record of accomplishment since the time of the tenure review. The candidate should also have achieved and maintained a record of high quality teaching and mentoring of Stanford students. While the primary criteria for promotion are excellence in scholarship and teaching, service (including what might be called institutional citizenship) may also be given some consideration.
Scholarship: In order to be promoted to Professor, a faculty member should have achieved recognized distinction in his or her field (broadly defined) and have compiled a significant record of excellent scholarly accomplishment since the time of the tenure review. In general, the evidence must show that the person being proposed for promotion is among the very best individuals in the field and not merely the best of a particular experience cohort in the field. The evaluation should address whether the candidate’s performance is the kind of innovative, cutting-edge research on important questions in the field that breaks new ground, or changes the way the field is viewed, or broadens our understanding of the field, or opens up new methods or new areas of investigation, and thereby has (or is likely to have) the fundamental impact on the field that is expected from the very best scholars in the field. Factors considered in assessing research performance include (but are not limited to) the following: scholarly activity and productivity; impact, innovation and creativity; 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.

Teaching: The candidate for promotion to Professor should also have achieved and maintained a record of high quality teaching and mentoring of Stanford students. Teaching is broadly defined to include: the classroom, laboratory, or clinical setting; advising; mentoring; program building; and curricular innovation. The teaching record should include, as appropriate, undergraduate, graduate, and postdoctoral instruction, of all types. Factors considered in assessing teaching performance include (but are not limited to) the following: knowledge of the material; clarity of exposition; positive style of interaction with students; availability; professionalism, institutional compliance and ethics; effective communication skills; helpfulness in learning; and ability to stimulate further education.

Timing: Chairs are urged to meet with their cognizant dean during spring quarter to discuss any associate professor who is a prospective candidate for promotion in the following academic year. This should be an occasion to look at the performance and progress of all associate professors in the department. The timing of the review is variable and depends on such factors as the progress of the person’s scholarship and norms for the discipline. Special circumstances, such as some outside offers or unusually rapid professional advancement, can also be considered. The effective date of the promotion is typically 9/1 of the academic year following completion and approval of the review at all levels. A department may recommend a different effective date if extraordinary circumstances prevent completion of the review on the typical schedule. The earliest effective date that may be approved is the beginning of the academic quarter (Autumn, Winter or Spring only) after the completion of the review.

Candidates should be notified in writing by the department chair that the tenure review will be conducted with information about timing and the materials required from the candidate for the review.

4.3 Forming the Evaluation Committee

The promotion evaluation committee in the department has the responsibility of gathering data on scholarship, teaching, and service. While the structure of evaluation committees varies among departments, normally the minimum is three full professors, with a senior faculty member serving as the committee chair. Any faculty member who is eligible to vote on a promotion to full professor action may serve on the promotion evaluation committee. Members of the evaluation committee should have no collaborative or mentoring relationship with the candidate although this may sometimes be unavoidable or preferable to other alternatives. The department chair should consult with the Senior Associate Dean in such situations. Any mentoring or collaborative relationship between the candidate and a review committee member or letter writer should be clearly disclosed in the cover memos from the department and school. In selecting the committee, the department chair is to consult with the cognizant dean, who retains authority to approve its membership.
4.4 Reviewing the Scholarship

Confidential letters from professional peers and students are the cornerstone of the evaluation process at every research university. Candid assessment of scholarship and teaching, without concern for breach of confidentiality, can best be obtained if explicit assurance is given that Stanford’s policy is to vigorously protect the sources of information contained in third-party evaluation.

External Referees

External referees evaluating the individual’s scholarship are to be chosen with great care. Department chairs and evaluation committees are required to obtain a minimum of five letters from distinguished scholars outside of Stanford. The referees should all be at the rank of full professor. A preliminary list of external referees should be prepared by the evaluation committee, taking into account the suggestions (positive and negative) of the candidate, as well as their own knowledge of the field. The candidate should suggest no more than three referees. Not all of the persons suggested by the candidate will necessarily be asked to write, nor will the negative suggestions of the candidate necessarily be followed. The department chair should present the list to the cognizant dean together with brief biographical sketches and should identify any individuals with special ties to the candidate (e.g., mentor, collaborator, etc.). The cognizant dean may suggest and/or require that changes be made to the list in order to obtain a more appropriate evaluation of the candidate. The cognizant dean has the responsibility for approval of the final list.

