

Suggestions for Preparing Self-Studies

Saint Mary's College of California

Rank and Tenure

To assist faculty members with the preparation of self-studies (Form A) in the Rank and Tenure process (interim reviews, tenure, and promotion), the Rank and Tenure (R&T) Committee offers the following informal guidelines.

General Comments

The R&T Committee limits its review of cases to the criteria for reappointment, promotion, and tenure as set out in Sec. 2.6 of the *Faculty Handbook*. Hence, we look first and most importantly to you, the faculty member and, second, to your department chair/program director and dean, to present a clear and evidence-based case for how your teaching, scholarship, and service satisfy these criteria. **Note that these criteria include how the your activities in these three areas demonstrate the “commitment of faculty to the aims and ideals of the College,” as expressed in the Mission Statement, while “taking into consideration the nature, purposes, and goals of specific programs.”**

Also, if this is not your initial review, you will want to reread the letter you last received from the Committee. Because we are committed to helping you build a successful career at the College, we often will raise questions or provide suggestions for you to consider in future self-studies. Locate these in the letter and address them as you think appropriate.

Finally, the membership of the Rank and Tenure Committee changes each year; therefore, new members will be reviewing your case. While we can review your previous Forms A on file in Academic Affairs, we find it more helpful when you prepare a new Form A each year (more on this in each section below).

Thus, in preparing your self-study, we suggest you:

1. Become fully familiar with the contents of Section 2.6 before you begin your self-study and consult it frequently as you construct your case;
2. Explain how your teaching, scholarship, and service reflect the aims and ideals of the College;
3. Address the questions or concerns raised by the previous letter from the R&T Committee (if appropriate); and
4. Revise your Form A so you are presenting a complete picture of your teaching, scholarship, and service.

Assistance in the Process

The Committee recognizes that for many faculty members, especially early in their careers, preparing a self-study may feel novel and challenging. Fortunately, most of your colleagues have successfully completed various stages of review and can serve as sources of information and support.

1. Departmental colleagues can share their experiences with you, provide peer feedback on your self-study, visit your classes, and review your teaching, etc.
2. Your department chair/program director can assist you in understanding how you fit with and serve your department's needs and goals, how best to interpret and use your teaching evaluations, how to construct a workable program of research, and how to choose appropriate service opportunities within your department and school, and how to participate in the governance of the college. Your chair or director can provide important feedback on your self-study.
3. The dean of your school can also provide important counsel, and you should meet regularly with your dean regarding your progress.
4. Colleagues outside of your department and outside your school, can also offer valuable perspectives on the process, and also offer specific assistance by visiting your classes, reviewing evaluations, and offering comments on your self-study.
5. The Office for Mission and Faculty Development has helpful materials to guide you through the process and can also arrange class observations by knowledgeable colleagues. Additionally, given the importance of addressing the "aims and ideals of the College, as expressed in the Mission Statement" in your Form A, you can obtain information from this office to help you better understand the College mission and how to integrate the three traditions into your teaching, scholarship, and service.

TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS

The *Faculty Handbook* discusses a variety of ways faculty members may demonstrate their teaching effectiveness. As you plan how to present your case, remember that the Committee's focus is always on the following question: What *evidence* has this candidate put forward to support assertions of teaching effectiveness? Below are suggestions for building your case regarding teaching effectiveness:

- Many faculty members provide a personal narrative that explains their broader teaching philosophy and objectives, and then demonstrate in concrete ways how those aims are expressed in actual instructional methods by referring to syllabi, sample assignments, classroom activities, and the like.

- Rather than simply stating that you have prepared a new course in the department, take a bit of time to help the Committee understand its individual merits and its role in the curriculum as a whole.
- Similarly, if you assert that your teaching “promotes intellectual stimulation and provides challenging learning experiences,” you must provide evidence that supports that assertion. Evidence can take both general and specific forms.
- Avoid statements of general intent such as, “*I have high standards for my students,*” not rooted in specific examples, illustrations, or other evidence. As one source of evidence, you (and your chair) could use grading distribution data to discuss your grading patterns, any goals you have related to your grading practices, and if appropriate, any significant deviations from departmental grade point averages.
- There are, of course, multiple ways to organize information and evidence. Some faculty members organize their discussion around the *Handbook’s* listing of the various ways that effectiveness can be demonstrated (Sec. 2.6.1). We have found this helpful.
- Recently, we have seen a trend of faculty members organizing self-studies by discussing in detail each of the courses they teach. Please do not do this. Instead, provide us with a well articulated assessment of your overall strengths and weaknesses. In exceptional cases, the review of one or more single courses may be warranted. If you or departmental colleagues want a class-by-class analysis to help you prepare your Form A, include this document in the Appendix.
- You should directly address assessment of student learning by providing concrete examples of how you assess students (e.g., grading rubrics, standards, syllabi, etc.) and what use you have made of feedback from students and colleagues.
- Student Evaluations. The Committee is especially interested in your insights regarding problem areas that may be revealed in your course evaluations and how you are working to improve any apparent deficiencies. What have you changed in your teaching? How have those changes worked out in practice? What are you working on now? **Do not submit copies of your course evaluations;** these are housed in the Academic Affairs Office with your Form A. Please do not quote extensively from written student comments—we have them, and like you, we discount the one student who says you walk on water and the one who says you should never stand in front of a class again. We do not need an exhaustive review of the quantitative data and written comments for all of your evaluations; we have this information. Instead, look for themes—strengths and weaknesses. Your reflection on these is most helpful.
- We must have reviews of your teaching based on class visits by colleagues. We have noticed a recent decline in the number of peer classroom observation reports.

Work with your chair to ensure that these visits occur. You might want to invite colleagues from outside of your department. Naturally, you will want to reflect on peer feedback in the same way as discussed above for student evaluations.

