

University of Pittsburgh

Department of Physics and Astronomy
Guidance for Mentoring Committees
and Candidates for Promotion

(draft circa Jan. 13, 2025)

1. The role and function of the Mentoring Committees

The explicit goal of the department is to support every candidate seeking tenure and/or tenured promotion. The mentoring committee is appointed by the Chair and is a key component of supporting this goal. The primary function of mentoring committees is to advise the candidate in a timely manner concerning ways in which to earn the stature, teaching effectiveness, and service contributions which merit promotion either to Associate Professor with tenure or to Professor.

Mentoring committee members are expected:

- In consultation with the Chair, to keep the candidate well informed about and to regularly advise them concerning the range and prioritization of activities which would contribute to the Research, Teaching and Mentoring, and Service components of their promotion dossier.
- To present the candidate's promotion case to the department, explaining the candidate's contributions in the areas of Research, Teaching and Mentoring, and Service.
- To communicate regularly with the candidate about their preparation for submitting a promotion dossier and to provide feedback concerning their readiness to be considered for tenure or tenured promotion.
- To discuss with the candidate whether comments and suggestions made by the committee at their previous meetings with the candidate have been addressed and to help the candidate use such information to their best benefit.
- To assist the candidate to tailor their preparation of a dossier file in a manner that is most consistent with the expectations of the department faculty and of potential letter-writers within the candidate's field of research.
- To confer with other faculty in the department to ensure that the information they are providing to the candidate is consistent with departmental practices and to work to minimize any differences in expectations.
- To present candidate's case to the department faculty at the time of the decision, to be knowledgeable about the candidate's contributions, and to be able to answer questions and address concerns raised in discussion.
- To discuss with the candidate the feedback received from the department during the third-year review and advise them concerning the best course of action to address any comments.

- To assist the department chair in identifying suitable external referees who can provide a fair professional evaluation of the candidate.

To summarize, every year mentoring committees must

- Report to the relevant faculty body (tenured faculty for promotion to associate professor with tenure) regarding the progress of their mentees.
- Produce a written mentoring report outlining the progress of their mentees.
- Have these written mentoring reports approved by a vote of the relevant body. The approved mentoring reports will be provided to the mentee and filed with the chair's office to assist the chair in providing guidance to the mentee.
- Consult with their mentees and explicitly state any areas of clear success or concern to their mentees. Consultations should address explicitly areas of success or concern which appear in the mentoring report.

A candidate for promotion will have their case reviewed by the relevant faculty body during the fall semester in accordance with the timelines established by the Dietrich School. Prior to this meeting, the mentoring committee will prepare a report regarding the candidate's qualifications for promotion and making a recommendation to the faculty body. The report will address the candidate's contributions in the areas of Research, Teaching and Mentoring, and Service. The mentoring committee will present this report at a meeting of the relevant faculty body and answer questions regarding the report. The faculty will vote subsequent to this meeting via email to the Academic Operations Manager. Votes will be known to the Academic Operations Manager but will otherwise be anonymous unless a faculty member wishes to explain the reasons for their vote to the chair in their individual minority report as stipulated in the Criteria and Procedures document.

The Chair is expected to monitor the work of mentoring committees closely. Candidates for tenure or tenured promotion may request the Chair to remove and replace some or all of their mentoring committee members. Members of the mentoring committee should be allowed to resign from the committee after consulting with the Chair; in particular, members of the mentoring committee should proactively do so if they believe they are unable to fulfill some or all of the expected roles of a mentoring committee described above. The composition of a mentoring committee could also change over time because of unforeseen events.

2. Guidance for future Mentoring Committees and Candidates for Promotion:

Contributions to Research, Teaching and Mentoring, and Service

It is inconceivable to prepare a comprehensive list of all possible intellectually valuable contributions that may be recognized by the department when a promotion case is considered. Therefore, the lists of possible contributions provided below are non-exhaustive and should be used primarily as guidelines by the members of future mentoring committees as well as by individuals who are eligible for promotion. In order to maximize their chances for a positive outcome, a candidate for future promotion should consult with the members of their mentoring committee, other faculty in the department, and professional colleagues within their own sub-field.

Descriptions of the candidate's contributions in the areas of Research, Teaching and Mentoring, and Service form the foundation of the tenure or tenured promotion dossier shared with external referees. The evaluation letters from those referees provide key information that faculty members use in their deliberations and eventual votes concerning a tenure or tenured promotion case before sending it to the Dean's Office. Therefore, the members of future mentoring committees should be proactive in advising future candidates on how to best present their dossier.

2.1 Examples of contributions to Research

We note that all contributions should be evaluated according to the standards within the candidate's own field of research, which will vary within the department. This list (as well as those that follow) should not be considered exhaustive.

- Publications in refereed journals that are considered reputable in the candidate's field, with emphasis on whether a candidate has made critical, substantial, creative, and/or definitive contributions to any of those publications. Authoring monographs, review articles or book chapters in the candidate's field of research
- Evidence of translating research to practice, such as authoring important technical documents, patent applications filed and awarded, licensing agreements, and other technology transfer activities
- Authoring white papers
- Producing original and/or intellectually valuable research contributions
- Developing experimental instrumentation for wider use
- Developing software and firmware in support of research
- Developing novel theoretical methods
- Making meaningful contributions to operating research facilities (at the University of Pittsburgh or elsewhere)
- Overseeing an active research group performing activities such as those described above
- Having an impact on research through leadership activities (e.g., within collaborations)
- Establishing a track record of obtaining external funding to support research
- Presenting invited and/or contributed talks at conferences and workshops, professional meetings, colloquia, seminars etc. (invited talks and colloquia generally particularly valued)
- Speaking publicly on research or science, including communications via media.
- Obtaining professional awards, prizes and other honors and recognition

In general, evidence which demonstrates a candidate's national or international reputation in their area of research is important for establishing their substantial contributions to research activities.

2.2 Examples of contributions to Teaching and Mentoring

In general, these contributions will primarily be evaluated by the candidate's more senior colleagues within the department (e.g., based upon classroom visits and review of course materials).

- Evidence of excellence of instruction when teaching classes
- Evidence of innovation in teaching, including the development of new courses or methodologies
- Contributions to curriculum improvement, enhancement and/or development
- Contributions to professional development and mentoring of undergraduate students at the University of Pittsburgh
- Mentoring and training of graduate students at the University of Pittsburgh and elsewhere
- Mentoring of postdoctoral researchers and/or more junior faculty
- Obtaining teaching and/or mentoring awards, prizes or other honors and recognition
- Evidence of the professional success of former students, advisees and mentees
- Awards, prizes and other honors received by the candidate's current and former mentees

2.3 Examples of contributions to Service

- Serving on departmental or university committees
- Serving on Ph.D. dissertation committees
- Service on University-level shared governance bodies or committees
- Community-based service in a professional capacity
- Serving as an editor or on an editorial board of a professional publication
- Serving as a referee for journals and other professional publications
- Reviewing proposals and serving on committees for funding agencies
- Serving on advisory committees or review panels for funding agencies, national laboratories or other governmental bodies
- Authoring white papers submitted to funding agencies, national laboratories or other governmental bodies
- Intellectual contributions and innovations which have a societal impact
- Development, implementation and contributions to outreach programs
- Development, implementation and contributions to programs aimed at advancing equity and inclusion within the department, University and/or the field
- Engagement with local (K-12) schools, museums, or other educational organizations
- Receiving awards, prizes and other honors or recognition for service activities