In constructing the referee list, a wide variety of considerations are appropriate, including but not limited to the following:

- The list should include individuals with expertise very closely related to that of the candidate and those who work in the same or a closely related specialty in order to obtain critical evaluations of the scholarship.
- The list should include individuals in related fields and those with a broader range of interests in order to obtain insights into the breadth of impact of the candidate’s work.
- The list may contain individuals (generally, no more than three), such as former mentors and current or former collaborators, who would be useful in educating readers of the file about the structure of the field.
- Normally, an individual whom the candidate perceives as having a strong negative personal bias toward the candidate or a clear conflict of interest should not be asked to serve as a referee. If for some reason letters from such individuals are judged likely to be useful and are solicited and received, the existence and nature of the concerns regarding the perceived bias or conflict of interest should be clearly indicated in the evaluation committee report.
- The list should contain individuals from strong academic institutions where promotion standards are generally high, in order to get letters from people who are comfortable with reading and writing the type of frank and critical evaluations that Stanford’s promotion process requires.

Once the referees have been selected by the department, those involved in the process should avoid communication with them that relates to the review process, both before and after letters are sent out. A minimum of five letters from external referees must be included in the file. To obtain this number of letters, a department should solicit 8 to 10 letters. Potential referees should generally be asked in advance by email if they are willing to provide evaluative letters. If the reply is positive, departments should then follow up with more detailed information, including the candidate’s curriculum vitae, research and teaching statement, and selected publications. Sample letters for the preliminary letter and the more detailed letter are provided by the H&S Dean’s Office, and should be followed closely. In all cases, referees should be given sufficient time to respond, normally at least four weeks. All
letters received by the department must be placed in the file, together with a list and biographical sketches of all the referees who were solicited. Letters may not be solicited by the candidate, and the candidate should not be told the identities of the external referees chosen for the evaluation process.

The wording of the letter soliciting evaluation of the candidate's scholarship and ranking is of critical importance. Referees should be asked to be quite specific in their comments about the candidate's scholarship, as well as in their comparisons and rankings of the candidate relative to other named persons in the field. In soliciting opinions from external referees, the department (or the Dean's Office at a later stage of review) may request special commentary on one or more items in the candidate's bibliography. All such special letters must be expressly approved by the cognizant dean before they are mailed.

Phone calls should not be made to external referees prior to letters being sent to them. Departments are to maintain a written record of all follow-up done with referees. For example, if, after receiving no response from the referee, a phone call is made to solicit a letter, then a written log of conversation is to be kept and included in the file.

If a referee chooses not to write, the communication explaining this decision (e.g., letter, e-mail message or phone conversation summary) is to be included in the file. If it becomes necessary to supplement the original referee list, the cognizant dean must approve the addition of any new names.

Once a letter of evaluation is received, it is inappropriate for the department to ask a referee for an interpretation or clarification of his or her comments.

Comparison Set

As noted above, in general, the evidence must show that the person being proposed for promotion is among the very best individuals in the field and not merely the best of a particular experience cohort in a field. To obtain information from the referees that is useful in determining whether the candidate meets this criterion, the referees should be asked to compare the candidate with a group of people (the "comparison set") consisting of four to six highly regarded people in the field who are setting the standard of excellence. The comparison set should consist of persons belonging to the faculty rank that the candidate would join upon approval of the proposed action. It should be composed of individuals recognized as world leaders in their fields and, when possible, from institutions comparable to Stanford. In most cases, a comparison set that includes individuals with: (1) a rank below that of the proposed appointment, (2) a more recent date of PhD than the candidate, or (3) less professional experience than the candidate should not be used as the set does not provide a useful basis for comparison. Any variance from these guidelines should be explained in the file.

A useful guideline is that the comparison set should include two of the most distinguished names from the list of referees. (In the specific letter written to a referee, the referee's name should, of course, not appear on the comparison set.)

In constructing the comparison set, the field of the candidate for promotion must not be defined in overly narrow terms. Thus a specific research topic should not define the comparison set; instead, as broad a segment as possible of the discipline should be used.
After a preliminary comparison set has been prepared by the evaluation committee, the department chair should present the list to the cognizant dean together with brief biographical sketches. The description should include the year and school from which the individual received his or her highest degree, his or her current title and institution, and a description of his or her area of expertise. The cognizant dean may suggest and/or require that changes be made to the list in order to obtain a more appropriate evaluation of the candidate. The cognizant dean has the responsibility for determination and approval of the final list.

