

# MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Spring 2026

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Tenure System Faculty, Deans, School Directors, and Chairpersons

**FROM:** Laura Lee McIntyre, Ph.D., Provost and  
Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs



**SUBJECT:** Guiding Policies on Faculty Reappointment, Promotion, and Tenure

### Purpose of This Memorandum

This memorandum provides annual guidance for deans, department chairs, school directors, and faculty on the standards, criteria, and expectations for reappointment, promotion, and tenure (RPT) reviews.<sup>1</sup> Tenure at Michigan State University reflects a comprehensive and integrated model of academic achievement in which faculty are evaluated on their contributions to research/creative activities, teaching, and outreach/service, within the context of our land-grant mission and commitment to advancing knowledge while serving society. The guidance below should be understood and applied within this tripartite framework.

Each college is expected to review this university statement each year and ensure that its internal processes and expectations are aligned to support positive outcomes.

### **Contextual Considerations for This Year**

Notable uncertainty remains in the broader higher education landscape. Since the spring semester of 2025, faculty may have faced disruptions to their research, teaching, and service activities due to federal actions and executive orders.

These disruptions have manifested in various ways, including but not limited to stop-work orders, cancellations of federal grants, restricted access to federally maintained databases, and travel interruptions. Community-engaged scholarship, teaching, and service activities may have been interrupted due to reductions in programmatic funding across public and private sector partners. Additionally, faculty whose work addresses topics that may now be subject to heightened scrutiny may find themselves navigating an increasingly complex environment in advancing, publishing, or presenting their scholarship.

While core criteria for RPT remain unchanged, the university affirms that faculty should be evaluated based on their assigned duties, the quality of their contributions, and the circumstances in which their work was conducted.



### Office of the Provost

Hannah Administration  
Building  
Michigan State University  
426 Auditorium Road  
Suite 430  
East Lansing, MI 48824

517-432-6550  
Fax: 517-432-9601  
provost.msu.edu

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<sup>1</sup> This document is shared annually with the University Committee on Faculty Tenure and the University Committee on Faculty Affairs, who are invited to recommend changes that promote a shared understanding of the underlying value proposition.

To inform both internal and external reviewers, faculty who experienced related disruptions are encouraged to create a work-interruption impact statement as a standalone document in their RPT dossiers. Statements are optional, but if utilized, faculty may create a record of interruptions and challenges to the areas for which they are appointed. Candidates should also include their ideas to address the challenges and whether a particular type of mentoring or other support would be helpful. External and internal reviewers are expected to give due consideration to the noted interruptions in the impact statement and to seek guidance from the RPT chair if they have questions.<sup>2</sup>

### **Foundations of Reappointment, Promotion, and Tenure at MSU**

The reappointment, promotion, and tenure process is grounded in MSU's values of collaboration, equity, excellence, integrity, and respect, along with the principles of academic freedom. The university is dedicated to advancing knowledge and transforming lives by providing outstanding undergraduate, graduate, and professional education; conducting research of the highest caliber; and advancing outreach, engagement, and economic activities. Through its faculty, MSU fulfills its land-grant mission – driving innovation, educating and mentoring future leaders, and engaging with local, national, and global communities to address complex societal challenges and improve quality of life across Michigan and around the world.

College leaders are responsible for engaging in meaningful guidance and establishing a culture that is expectant of success and inclusive of new scholarship that expands the field. The test of any department lies in the success of its recruitment, tenure, and promotion process, not in exclusionary practices designed to maintain the status quo. It is important to nurture our community of scholars, as our individual and common achievements are tied to how healthy and supportive our culture is for all.

### **Tenure Philosophy**

The tenure system is grounded in the principle that faculty must have the freedom to pursue innovative – and at times, controversial – research, teaching, and outreach without the risk of dismissal. It serves as both a safeguard for academic freedom and a recognition of sustained scholarly and professional achievement. By protecting the freedom to challenge prevailing ideas, engage in critical inquiry, and participate fully in public discourse, tenure enables faculty to generate and disseminate knowledge that advances their disciplines and enriches student learning. This protection is essential now more than ever, not only for the advancement of knowledge but also for the broader functioning of a democratic society, where universities are charged with fostering independent thought and the open exchange of ideas.

