GUIDELINES FOR VIRTUAL P&T COMMITTEE PROCEDURES, 2020-21

Our university Policy and Procedures for the voting meetings of promotion committees require physical attendance in order to participate. However, the viral pandemic requires that the 2020-21 AY cycle of meetings be held virtually, and the Provost approves this exception. Neither university Procedures nor unit bylaws need to be changed for this year’s exceptional process. However, it is imperative that we carry out this virtual P&T process in a way that abides by the fundamental principles and features of our normal Procedures: https://www.purdue.edu/provost/faculty/promotionandtenure.html. Our goal is that only the modality of the meetings will change. The guidelines below are designed to help committee chairs at all three levels accomplish virtual meetings that meet our requirements for confidentiality, security, attendance control, and a secret ballot. The example below is intended to show one way to conduct a virtual meeting consistent with our Policy and Procedures, but there are alternatives. As committee chairs establish their own unit’s virtual process, they might find useful this treatment of best-practices for remote meetings: https://www.robertsrules.com/pdfs/electronic-meeting-sample-rules.pdf.

Key Principles: confidentiality, rules of attendance, and a secret ballot

(1) Confidentiality. Only qualified faculty, as per university promotion Procedures, may participate in the discussions; no unapproved “listeners in,” and no recording of the meeting. It will be the responsibility of each committee member to plan ahead so that they can attend this virtual meeting in a space and manner such that conversations cannot be overheard, a dependable, high-bandwidth internet connection is available, and both video and audio capability are present.

(2) Attendance. A designated meeting host (e.g., the head, associate head, or administrative assistant) should check each faculty member into the virtual meeting. To ensure that only eligible committee members are participants in every part of the meeting, individuals who are recused due to conflict of interest should be checked out of the meeting for the case in question, and then checked back in again. Associate Professors must be checked out of the meeting before the consideration of cases for promotion to Professor begins. Supplemental members of the committee (e.g., clinical/professional faculty) may need to be checked in for the relevant cases and checked out afterward.

(3) Voting. A confidential and reliable mechanism must be used to record YES/NO votes (with those two choices only) and to capture in text the individual reasons for votes. For example, a simple Qualtrics survey can be constructed for each case and the link can be emailed to each qualified faculty member who has been present for the discussion. Other voting platforms may also be suitable. Voting by email is not acceptable.

Personnel

In addition to the qualified faculty, the attendance of an administrative assistant to help manage the platform, and an IT expert (present or on-call) to deal with technical issues, is both permitted and encouraged for the virtual meeting.
An Example of the Procedures for a Virtual Promotion Committee Meeting

(1) Preparation.

Ensure that the promotion documents are available in a secure, university-supported electronic platform (such as FileLocker) for review by committee members prior to the meeting. Communicate the conditions of the meeting clearly to all committee members.

If voting will involve committee members responding to an emailed link, then prepare a list of the faculty qualified to discuss and vote in each set of cases, with their Purdue email addresses.

Meetings should take place via a secure, reliable video-conferencing platform, in a session with a unique ID and password. Most units will already have experience with a preferred platform for virtual meetings. We suggest Zoom or WebEx and note that MS Teams lacks some important functions, including a waiting room suitable for case-by-case recusals or special admissions. Zoom and WebEx can both be attendance-locked, and can lock out recording. They can also be accessed by phone in case a computer internet connection should fail for one or more participants. Consultation with your unit IT support staff in choosing a platform is recommended. Consider scheduling a longer time block than might be required for a face-to-face meeting.

We urge that the committee chair and appropriate support staff test the selected platforms for meeting and voting ahead of time, ensure that committee members become familiar with the platform and are able to access it, and ensure that the platform fulfills the unit’s meeting requirements. Set up the platform for this meeting such that all faculty will be joined in through the Waiting Room or Lobby, and set the default to Mute.

If using Qualtrics, set up a survey for each case, using the template provided by the Provost’s office. Prepare to send each survey to those qualified and present for the discussion of each case, using a reference electronic document such as an Excel file containing the names and email addresses of all qualified faculty. For other voting platforms, establish and test them to ensure they can meet the requirements of providing a timely, anonymous, secure, and accurate ballot, with written comments.

(2) Meeting

As noted above, we encourage the chair of the committee to appoint an assistant who does not participate in the promotion discussions and whose sole role is to host and manage the virtual platform and ballot process. On the day of the meeting, admit each qualified person into the virtual meeting from the Lobby or Waiting Room. Configure the platform so that the host controls, and can prohibit, recording. Ask all participants to enable their cameras so that the chair can ensure they are virtually present for the discussions. The chair may want a call of the roll.

