May 2020

To: Department Chairs, Directors and Deans
From: David Canon, Chair, Social Sciences Divisional Committee
Re: Tenure Reviews during the 2020-2021 Academic Year

We are writing to alert you to changes in, and recommendations from, our Social Sciences Divisional committee, which are useful to know, even if you do not have any tenure cases coming up this year in your department/school.

1. **Expectation to include a copy of the Department’s tenure guidelines in the candidate’s tenure dossier.** As described in Faculty Policy & Procedure 7.14.D, “Each departmental executive committee shall establish written criteria and standards it will employ in recommending the granting of tenure.” The Social Sciences Divisional Committee recognizes there may be variation among departments with regard to the benchmarks of excellence, and in the desirable indicators of quantity, quality, and impact of scholarship, teaching, and service. Inclusion of the specific departmental tenure guidelines in the dossier will help the committee to appropriately evaluate candidates, applying the Social Sciences Divisional tenure guidelines in the context of the local standards of the candidate’s department and discipline.

2. **Reminder to explicitly state, in the department chair’s letter, what the secondary area of excellence is and include a statement describing how excellence is defined, promoted, and assessed in the candidate’s department.** Criteria for excellence in research is often the primary focus of the Chair’s letter, however, there is an expectation that candidates also demonstrate excellence in teaching and/or service. The committee needs to understand what activities constitute excellence in teaching/service in the home department and how the candidate demonstrates meeting or exceeding those expectations. This is not a new addition to the tenure guidelines, but the guidance has been moved to emphasize its importance.

3. **Reminder to clarify the candidate’s independent contributions to coauthored research, particularly for cases with a large number of coauthored publications.** Revisions to the tenure guidelines have been made to explicitly request clarification of contributions for coauthored publications. This is particularly important when a large number of the candidate’s contributions have been coauthored and independence from mentors or senior authors is not clear. Explicit information in the Chair’s letter and the accompanying evidence in the dossier should be provided to clarify the candidate’s unique and independent contributions to the research.
4. Integrated cases. Although the nature and requirements of integrated cases have not changed, clarifications were recently made to the tenure guidelines to better describe how excellence is defined in these cases. In particular, the guidelines now state that integrated cases are ones where “the three areas of achievement may be so closely integrated that it is not possible to unambiguously document and assign accomplishments to specific areas.” Further, the guidelines now indicated that “it is incumbent upon the department and candidate to demonstrate, with appropriate metrics and supporting documentation, how one activity synergizes with another in a way that creates novel tools, treatments, ideas or knowledge to generate an impact.” If you are considering presenting an integrated case, we recommend that you consult with the chair of the Social Sciences Divisional Committee as early as possible in the candidate’s tenure clock.

5. External letters There are a few recurring issues concerning external letters. First, make sure that external referees are “arm’s length” (see the tenure guidelines for the definition of “arm’s length”). Any deviations from this practice must be explained in the chair’s letter (for example, if an external reviewer states in their letter that they have mentored or collaborated with the candidate but the department believes that the nature of the mentoring or collaboration does not violate the spirit of “arm’s length”). Second, most of the external referees should be full professors at peer institutions. Exceptions, such as associate professors or emeritus professors, may be appropriate referees, but the chair’s letter should explain why they were chosen.

6. New streamlined process for senior hires. Starting in the 2020-2021 academic year, the Social Sciences Division is making available a new more streamlined process for senior hires. See the tenure guidelines for details at https://secfac.wisc.edu/tenure/social-sciences-divisional-committee/tenure-documents/. This is an opt-in process, so if you are making a senior hire and would like to take advantage of this new process, please contact the chair of the Social Sciences Division.

7. New recognition for scholarly activity that enhances the Wisconsin Idea. The tenure guidelines were revised to include a new section on scholarly activity that enhances the Wisconsin Idea, including both community engaged scholarship and scholarly activities to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. This new focus does not alter the alternative paths to tenure outlined in Section IV of the tenure guidelines, but rather is another way that a candidate can document excellence. Some other reminders and tips:

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- The department chair’s letter is the single most important document in the dossier. Please take the time to write a concise yet comprehensive review according to the guidelines. More than half the cases that are denied by the Social Sciences Divisional Committee have weak chair’s letters that did not provide adequate context about the nature of the discipline, the candidate, and/or articulate reasons for support for the candidate’s promotion.
• **Peer evaluations of teaching are required for probationary faculty every year**, starting in the candidate’s second year. It is extremely useful for probationary faculty to receive feedback on their teaching so that they can make changes and document improvement over time. The peer evaluation should be conducted by a faculty member and based on both course materials and observation of teaching. Written documentation of the evaluation should be included in the tenure dossier. A [sample peer evaluation form](https://secfac.wisc.edu/documenting-scholarship/) is available on the divisional committee website.

• All documents relevant to the submission of tenure dossiers to the Social Sciences Divisional Committee, including the updated, most recent version of the committee’s tenure guidelines and template letters are available at: [https://secfac.wisc.edu/tenure/social-sciences-divisional-committee/tenure-documents/](https://secfac.wisc.edu/tenure/social-sciences-divisional-committee/tenure-documents/)

• A number of exemplary dossiers from past successful tenure cases are available for review. To arrange time to look over these dossiers, please contact Divisional Committees Coordinator Michaela Aust (contact information below).

**Consider submitting your cases early in the academic year.** We anticipate a high volume of cases this year. If there are too many cases for a given meeting, some cases must be deferred to the next meeting. Our past experience suggests that cases submitted in fall and early winter are much less likely to be deferred because of case overload than cases that arrive later in the spring.

The committee seeks to work with departments/schools to ensure fair and judicious reviews of candidates. Please contact me (dtcanon@wisc.edu or 263-2283) or Divisional Committees Coordinator Michaela Aust ([Michaela.aust@wisc.edu](mailto:Michaela.aust@wisc.edu) or 263-5741) with any questions, comments, or suggestions.