Tenure also reflects a mutual commitment between the institution and the faculty member; an investment in a long-term relationship that supports continued growth in scholarship, teaching, and service. It is both a privilege and a responsibility, requiring faculty to uphold the highest standards of professional conduct and to contribute meaningfully to their academic communities.

Our philosophy of tenure calls for regular reflection and evaluation on the standards used to assess faculty throughout their career. Accomplishments that advance the effectiveness, climate, and culture of the unit, college, university, and discipline are attributes for a positive outcome; accordingly, significant or repeated behaviors that are not consistent with these expectations must be addressed regardless of rank. Tenure can never be used as a shield to hide or permit behaviors unbecoming of the title *faculty*. The standards we set for earning tenure reflect the university *writ large*, measure individual accomplishments, and measure the success of all tenured or promoted faculty as stewards of this process.

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<sup>2</sup> If the impacts have significantly slowed progress, candidates can consider requesting a tenure clock extension, per [policy](#).

## **Core Criteria for Evaluation**

The review of faculty for reappointment, tenure, and promotion must reflect the multifaceted nature of academic excellence and be grounded in fair, rigorous, and contextually aware evaluation. Faculty contributions are evaluated across teaching, research, and/or creative activities, and service and/or outreach – each essential to fulfilling the university’s mission. Evaluation processes must consider the myriad ways excellence is demonstrated, including collaborative work, leadership, innovation, and contributions to an inclusive academic community. The criteria below offer guiding principles for assessing faculty performance across roles and career stages and serve as the foundation for unit- and college-level expectations.

### **I. Domains of Evaluation**

It is expected that multiple methods for evaluating performance be used in assessing teaching, research/creative activities, and service/outreach. They should address the scholarship, significance, impact, and attention to the context of the faculty member’s accomplishments. Assessment should account for the quality and quantity of outcomes and the core criteria noted below; it should also acknowledge the creativity of faculty effort and its impact on all students, on others the university serves, and on the field(s) in which the faculty member works.

- **Teaching.** Multiple measures for evaluating teaching could include teaching statements, syllabi, student evaluations, innovative course assignments, methods to foster accessible learning environments and inclusive pedagogy for students of all backgrounds, class artifacts, curricula programming to reach broader groups and expand experiences, peer observations, and teaching portfolios.<sup>3</sup>
- **Research and/or Creative Activities.** Faculty are evaluated on their individual and collaborative scholarly excellence and related activities. Examples of related components of scholarly excellence at MSU include creating a scholarly environment where all can flourish, diversifying research topics, formats, and subjects, engaging in emerging cross-disciplinary activities, successful and respectful mentoring, and integrating scholarship into the creation, application, and dissemination of knowledge.<sup>4</sup>
- **Service and/or Outreach,** Service may occur at the unit, college, university, disciplinary, and/or societal level. In addition to the traditional markers of service (e.g., committee work, professional association efforts), accomplishments might also advance the effective functioning, climate, and culture of the unit, college, and university, consistent with MSU core values, as well as service to the profession, or in support of outreach and engagement in the greater Lansing community, across the state of Michigan, nationally, or internationally.

### **The Reflective Essay**

Each candidate for reappointment, tenure, and/or promotion must include a maximum five-page reflective essay about accomplishments over the reporting period as a part of the dossier. This essay should highlight how accomplishments in research/creative activities, teaching, and service are significant and impactful and have contributed to the mission of Michigan State University. The Reflective Essay should not be a narrative of the individual’s CV but rather provide information on how previous and current activities and accomplishments have impacted their growth and represent excellence. (See [Appendix A](#) for a full list of required materials.)

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<sup>3</sup> This does not preclude a unit from providing some guidelines concerning normal performance metrics that are common in evaluation.

<sup>4</sup> While collaborative scholarly efforts are recognized and encouraged where appropriate, reappointment, tenure, and promotion decisions are individual to the faculty member, and so evidence of the faculty member’s contribution to collaborative efforts is critical in making these decisions.

### **Core Values Related to Conduct**

As noted in the [Faculty Rights and Responsibilities Policy](#) and the University Committee on Faculty Affairs' [Statement on Professional Integrity](#), faculty responsibilities extend beyond scholarship, service, and teaching. They include adherence to the highest standards of professional behavior and a shared responsibility for sustaining a respectful culture and climate for all. Demonstrating collegiality and civility are essential elements of these expectations.

