MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

October 10, 2024

To: University Committee on Faculty Tenure (UCFT)
University Committee on Faculty Affairs

From: Teresa Mastin, Ph.D.
Vice Provost and Associate Vice President for Faculty and Academic Staff Affairs

Subject: Feedback Request on the annual RPT Memo

Background

The Provost's annual Recommendations for Promotion and Tenure (RPT) memo serves as a crucial communication tool for deans, chairs, and faculty at Michigan State University. This memo outlines the university expectations and guidelines for the promotion and tenure process.

Request

In alignment with established practice, I am reaching out to solicit your review and feedback on the RPT memo. Please review the existing memo (attahed) and provide any recommendations or suggestions to Kara Yermak at burtkara@msu.edu by October 21, 2024.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and your continued commitment to supporting faculty success at MSU.

Attachment:

1. Spring 2024 RPT memo

Cc: Kara Yermak

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MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

SPRING 2024

MEMORANDUM

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

FROM: Thomas D. Jeitschko, Ph.D., Interim Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

SUBJECT: University Philosophy and Guiding Policies on Faculty Tenure and Promotion

The Office of the Provost sends a message bi-annually to deans, directors, and chairpersons to assist them in reappointment, promotion, and tenure decisions. I continue to support the policy and guidelines provided in the past few years, which is reflected in this memo.

The Nature of Faculty

MSU tenure-system faculty create, invent, produce, discover, express, and reveal elements about ourselves, our world, and our place in that world. Their work may examine the minutia of a bacterial cell or the complex significance of an artistic performance. The nature of this work allows us to understand, contextualize, and improve the human condition or may be abstracted from utility and exist solely as advanced knowledge. In the end, the diverse products of their work may be lauded by many or known by only a few, appreciated for their audacity or cited for their wisdom, and appear in books or papers, exhibitions, or productions.

MSU non-tenure-system faculty teach, advise, advance, and work on independent research, scholarship, and pedagogy that provide new insights that are conveyed in myriad ways. Our librarians, health professionals, academic specialists, and academic faculty in the Facility for Rare Isotope Beams contribute in specialized ways to scholarly life and contribute to the intellectual fabric of our community of scholarship.

While there is formalized nomenclature associated with academic tracks and the nature of work, at their core, MSU faculty are catalysts of human striving in pursuit of new knowledge and enduring truths, teaching and enabling learning for a new generation of students and linking real world praxis to our cycle of understanding. Faculty are valued for their work and themselves. Faculty are the cornerstone of a great university.

Philosophy of Tenure

The conceit of the tenure system is that those who are able to create, fashion, and share new knowledge are also those who have earned special freedoms. Indeed, tenure is a concept that places academics in a unique class, allowing scholars the freedom to explore and express themselves and their work in ways that could be antithetical to present knowledge. This premise has an important corollary: those who are best at producing new work are also best able to teach what is known and to use their expertise to enable learning at foundational depth and on the leading edge of emerging knowledge. Research universities can only be called great when their creative and learning environments are in full resonance and each is valued as a fundamental aspect of what enables tenure. Knowing and learning are the outputs of those who earn this special status within the system.

MSU tenure-system faculty are also called to the higher purpose of a land-grant institution in which the service, outreach, or engagement component is weighted in equal measure to the pursuit and teaching of knowledge. Our land-grant mission is the leavening that allows MSU to continually rise, and with it the State of Michigan and our national and global partners and stakeholders.

Thus, the MSU philosophy on tenure is a frame for our aspirations to achieve the highest standards of research and teaching, and of service and outreach. This philosophy guides the evolution of our tenure and promotion systems across all units of the University over time. The value proposition of these systems is that they support all who strive to achieve the highest standards so that society will learn and become better as a result.

Tenure, and the associated promotion processes for all faculty, represent systems determined by the people who have created them. They have established academic 'winners' measured, somewhat ironically, against the metrics of those who have gone before. This irony plays out further in that the cultural antagonist to a great institution is homophily. To resist this homophily, systems must be developed that enable scholarship and teaching to be viewed through the widest possible lens by the widest group of narrators. When tenure and promotion systems become regressive, scholarship is reduced to attributes of existing knowledge legitimized by those who have long held privilege. They then fail to imagine new possibilities in whose interest these systems were formulated (at best) and exclude new entrants into the systems who are most different from those for whom the systems were originally created (at worst). The intention of this memo is to invite the units responsible for tenure and promotion recommendations in the University community to engage in a new kind of thinking that establishes and values a new level of creation, invention, production, discovery, expression, and revelation about ourselves, our world, and our place in that world.