The committee chair should make the usual introductory remarks, reminding all of the policy and procedures governing the meeting. Also, introduce the virtual process: explain how it will be conducted, how the presentations and discussions will be carried out, how entry and exit of committee members will be managed, and how the voting will proceed. In the reminder about confidentiality of the meeting, point out that for any participant to record any part of the virtual meeting violates university policy and their fundamental ethical obligations. Disable any private chat feature of the platform to ensure that all deliberations are conducted openly.
Before discussion of each case, ensure that any committee member with a conflict of interest for that case has been recused by shifting them to the Waiting Room. Also, bring back from the Waiting Room anyone who was recused for the previous case. If applicable, admit any special members, such as a representative from a department in which the next nominee has a secondary appointment, or an outside C/P faculty member who will participate in the consideration of a C/P promotion case. Also, before shifting from discussing promotions to Associate Professor over to discussing promotions to Professor, dismiss the Associate Professors en masse.

We suggest using a Shared Screen to facilitate presentations for each case. Return to a normal view for the discussion. The host should be prepared to display any necessary slides or portions of the document by screen-sharing during the discussion. Maintain all on mute and recognize discussants whose hands are raised by unmuting. It could also be useful to open the microphone for several committee members while they are initially presenting and discussing a case.

As soon as each discussion is complete, initiate the voting platform. For Qualtrics, this means sending by email the appropriate link to each person who is “present” and qualified to vote. This could be done by pasting the email addresses of qualified, attending faculty from an Excel file to the “To” box of the email with the link. An alternative would be to paste the link into the meeting chat box so that attendees and only attendees can access it. A Qualtrics survey can be accessed from a networked computer or from a cell phone. Qualified faculty will vote YES/NO and provide their comments, then finish the survey, submitting their vote and comments anonymously. Other voting modalities are available, but ensure that the mechanism is anonymous, secure, accurate, and can accommodate written comments.

Access the voting data and text for each case by, for example, downloading Qualtrics results to an Excel file. This will retain the written comments along with each vote but maintain anonymity of each voter. Count to ensure that all eligible faculty have voted. Ask if all have voted before proceeding to the next case. Any downloaded voting data must be treated with the same level of confidentiality, security, and document retention as expected for paper ballots or candidate dossiers.

(3) Technical Assistance and trouble-shooting

Training is available for both the virtual platforms and the Qualtrics survey system. To access training, contact the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs (angela@purdue.edu), your unit or college IT group, or Brian Lawson in IT Infrastructure Services (lawson93@purdue.edu). Despite any technical challenges, promotion candidates must get the careful and fair review that they deserve. For trouble-shooting on the day, we recommend issuing a single contact, such as the administrative assistant’s cell phone number, to all participants. It would also be useful to have IT advice present or on call.

It is possible that the technology could fail so dramatically that the meeting must be halted and resumed on a later date. That would be true, for example, if the chair lost a functioning connection to the meeting app; it would also be true if the nominator of a promotion candidate were unable to attend and present the case fully and effectively. Please anticipate and plan for these unlikely scenarios. However, short of catastrophe, individual committee members are responsible for putting themselves in positions that allow them to participate fully in a remote promotion committee meeting.
Relevant direct excerpts from university Promotion & Tenure Procedures:

(II.A) The confidentiality of remarks made at such meetings should, therefore, be carefully preserved and restricted to those within the promotions process to allow for full, fair and free discussion of the merits of the case.

(II.B) Attendance requirements and the specific rules governing the meaning of participation for the members of the Primary, Area and Campus Promotions Committees are determined by the committee chair or an academic officer with authority commensurate with or higher than the committee level, in consultation with committee members. Committee members who have a Conflict of Interest with a particular candidate must recuse themselves from all discussion and deliberations of a candidate’s case. All eligible members participating in Primary or Area Committee deliberations are required to participate in all substantive discussions of a candidate’s record and to submit a ballot on all candidates. Eligible members of all committees must be present to submit a ballot. Recusals, blank ballots and otherwise un-submitted ballots are not counted as votes.

(II.C) Each nomination is first considered and discussed by the Primary Committee, after which, members cast a written ballot for the individual candidate. The result of the ballot is recorded on the Nomination for Promotion form. In addition to providing for a “yes” or “no” vote, the ballot provides an opportunity to show reasons for the vote, with space allocated for comments and/or explanations. The reasons for all votes are expected to be provided, but this is especially important in the case of negative votes since comments can be the basis for feedback for faculty improvement. Unless otherwise noted in Appendix A, the chair of the committee does not cast a vote. Rather, her/his recommendation appears separate from the Primary Committee’s recommendation on the Nomination for Promotion form.