

Equitable Assessment of Faculty Productivity During the COVID Pandemic for Promotion and Tenure 2021-22

We document faculty productivity in teaching, research, engagement, and service for the promotion process. *For the near future, we all must take special care to evaluate performance records in light of the significant and varied challenges that have been created by the COVID-19 pandemic and its disparate impacts on work conditions and productivity.*

The following is guidance from the Provost about how we will do this. It is applicable to both tenure track and clinical/professional faculty. This guidance has resulted from consultation with our Big Ten peers, Purdue University Senate and Butler Center leadership, Deans, Associate Deans, Department Heads, and faculty.

Adaptations in the promotion process:

- The University has provided automatic extensions of the probationary period for tenure track faculty (see the [20 March 2020](#) and 18 August 2020 memos).
- Faculty should be invited by their Head to include a **Professional COVID-19 Impact Statement** within the promotion document to describe how the pandemic working conditions (re-allocation of time across teaching, research, engagement, service; inability to conduct research; delays/cancellations in planned activities and events; etc.) have affected their professional accomplishments in teaching, research, and engagement, as well as service obligations. This could include a specific list of impediments and how they were overcome. This statement will stand alone and not displace other content or space limitations from the promotion document. Providing this mechanism communicates that the University and its Colleges and Units understand recent circumstances and support the progress of faculty given the pandemic working conditions and challenges. However, including a statement is optional and the choice is left to each promotion candidate to decide how to best feature their professional progress. Guidance for faculty about composing this statement is provided below (“Professional COVID-19 Impact Statement for promotion documents: guidelines for faculty”). A brief message from the Provost will serve as the header to the statement.
- Faculty can make note of invited talks, presentations, and other events they would have participated in had they not been cancelled by the pandemic. For example, they can list the invited talk in the relevant section of the promotion document followed by a “COVID-19 cancelled” notation.
- The Provost’s Office will provide guidelines for chairs and members of primary and area committees (see “Guidance for chairs and members of primary and area committees,” below).
- The Provost’s Office will frame appropriate *language* to be used when soliciting letters from external referees (see below).
- The Provost’s Office will reinforce the contents of this guidance by including it in the spring 2021 Provost’s memo explanations of the process along with appropriate *language* to use.

Note that this accommodation of the COVID-based challenges that faculty have faced is not a “lowering of the bar” for promotion. The issue is, “how shall we evaluate the effort and impact of faculty who have borne highly varied disruptions to their work during the pandemic?” To that end, we will assess the quality and impact of their work in its overall context, including what was possible and what was required of them under the conditions of the past year.

Professional COVID-19 Impact Statement for promotion documents:

Guidelines for faculty

*Note that you are **not** obliged to include an impact statement in your promotion document. This is not intended to be a burden or an expectation, but rather an optional tool for you to use if you so choose to best feature your professional progress despite the pandemic-related obstacles.*

Provost's statement: The header will be a statement from the Provost, explaining the reason and purpose for the COVID impact statement:

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every aspect of the University's operation and, in turn, every faculty member. We are deeply committed to the well-being and success of our faculty and acknowledge the differential and, in many cases, negative impacts of the pandemic on their work and career development. Therefore, in considering decisions about promotion and tenure, the University must evaluate each candidate's research, teaching, engagement, and service activities within the context of the pandemic. The following Professional COVID-19 Impact Statement was prepared by this candidate, with the guidance and approval of the Provost's office, to help create that context for the committees that will review this case.

For the faculty Professional COVID-19 Impact Statement: For the areas of research, teaching, and engagement, as well as service obligations, document how you managed your program during the pandemic. Possible areas include:

- Opportunities, activities, or resources that were cancelled, closed, or lost
- Opportunities, activities, or resources that were delayed
- Activities that took more time or effort, and whether time had to be reallocated, perhaps particularly in the shift of teaching modalities
- How the pandemic affected your support staff, graduate, and undergraduate students
- Creative ways that you developed accommodations or workarounds to address challenges that the pandemic created
- Opportunities, activities, and resources that were made possible by the pandemic
- Your contributions to Purdue's COVID-19 responses, and the impact of your efforts. Among many examples are: Protect Purdue-related committees and task forces; and leadership in converting campus spaces, courses, and curricula.
- Your future plans to address the documented issues and to re-launch, where necessary, post-COVID

The written narrative should have a maximum length of 2 pages. Emphasize where and how you overcame the pandemic-based obstacles that presented themselves, and point to the efforts and successes that you experienced despite them. Useful resources for this include:

- A list of suggested [prompts](#) from the Big Ten, by the University of Nebraska
- [COVID-19 Tool](#), from the ADVANCE group at University of Massachusetts, Amherst.
- PNAS opinion piece, [Malisch et al](#), and its associated [Appendix with specific questions](#).
- [Guidance documents](#) developed by Prof. Mangala Subramaniam at Purdue's SBBCLE.