Internal Referees

Stanford senior faculty from outside the department with special professional competence to evaluate a candidate normally may be asked to contribute to the file. Such internal referees may also be asked to comment upon the candidate’s teaching performance. The file should contain brief biographical sketches of the internal referees, along with a short explanation about why the person is being asked to write. The cognizant dean has the responsibility for determination and approval of the final list. A sample letter to internal referees is provided by the H&S Dean's Office.

Published Scholarship

The candidate for promotion has the responsibility of designing and pursuing a schedule of research and writing that results in a significant record of accomplishment since the time of the tenure decision. In good part, the candidate's reputation as a scholar derives from published articles and books that have been subjected to broad, formal professional scrutiny.

It is the joint responsibility of the candidate and of the evaluation committee to ensure that all the candidate's works which have appeared in print since the time of the tenure decision be included in the promotion review process. The evaluation committee bears ultimate responsibility for determining which of these works is sent to external referees. The same set of published materials must be provided to each referee.

Unpublished scholarship

The decision regarding which, if any, unpublished works should be sent to external referees rests with the candidate. The candidate is encouraged to seek advice from the department chair or other colleagues in this matter. Such works may range from materials that have been submitted for publication in final form to incomplete manuscripts. The same set of unpublished materials must be provided to each referee.

Performances or exhibitions

Faculty whose creative work involves either performance or exhibition, but not conventional publication, may require a special type of evaluation. For instance, chairs may solicit from qualified referees, near the time of a performance or exhibition, evaluations for future use during promotion evaluations. In addition, sketches, tapes, samples of paintings, recordings of performance, or other artifacts of such events may be brought to the attention of the referees so that those persons may better judge the candidate's creative accomplishments. The solicitation letters should reflect special aspects of the particular creative activity. The file should contain copies of published reviews.

Candidate's Statement

The candidate should include a statement describing the present and future course of his or her research and teaching. The candidate should consult with his or her chair regarding the appropriate content and length of the
statement, which ordinarily should be no more than three pages. Candidates who submit longer statements should be asked to revise the statements to meet the three-page limit. The evaluation committee should comment on these planned activities and potential for professional growth. The curriculum vitae and candidate’s statement should also be included in the materials sent to all external referees.

4.5 Reviewing the Teaching

Candidates for promotion to full professor are expected to have achieved and maintained a record of high quality teaching of Stanford students. Teaching evidence gathered for the file should include:

- a summary of the teaching commitments since the tenure decision with course titles, numbers, units, and enrollments; course evaluation summaries;
- description of any pedagogical innovations or course development activities in which the candidate has participated;
- confidential letters from students (both undergraduate and graduate) enrolled in the candidate’s courses, as well as letters from teaching assistants, graduate students and postdoctoral fellows for whom the candidate is an advisor or mentor;
- evaluation by senior faculty who have visited the candidate’s classroom; and/or who have evaluated the candidate’s course materials (optional).

Letters from students are a critical component of the promotion process. The number of letters and selection of students are directly related to the teaching and advising load of the faculty candidate. Following are guidelines for obtaining student letters:

- Include letters from all current and former direct graduate and/or postdoctoral advisees of candidate.
- If appropriate to the candidate’s role, the file must include 4-6 letters from undergraduate students; more undergraduate letters may be solicited if that is the department’s practice. This number may include undergraduate student advisees, students in classes taught by the candidate, or a combination of the two groups. The goal is to obtain input from a cross-section of undergraduates taught or advised by the candidate. A department may establish its own process for selecting students; such a process should be used for all promotion reviews and should be described briefly in the file. Following are general guidelines for selecting undergraduate students:
  - Advisees: Letters from undergraduate student advisees may be solicited from all students on a list assembled by the department or provided by the candidate, or from a random selection of students on the list.
  - Students in Classes: Depending on the size of classes taught, the department may ask all students in the candidate’s classes to provide a letter, or may solicit letters in a random manner from class lists (for example, selection of every tenth student, every twentieth student, etc.).
- Two follow-up requests should be made to non-respondents.
- E-mail may be used.
- The department should document the process in the final file. Tallies of the number of letters requested and received are to be included, along with copy of sample solicitation letter and follow-up request letters.
- Unsolicited letters may not be included in the file.

The evaluation committee should provide an analysis of the qualitative data as well as commentary on the content of the student letters. Negative comments should be addressed.

4.6 Department Discussion and Confidentiality Issues

Should a faculty member within the department 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 promotion and must recuse himself or herself from voting.

As a standard practice, the supporting documentation should be made available to Academic Council departmental faculty who are eligible to vote on the promotion 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.