Faculty members of MSU have a particular duty to hold themselves accountable. Institutional leaders have the duty to hold the faculty accountable. These duties fall within the purview of reviews conducted in the context of appointments, annual reviews, reappointments, tenure, and promotions.

### **II. Standards by Career Milestones**

The following criteria establish university-level standards for evaluating tenure-system faculty at key milestones in their academic careers.

- **Reappointment to a Second Probationary Appointment** – Each reappointment recommendation should be based on clear evidence that a record of progress is being established toward becoming an expert of national and/or international stature, a solid teacher, and a contributing member of the unit, college, university, and/or discipline.
- **Reappointment with Award of Tenure** – Each tenure recommendation should be based on a clear record of sustained, outstanding achievements in research/creative activities, teaching, and service/outreach across the mission, consistent with performance levels expected at peer universities. The record should provide a basis in actual performance for predicting capacity to become an expert of national or international stature and long-term, high-quality professional achievement and university service.
- **Promotion from Assistant Professor to Associate Professor with the Award of Tenure** – A recommendation for promotion from assistant professor to associate professor includes the award of tenure, and should be based on several years of sustained, outstanding achievements in research/creative activities, teaching, and service/outreach across the mission, consistent with performance levels expected for promotion to associate professor at peer universities. The second probationary period provides time for a basis in actual performance for predicting capacity to become an expert of national or international stature and long-term, high-quality professional achievement and university service.
- **Promotion to Professor** – As the university invests in an individual at the time of tenure, the measure of promotion to “full” is the investment the individual has made in the university. As such, a recommendation for promotion from associate professor to professor in the tenure system should be based on several years of sustained, outstanding achievements in scholarship and education across the mission, consistent with performance levels expected at peer universities. Moreover, it is an expectation that individuals should provide leadership within the department, mentorship to junior faculty and graduate students (where appropriate), teaching of undergraduates (where appropriate), service on committees, and contribute to a flourishing intellectual life for those in the broader discipline, unit, college, and Institution. A reasonably long period in rank<sup>5</sup> before promotion is usually necessary to provide a basis in actual performance, permit endorsement of the individual as an expert of national and international stature, and to predict continuous, long-term, high-quality professional achievement and university service.

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<sup>5</sup> Over the past several cycles, the average time in rank before promotion to professor has been 6.4 years.

As a tenured faculty member, a professor must not only demonstrate disciplinary excellence but also demonstrate commitment and effectiveness in larger institutional missions such as improving the breadth and depth of our community of scholars and culture, both in the academy and more broadly in society. Innovation brought to teaching and interdisciplinary teambuilding that enables broader groups of people from the widest possible disciplinary or college perspective is also part of a move from individual work to being a university professor. Such a responsibility is even greater for those who earn promotion to full professor.

### **Expectations of Unit and College Review Committees**

Each department and school is required to establish procedures so that its faculty can provide advice to the chairperson/school director regarding recommendations for reappointment, promotion, and tenure. Similarly, each college is required to have a college review committee, consistent with the policy [College-Level Reappointment, Promotion and Tenure Committees](#). Members of review committees are expected to make recommendations to the chairperson, director, or dean that are based upon full and frank discussions about candidates that are confidential, respectful, and evidence-based. All share the responsibility of building a unit characterized by inclusive excellence.

### **Expectations of Department Chairpersons, School Directors, and Deans<sup>6</sup>**

The first responsibility for chairpersons or school directors is to ensure their department has developed a set of fair standards and evaluative criteria for use in making RPT recommendations. These standards must take into consideration peer evaluations that have established a fair set of evaluative factors. As a general rule, faculty members should be evaluated based on the responsibilities outlined in their appointment and the percentage of effort assigned to each area of their role (e.g., research, teaching, service). Assessments should align with the faculty member's workload distribution and reflect the expectations appropriate to their specific assignment.

Chairpersons, school directors, and deans are also responsible for ensuring that the process for soliciting and managing external review letters is conducted fairly and in accordance with the following university policies: [External Letters of Reference and Confidentiality of Letters of Reference for Reappointment, Promotion and Tenure Recommendations](#).<sup>7</sup> The process of soliciting external letters of reference must incorporate the principles and procedures outlined in the preceding policies, and referees must have no conflict of interest.