Our philosophy of tenure and shared values for the promotion of faculty requires regular evaluation of standards for transitions and retention as well as indicators for assessment at all parts of the pathway. In its purest form, tenure represents one milestone along a trajectory of academic achievement, and not a destination. In as much as accomplishments that advance the effectiveness, climate, and culture of the unit, college, university, and discipline are attributes for a positive outcome, significant or repeated behaviors that are inconsistent with these values are reasons for institutional interdiction at any point in the lifetime of a tenure-system/tenured

faculty. Tenure can never be used as a shield to hide or permit behaviors unbecoming the title *faculty*. Moreover, the environment in which tenure is earned is therefore tested as part of the system as well. Thus, the standards we set for earning tenure are a reflection of the University *writ large*, a measure of the accomplishments of a person, and a measure of the success of all the tenured or promoted faculty as stewards of this process.

Additionally, our tenure structure holds levels of accountability or duties. The first duty is of the Institution to establish clear values upon which policy rests. If we are what we value, we must be able to measure that value and use those values in our decisions. Thus, the aspirations of each decision should rest on all the bedrocks of our purpose – research, teaching, service, outreach, and engagement. The second duty for all members of the MSU community engaged in the recruitment and development of faculty is to review all of the documents associated with tenure and promotion. Members of the college leadership are called upon to engage in meaningful guidance and to establish a posture that is expectant of success, even when the new scholarship emerges at angles orthogonal to work that may have gone before. The test of any department lies in the success of its recruitment, tenure, and promotion process, not in the exclusionary practices of winnowing academics. The final duty rests with the individual to shape and nurture the next generation of knowledge. This is a high bar – work, ideas, and products are concretized in papers, books, performance, or sculpture, but also ephemeral in the development of another scholar in the profession. The core of tenure is earned by the individual, the process is enabled by the College, and the Institution, *writ large*, bestows the final outcome.

There are additional duties of the individual to the institution that are associated with this process, and they include a fidelity to the highest standards of faculty behavior, the enablement of a culture and climate that is respectful of all individuals and takes personal responsibility for behavior and the associated climate that is created. In March of 2024, the University Committee on Faculty Affairs issued a *Statement on Professional Integrity*[1] that is intended to describe and encourage behaviors that will foster an equitable, safe, and respectful workplace at Michigan State University. Behaviors unbecoming a member of the faculty erode confidence in the individual. Thus, it is our duty as a member of the MSU faculty to be accountable for our actions, to hear critique, to be self-reflective, and to come to the aid of those who are subject to the negative impacts that result from behaviors unbecoming. The consequence of inaction is born out in structural corrosion and results in a climate where the best work, best teaching, and best selves cannot be accomplished or realized. Thus, at each point of possible interdiction, we must work to enable individuals who believe in personal standards and accountability to the profession, to the Institution, and to those within their unit. These duties are tested daily, and failure may be self-evident and correctable, or may need to be corrected by outside entities. Behaviors that erode an individual, corrode a culture, and etch themselves onto the Institution, will eventually destroy the academy. Faculty members of MSU have a particular duty to hold themselves accountable. Institutional leaders have the duty to hold the faculty accountable. These duties are within the purview of the reviews that occur in the context of appointment, annual reviews, reappointment, tenure, and promotion.

[1] See Statement on Professional Integrity in the *Faculty Handbook:*
Michigan State University Statement of Professional Integrity (msu.edu)

Indeed, the statement on Academic Freedom and Responsibility within the *Faculty Rights and Responsibilities Policy*[2] in the Faculty Handbook emphasizes that academic freedom and responsibility are intertwined: "Michigan State University endorses academic freedom and responsibility as essential to attainment of the University's goal of the unfettered search for knowledge and its free exposition. Academic freedom and responsibility are fundamental characteristics of the University environment and are always closely interwoven and at times indistinguishable."