- In the Appendix, include copies of peer reviews (unless your chair is including them in Form B), copies of course syllabi, and/or examples of course materials that offer tangible examples of the themes discussed in your narrative. Avoid including materials (e.g., course syllabi) unaccompanied by discussion of your purpose in including them. And please organize and label your appendices (tabs are appreciated); use in-text references; a table of contents is a great addition.

SCHOLARSHIP

While the *Faculty Handbook* defines scholarship broadly, scholarly activities are to be “specifically and publicly demonstrated in order to be evaluated fairly and effectively,” and “should include some form of public presentation and external peer review” (Sec. 2.6.1). As with teaching effectiveness, the *Handbook* provides a number of specific ways in which scholarship might be performed or produced, as well as a variety of methods by which your work may be presented to and evaluated by others. Note that there are many options other than traditional publication in academic journals. *Below are suggestions for how to prepare your case regarding scholarship:*

- The key factor in presenting your scholarship is, once more, to make clear to the Committee *what* your scholarship is (your fundamental questions, goals, etc.), and *how* it fits into and contributes to your field or discipline. To provide a broader perspective on your work, you might discuss how your current work either builds on your previous work or establishes a new line of inquiry.
- Many candidates provide this information in the form of a narrative in which they discuss their scholarly achievements and future ambitions in some kind of context that shows connections among them (often referred to as a program of research). This helps us understand what motivates your scholarly interests and how you see your scholarship unfolding over time.
- In general, you want to be as specific as you can in offering *evidence* of how your scholarship meets the *Handbook* criteria. Please state the fora of public presentations. Give evidence of external peer review (e.g., do not state “double-blind review” without supplying evidence—page from the journal or conference website, or letter from the editor). Submit letters attesting to the submission of articles for review or forthcoming publication or performance or display. We need copies of recent work published, or under review (only once; no need to resubmit these annually, unless you revise them). Let us know the acceptance rate for conferences and journals; how single- versus multiple-author research is viewed in your field; what “conference proceedings” mean in your discipline (this ranges from highly competitive to if-the-body-is-warm the paper is included in the proceedings). We greatly appreciate your help on these matters.

- Some forms of scholarly activity are, of course, easier to document than others. Nevertheless, your obligation is to make the case, for example, for why a workshop, consultancy, art show, recital, or advocacy represent scholarship within the meaning of the *Faculty Handbook* criteria. Remember also, that we might not be completely familiar with how your discipline conceives scholarship and the standards for its demonstration, so don't shy away from educating us as you think appropriate.
- Watch for missing or confusing information as you prepare your case for scholarship. Do items appear on your vitae that are mentioned nowhere else? Does your vitae categorize your scholarly work in a way that differentiates among working papers, papers under submission, and those that have been published? Between unpublished conference presentations and those that appear in proceedings? Did you discuss a working paper being prepared for eventual conference presentation or publication in your last review that goes unmentioned in the present review?
- In the Appendix, include evidence of your scholarship such as copies of papers, reviews by external peers, proposals for publications, relevant correspondence, and the like.
- Finally, do not inflate your presentation of your scholarly activity. For example, being in the "visiting scholar" program at Berkeley, for which you pay a fee to use the library, is not a "fellowship."

SERVICE

As stated in the *Faculty Handbook*, service to students, colleagues, and the College is a privilege and a responsibility. Forms of service are varied, but service within and outside your department is expected, as is appropriate for your rank and position. (As an obvious example, first-year faculty members are not expected to be on a major College committee). As with teaching effectiveness and scholarship, you are responsible for providing clear *evidence* of service activities. Some suggestions are provided below:

- Go beyond merely listing committees, task forces, positions held in regional or national professional bodies, etc. by sharing with us what you consider to be your specific contributions in these positions and how students, colleagues, your department or school, or the College has benefited from them.
- In other words, any evidence you provide that indicates the nature or range of your contributions helps us to understand the extent and value of your service achievements. Some faculty members solicit letters from chairs of relevant committees, commenting on the extent and quality of their service.

- In addition to participating in the work of departments, programs, and schools, the *Faculty Handbook* also stipulates that faculty members should participate in “the governance of the College, for which School-wide and College-wide committees is one important element.” Be sure to mention how you are achieving or planning to achieve this criterion.
- Do not list every meeting or campus function that you have attended in the past year. Almost all of us write letters of recommendation for students; don’t include them. Undergraduate faculty are expected to supervise independent studies. Instead, summarize these kinds of activities and explain your reasons for participating.

Important Final Points

- Be honest about your strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures. We all have them. What are you working on improving? What are you particularly proud of? What might not have gone as you would like, and how are you addressing it? The burden of forming an argument for your retention, tenure, or promotion is yours, including demonstrating an awareness of the other side of the argument.
- Remember that time is finite—yours and ours. Committee members try to keep R&T time to fifteen hours a week. You want us to read your Form A carefully; however, if you submit a large, disorganized file with a rambling narrative, we have to decide how to work through it. You want to direct us to what is most important; you do not want us to make that decision for you.
- Avoid including materials in your file that serve no apparent purpose, or receive no mention in the self-study. Ask yourself – why am I including this material? Have I made it clear to the Committee what I want them to learn from it?
- Because interim reviews often begin in a candidate’s first year of service, little or virtually no evidence of accomplishment at Saint Mary’s will exist. In these cases, use this review as an opportunity to introduce yourself to the committee, discussing your experiences and activities at other institutions, and/or relating your ambitions for your career with us. What drew you to Saint Mary’s? What are your immediate plans during this first year?
- If you are being considered for tenure and/or promotion, be sure to address the Additional Criteria listed in the *Faculty Handbook* (Sec. 2.6.1.1).