



To: Deans, Department Heads, Chairs and School Directors, and
College and Department Promotion and Tenure Committees

Cc: Cyril Clarke, Robert Weiss, Robin Queen

From: Ron Fricker, Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs

Date: September 21, 2022

Subject: Guidance on Considering Promotion and Tenure Cases Prior to Their Mandatory Year

1. **Purpose.** To provide clarification that promotion and tenure (P&T) cases do not have to wait until a faculty member's mandatory year and to provide guidance on non-mandatory P&T cases.
2. **Background.** In the absence of prior service, tenure-track faculty are given a six-year probationary period upon hire. This probationary period may be extended for a variety of reasons. For example, due to the pandemic and upon their request, pre-tenure faculty in academic years 2020-21 and 2021-22 were granted automatic probationary period extensions to help mitigate the impacts of the pandemic on their P&T preparations. Section 3.4.2 of the Faculty Handbook provides the specific details of and requirements for the extension process.
3. **Discussion.** As a result of probationary extensions, a faculty member may have a probationary period exceeding six years and, with COVID-related extensions, their mandatory P&T year may now be as much as eight to ten years after hire. Furthermore, faculty may have taken the probationary period extensions during the pandemic as "insurance" against future unknown pandemic impacts and may not now need those years to be fully prepared for P&T.

At Virginia Tech, we do not require that faculty wait until their mandatory year to be promoted. Furthermore, faculty who are being evaluated for promotion and tenure, whether in their mandatory year or in a non-mandatory year, are held to the same standards as described in each department's or school's expectations document. Section 3.4.2.1 of the Faculty Handbook states:

It is very important that all individuals and committees participating in tenure reviews understand that any individual who receives a probationary period extension must be held to the same standard—not a higher or more stringent one—to which other candidates without such an extension are held. This is also true in the case where the candidate's dossier is considered on the original schedule for review. However, in this instance where an approved extension was granted but not utilized, the tenure review is not considered mandatory and can be conducted again in the subsequent year without penalty.

In the last academic year, a substantial fraction of the assistant professors who applied for promotion and tenure were non-mandatory cases. This was often because faculty had taken one or more COVID-related extensions and then found they did not need them. This may continue to be the situation this academic year and in coming years.

4. **Guidance.** If there is agreement that a faculty member has satisfied all the department's expectations for promotion and tenure before their mandatory year, then they should be supported by their department head, chair or school director, and their department committee(s) in applying for promotion and tenure at that time. There is no requirement to wait until a faculty member's mandatory year. Whether in a mandatory year or not, P&T committees and administrators should ensure that cases are held to the same standard and that standard should comport with the department or school's written expectations for promotion and tenure.