What follows is a framework that is sent annually to all tenure-system faculty, deans, school directors, and department chairpersons to assist them in creating the environment for success in which reappointment, promotion, and tenure work is done and decisions are made. Because recommendations for reappointment, promotion, and tenure (RPT) are among the most important decisions made by great universities, clarity and transparency are essential components of an effective process. The published policies, procedures, and criteria for reappointment, promotion, and tenure provide further guidance[3].

Just as this memorandum is shared annually to communicate university-level expectations and procedures, each college will review the University statement and ensure alignment of their systems to enable a positive outcome. This policy is provided to the University Committee on Faculty Tenure, who suggest changes that ensure a shared view of this value proposition.

Guiding Policies

Section 1: University-Level Standards

1. **Reappointment to a Second Probationary Appointment** – Each reappointment recommendation should be based on clear evidence that a record is being established of progress 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.

2. **Reappointment with Award of Tenure** – Each tenure recommendation should be based on a clear record of sustained, outstanding achievements in scholarship, teaching, and service[4] 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

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[2] See Faculty Rights and Responsibilities policy in the *Faculty Handbook:* https://www.hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/faculty-academic-staff/faculty-handbook/faculty_rights.html

[3] See Faculty Guide for Reappointment, Promotion and Tenure Review: https://hr.msu.edu/ua/promotion/faculty-academic-staff/guide.html

[4] Service includes accomplishments that advance the effective functioning, climate, and culture of the unit, college, and University, consistent with MSU core values. It also includes 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 definition of 'service' similar to research and scholarship, varies by faculty member, but can be intellectually described and reviewed by members of the academic community.

national and/or international stature and long-term, high-quality professional achievement and University service.

- For the faculty member appointed initially as associate professor on a probationary basis in the tenure system who has established such a record, the tenure recommendation is effective upon reappointment after one probationary appointment period.

3. **Extensions to the Tenure Clock** – Some candidates for reappointment, promotion, and tenure will have received an extension of the tenure clock by virtue of University policy. Under these circumstances, the criteria for reappointment, promotion, and tenure are the same as is true for the faculty member who has not received a tenure clock extension.

4. **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 scholarship, teaching, and service across the mission, consistent with performance levels expected for promotion to associate professor at peer universities. A reasonably long period in rank before promotion is usually necessary to provide a basis in actual performance for predicting capacity to become an expert of national and/or international stature and long-term, high-quality professional achievement and University service.

5. **Promotion to Professor** – In as much 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, teaching of undergraduates, 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 before promotion is usually necessary to provide a basis in actual performance to 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. 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 culture, inclusiveness, and equity both in the academy but also more broadly in society. Innovation brought to teaching and interdisciplinary team building that enables broader groups of people from the widest possible disciplinary or college perspective are 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.

6. **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 accomplishments represent excellence.

7. **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Efforts Related to Research/Scholarship/Creative/Performative Activities, Teaching Outreach, and Service**[5]: Because DEI are core values of Michigan State University, candidates should detail their DEI efforts, providing evidence of their activities and accomplishments in the context of research/creative activities, teaching, service, outreach, and engagement. Faculty should include evidence of their activities and accomplishments in DEI, as appropriate, when detailing information on relevant research/creative activities, teaching, and service in appropriate sections of their dossier. Faculty should describe how these efforts are interwoven and enhance all other areas of faculty accomplishment. Whenever applicable, faculty contributions and commitment to learning and engaging in DEI efforts will be recognized and considered in the RPT process.

8. **Core Values Related to Conduct**: Accomplishments that advance the effectiveness, climate, and culture of the unit, college, and University, consistent with University core values, must be considered in these decisions, as must significant or repeated behaviors that are inconsistent with these values.

Section 2: The Focus of the Office of the Provost's Review

The Office of the Provost review of each recommendation concentrates primarily on the evidence of the individual's effectiveness in the performance of academic duties. Within this context, faculty must demonstrate substantive and sustainable achievement in research, teaching, and service, and the infusion of their scholarship into outreach and engagement efforts, where applicable. Assessment of faculty performance should recognize the importance of both research and teaching and learning, and their extension beyond the borders of the campus as part of the outreach dimension. Assessment should take into account the quality of outcomes as well as their quantity; it should also acknowledge the creativity of faculty effort and its impact on students, on others the University serves, and on the field(s) in which the faculty member works. It is expected that multiple methods for assessing performance be used in assessing research, teaching, and service. For example, the sole use of student evaluations of teaching is inappropriate as a means for assessing teaching effectiveness. Among other concerns, research has demonstrated bias in student evaluations of teaching relative to underrepresented minorities and women.