As provided in the *Bylaws for Academic Governance*, the faculty committee, operating in an advisory mode, is to provide advice to the chairperson/director as described in the unit bylaws. Each department, school, and comparable unit is required to have procedures and criteria that are clearly formulated and relevant to evaluating the performance of faculty members (see [Statement on Non-Tenured Faculty in the Tenure System](#), Faculty Handbook). As noted in the bylaws:

*“The chairperson or director has a special obligation to build a department or school strong in scholarship, teaching capacity, and service.”*

Unit administrators are responsible as individuals for the recommendations made to the dean. Deans review each recommendation for reappointment, promotion, and tenure, and independently make a recommendation to the Provost, taking into account unit, college, and university criteria. Bearing in mind the university's continuing objective of recruiting and retaining a broad range of excellent faculty, the unit and college must ensure well-grounded, well-justified recommendations for reappointment, tenure, and/or promotion.

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<sup>6</sup> For those colleges that are not organized into departments and schools, the dean, as unit administrator, holds the responsibilities that are required of chairpersons and school directors in other colleges.

<sup>7</sup> These policies are currently under review, with revised versions expected to be implemented within the next month.

### **Principles of Evaluation for the Provost-Level Review**

The Office of the Provost's review of each recommendation concentrates primarily on the evidence of the individual's effectiveness in the performance of academic responsibilities and duties. The review also ensures that the appropriate processes have been followed and considers the clarity of unit-level expectations and criteria, as well as the feedback provided to the faculty members through annual evaluations.

The university expects faculty to uphold the highest standards of conduct, foster a respectful culture for all, and take personal responsibility for the environment they create within their units. In keeping with these values, the Provost will consider all available information when making final decisions.

## **Appendix A: Required Materials and Timeline for RPT Reviews**

Comprehensive guidance can be found in the published policies, procedures, and criteria outlined in the [Faculty Guide for Reappointment, Promotion, and Tenure](#).

### **Required Materials for Review by College Committees**

Because tenure is in the university, not the college or department/school, there is some level of uniformity in how college committees function. Thus, in addition to the dossier (Form on Progress and Excellence in RPT, CV, reflective essay) for the candidate, each case should include:

- Unit reappointment, tenure, and promotion bylaws and policies
- Information concerning the expectations for the faculty member (e.g., appointment letter for reappointment cases, annual review letters since last RPT action, dean's developmental letter at time of reappointment, letter explaining why a promotion case was previously denied)
- Written reports from all unit peer review committees that include the votes to support the recommendation
- Chair's summary statement (within the Form on Progress and Excellence in RPT and/or a separate letter)
- External review letters (where applicable)
- The external reviewer invitation letter and any accompanying guidance sent to external reviewers (where applicable)
- Abstentions in all votes should be restricted to conflicts of interest

All college committees are required to have each member vote on RPT actions and report the college vote to the Office of the Provost.

### **The Process and Timeline**

Unit peer review committees make recommendations to the chairperson or school director. Chairpersons and directors then make unit-level recommendations, which are reviewed by the college peer review committee, which makes a recommendation to the dean. Deans make the college recommendation to the Provost by Feb. 28 each year. Because tenure at Michigan State University is in the university and not in the department, school, or college, every action before the Provost's review is a recommendation. Only the faculty member can stop a reappointment, tenure, or promotion case from moving forward to the next higher level of review. A negative recommendation by the chairperson, director, or dean does not eliminate the review at the Provost level. Recommendations are to be based on explicit unit and college criteria and quality evaluations that are consistent with unit, college, and university policies and goals.

The Office of the Provost reviews occur each year during March and April. Faculty are to be notified of the recommendations from their chairperson/director and dean when those recommendations are forwarded to the next level for review. Faculty will normally be notified of the final recommendation for reappointment, promotion, and tenure actions during May. Official notice of final decisions will normally be sent to faculty members in June, after the President has approved promotion actions and the Board of Trustees has approved tenure actions at its June meeting.

- The effective date for **promotion** with or without the award of tenure is the first of the month following final approval by the Board of Trustees.
- The effective date for **reappointment with tenure** is the first of the month following final approval of the Board of Trustees.
- The effective date for **reappointment without tenure** is Aug. 16 of the year following the approval (e.g., for recommendations made in April 2026, the effective date is Aug. 16, 2027).
- The effective date for **non-reappointment** decisions is Aug. 15 of the year following the recommendation (e.g., for recommendations made in April 2026, the effective date is Aug. 15, 2027).