The candidate’s work and information to be included in the promotion papers should be read carefully and objectively prior to the formal vote by every faculty member eligible to discuss and vote on the file. The evaluation 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 promotion 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 should be reviewed and followed.

4.7 Voting

Only full professors are eligible to vote on the promotions of associate professors. At the department’s discretion, faculty holding non-tenure line appointments for continuing terms at the rank of professor may vote. A clear departmental policy should be established in this regard and applied consistently. Emeritus professors (whether or not recalled to active duty) may not vote on promotions to full. Students may neither participate in departmental deliberations nor vote.

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 promotion 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 participating and 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 in advance with the cognizant dean and agreed on recusal prior to the departmental vote.

School policy allows for secret or open ballots on promotions. 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. The actual yeas, nays, abstentions, and non-votes must be recorded and reported in all votes on faculty appointments and promotions. A department’s decision on promotion is subject to the exercise of professional and scholarly judgment and discretion by the faculty, based on the information available at the time of the review. Every faculty member who votes on a case is entitled to provide a written explanation of his or her vote in the papers submitted by the department.

Split Votes. In cases where the vote is split, 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 possible.

Dissenting Votes. If there are dissenting votes, the chair should summarize the reasons for them, if possible. Dissenting voters are strongly encouraged to summarize their views 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, however, 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 be 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 valid 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.

4.8 Negative Decisions at the Department Level

A department’s decision on promotion is subject to the exercise of professional and scholarly judgment and discretion by the faculty, based on the information available at the time of the review. If a candidate for promotion is turned down at the department level, the chair should first discuss the outcome with the cognizant dean. Shortly after the meeting, the chair should provide the cognizant dean with a copy of the file, a detailed memo outlining the reasons for the promotion denial, along with a draft of the letter that notifies the candidate of the decision. Under normal circumstances, the candidate should be informed within one week from the time of the decision.

4.9 Submission of the Promotion File

If the department votes positively on the promotion, the chair of the evaluation committee is responsible for preparing the documentation necessary to complete the file. The promotion papers should be assembled in accordance with the guidelines set forth in Stanford University Faculty Appointment Long Form (Appendix B of the
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 for the file. In addition to serving as a letter of transmittal, the letter should also include the pertinent information obtained during the course of the candidate’s review and the effective date of the promotion, 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, summarize the candidate’s placement with regard to the comparison set and provide any relevant information not included in referee or student letters.

4.10 The Review Process

When the file has been completed, the department administrator should send the file 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 can 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 (review and forward to cognizant dean)
- Cognizant dean (review and approve for Dean’s consideration)
- Dean (final approval at School level)
- Provost (review and approve)
- Advisory Board of the Academic Council (receive report)
- President (approve and report to Board of Trustees)

If the decision by the Dean is positive, a cover letter is written, and the recommendation is forwarded to the Provost for her independent review and decision. The Provost may request further information from the Dean. The Provost has the prerogative of denying a positive recommendation of the Dean. When that occurs, reasons for the denial will be provided by the Provost to the Dean who will notify the department chair. All cases approved by the Provost are reported to the Advisory Board and are submitted to the President for final approval and reporting to the Board of Trustees.

4.11 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. Under normal circumstances, the candidate should be informed within one week from the time of the decision. Reconsideration of a negative decision by the Dean will be allowed only when the department presents convincing evidence of new and material information 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 process.

If a faculty member is denied promotion during any stage of the review, he or she may obtain information on the relevant University policies by consulting the Stanford University Faculty Handbook.
4.12 Decanal and Provostial Feedback

After the file has been reviewed and approved by the deans, Provost and Advisory Board, the cognizant dean will discuss the evaluation with the department chair and communicate feedback, if any, gained from these other levels of review that can be incorporated into a counseling letter to the candidate. A fuller perspective can thereby be provided to the faculty member about his or her performance.

When the department has completed the promotion review, the chair should then draft a letter to the candidate that summarizes the results of the review. The letter should not be shared with the candidate until the completion of the promotion process (approval by the President of the University). Appropriate areas to discuss include the quality and quantity of both scholarship and teaching, guidance or suggestions for future actions or areas of focus, as well as an acknowledgment of any special service efforts and institutional citizenship issues. The draft of this letter should be included as part of the promotion file.

When the final draft of the letter has been approved by the cognizant dean, the department chair should then meet with the candidate to discuss the results of the review and to give him or her the letter. Department chairs are encouraged to include the chair and/or members of the evaluation committee in this meeting.

Links
[1] https://facultyaffairs-humsci.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj5881/f/promotion_to_full_checklist_0.xls