Applying COVID Impact to P&T Evaluations: Guidance for chairs and members of primary and area committees

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Toward that end, beginning in Fall 2021, promotion candidates will have an opportunity to describe how the pandemic has affected their professional accomplishments in the areas of research, teaching, engagement, and service in a **Professional COVID-19 Impact Statement**. In addition, the Provost's Office will recommend language to use when soliciting external letters, to remind evaluators of the pandemic's impact. See elsewhere in this document for the particulars. These considerations will remain in place through AY 2025-26.

Rationale:

For [academic promotion](#) at Purdue, we assess both the record of achievements of faculty candidates and their potential for the future ("a sustainable and impactful record"). For example, for promotion to Associate Professor with tenure, our policy states that the candidate must demonstrate "a significant record of accomplishment...and promise of continued professional growth and recognition." In weighing the promotion to Full Professor, the University also evaluates whether the candidate has fulfilled that potential.

We recognize that during the pandemic period, circumstances beyond our control have in many cases changed both the distribution of faculty effort and what can be achieved in discovery, teaching, and engagement. This in turn affects the amount of information available to make our collective judgment about a faculty member's future trajectory. We must accept that our inferences about a promotion candidate's potential could be based on less information than in the past. We cannot simply rely on our traditional milestones and markers, but must take care to evaluate the candidate's record in light of the challenges created by the pandemic.

While the information available to make these important decisions about promotion and tenure has changed, our standards have not changed. The University still expects excellence, as demonstrated by visible, meaningful, and impactful contributions to the research, teaching, and engagement missions of our institution.

And so, we expect promotion and tenure evaluation committees to consider the specific impacts COVID-19 has presented for individual faculty members and to evaluate their records holistically and in context. While in a real sense this is what we expect every year in the evaluation of candidates for promotion and tenure, it has never been more important than at this time given the widely differing ways that COVID-19 has affected individual faculty.

Implementation:

(1) Attend to the **Professional COVID-19 Impact Statement** of each faculty member who submits one. This will be an addition to the promotion document and will not displace other content.

(2) Note the range and depth of specific obstacles to faculty productivity, and note the Provost's statement. Recognize that COVID-19 had widely varying impacts across our faculty. Attend to how each candidate overcame these obstacles.

(3) Be cognizant of the additional effort required for faculty to pivot their teaching modality, and to other potential burdens associated with carrying out their teaching, research, engagement, and service responsibilities under the conditions of the past year. Recognize all that they did to keep their department, college, and Purdue operating during the pandemic.

(4) Be cautious in the assessment of teaching evaluations for terms affected by the pandemic. Faculty will have faced changing their teaching modality as well as managing highly stressed students, and different faculty will have had to adapt or accommodate to different degrees. Note that for the disrupted spring 2020 semester, the University suspended summative evaluations completely (see the 3/25/2020 memo).

(5) "Bracket" the COVID-19-effect era, consider where it falls along each candidate's career trajectory and, in subsequent years, how far out its effects persist.

(6) For fair and equitable assessment of each promotion candidate's impact and potential, evaluation decisions for promotion should be:

- (A) Individual (as always)
- (B) Holistic (as always)
- (C) Forward-looking (candidate's future potential)
- (D) Discipline-specific, discipline-informed (they know best what has been possible)
- (E) Guided by our clear principles and language, both central and local

[\(Purdue University Promotion Criteria\)](#)

Language to include in letter soliciting external reviewers for promotion cases

To ensure that our external referees are aware of how we are evaluating promotion cases in the wake of the COVID year, we will include two blocks of language in the letter that units send to solicit referee reports.

The first regards how to place the professional accomplishments and impact of a candidate into the context of the pandemic situation. If a promotion document includes a Professional COVID-19 Impact Statement, then include this language in the letter to the external referees:

(1) Purdue University acknowledges the differential and negative impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic may have had on faculty career development. In carrying out decisions about promotion and tenure, we will evaluate each candidate's research, teaching, service, and engagement activities within the context of the pandemic. To this end, candidates have had an opportunity to include in their document a Professional COVID-19 Impact Statement, which documents how the pandemic has affected their professional accomplishments in discovery, teaching, and engagement, as well as their service obligations. To assist in your evaluation, we include this statement in the promotion document with which you have been provided. It presents information about what obstacles were faced by this candidate during the COVID year and how they overcame them, and helps to put their impact during that year into the context of what was possible.

The second block treats the possible use of COVID-related extensions of the probationary period. Here, we will use the same language that has been provided to all external referees for several years (see [2020-21 Provost's memos](#)). The purpose is to ensure that they are aware that we hold all promotion cases to the same criteria, regardless of **timing**. The language for all external referees is:

(2) Please note that length of service in rank by itself is not a factor in promotion and/or tenure decisions at Purdue. Our criteria clearly state: "...issues of timing should not be paramount, and discussions should focus instead on the question of whether the faculty member has provided evidence of a sustainable and impactful record that warrants promotion and/or tenure..." We do not designate any promotion nomination to be "early" (records are ready for promotion or they are not), nor are any extensions of the tenure clock granted to a faculty member to be considered in the decision.