[5] For implementation procedures, see Guidance for Colleges in Implementing DEI in RPT Processes: https://hr.msu.edu/ua/promotion/faculty-academic-staff/documents/dean-guidance-dei-rpt.pdf

In many cases, faculty demonstrate excellence through individual scholarly activities. Collaborative scholarly efforts[6], cross-disciplinary activities, and the integration of scholarship into the creation, application, and dissemination of knowledge are also recognized as relevant dimensions of faculty performance.

Excellence in service at the unit, college, University, disciplinary, and/or societal level is also expected of faculty. In addition to the traditional markers of service (e.g., committee work, professional association efforts), activities that advance core values like diversity, equity, and inclusion for faculty, students, and staff, must be recognized in assessing faculty performance.

Consistent with Michigan State University's core values, the University is committed to excellence and equity in every facet of its academic mission. As such, all faculty are strongly encouraged to play a proactive role in learning about, contributing to, and supporting MSU's institutional goals of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Contributions to DEI will be acknowledged, evaluated, and recognized in the reappointment, promotion, and tenure process, as well as in annual reviews of faculty accomplishments. The University acknowledges that contributions to DEI have largely comprised "invisible work" that often disproportionately falls on women and underrepresented groups, and recommits itself to recognizing and rewarding these efforts. DEI efforts can be accomplished through research, teaching, and service, with expected impact on the department, program, discipline, or institution. For example, candidates might: propel a research agenda that incorporates equity and inclusion issues, or diversity in their object of study; establish/support the creation of initiatives around DEI; foster inclusive learning environments both in the classroom and research groups that ensure that students are provided with equitable opportunities for success; participate in mentorship programs for minoritized students; create new DEI curricula programming; or work with diverse groups/organizations on and off campus.

Finally, as enunciated above, the University expects of faculty a fidelity to the highest standards of behavior, the enablement of a culture and climate that is respectful of all individuals, and personal responsibility for behavior and the associated unit and University climate that is created. Consistent with this philosophy, the provost may use all information available to them in shaping their final determinations.

Section 3: Expectations of Department Chairpersons, School Directors, and Deans[7]

The first responsibility for chairpersons or school directors is to ensure the development of 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 questions regarding contributions to the field, contributions to the values of the Institution, and other supporting information. As a

[6] While collaborative scholarly efforts are recognized and encouraged where appropriate, reappointment, tenure, and promotion decisions are individual to the faculty member. Evidence of the faculty member's individual contribution to collaborative efforts is critical in making these decisions.

[7] For those colleges which 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.

general rule, in making assessments, no single indicator should be used as the sole measure of excellence and/or scholarly productivity; rather, the goal should be that multiple elements should be used in assessing excellence for each area of a faculty member's assignment.

Unit administrators are responsible as individuals for the recommendations made to the dean. Deans independently review each recommendation for reappointment, promotion, and tenure, and in each case, will focus primarily on how effectively the individual performs academic duties. They support or reject the recommendations of chairperson/directors and college review committees 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 an excellent, diverse faculty, the unit and college must ensure well-grounded, well-justified recommendations of reappointment, tenure, or promotion.

Section 4: Expectations of Unit and College Review Committees

Each department and school are 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."[8] 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.

Because tenure is in the University, not the college or department/school, there should be some minimal level of uniformity in how college committees function. Thus, in addition to the dossier (Form on Progress & Excellence in RPT, CV, reflective essay) for each 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, deans' 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
- External review letters
- Unit level RPT votes
- Abstentions in all votes should be restricted to conflicts of interest

[8] https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/faculty-academic-staff/faculty-handbook/college-level_tenure_committees.html

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

Section 5: 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 February 28th each year. Because tenure at Michigan State University is in the University and not in the department, school, or college, every action prior to 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 reappointment with tenure is the first of the month following final approval by the Board of Trustees (usually July 1). The effective date for reappointment without tenure is August 16 of the year following the recommendation, e.g., for recommendations made in April 2025, the effective date is August 16, 2026. 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 (usually July 1). The effective date for non-reappointment is August 15 of the year following the recommendation, e.g., for recommendations made in April 2025, the effective date is August 15, 2026.