

Suggestions for Preparing Self-Studies

Saint Mary's College of California

Rank and Tenure

In order 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 to help you through the process.

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, the Committee looks first and most importantly to the faculty member and, secondly, to the faculty member's department chair/program director and dean, to present a clear and evidence-based case for how the candidate's teaching, scholarship and service satisfy these criteria. **Note that these criteria include how the faculty member's 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 review the letter you last received from the Committee. Since the Committee is committed to helping each faculty member build a successful career at the College, the Committee often will raise questions or provide suggestions for the candidate 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, and as such, it is important for you to recognize that new members will be reviewing your case. While the members can always go back and review your previous Form A, if it exists, it is helpful to the committee members if you prepare a new Form A each year. By including material from previous submissions with your current updates and future plans, the committee members will have a complete picture of your past, current, and future record.

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 demonstrates the aims and ideals of the College;

3. Address the questions or concerns raised by the previous letter from the Rank and Tenure 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 like a novel and challenging undertaking. Fortunately, most of your colleagues have successfully completed one or more of the various stages of review and can serve as sources of both information and support as you prepare your own case.

1. Departmental colleagues can share their experiences with you, provide peer feedback on your self-study, visit your classes and provide a review of your teaching, etc.
2. You should look to your department chair/program director for assistance in understanding how you fit with and serve your department's needs and goals, how best to interpret and make use of your teaching evaluations, how to construct a workable program of research, and in choosing appropriate service opportunities within your department, your school, and in the governance of the college. As well, 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 seek to meet with your dean regarding your progress at regular intervals.
4. Colleagues outside of your department, even outside your school, can also offer valuable perspectives on the rank and tenure process, and also offer specific assistance by visiting your classes, reviewing evaluations, and offering comments on your self-study. This may be especially useful for those in smaller departments.
5. The Office for Mission and Faculty Development has various materials helpful in guiding you through the rank and tenure 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 in which 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 which 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,” it is your obligation to 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 in which you can 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), and the Committee finds this to be helpful.
- Recently there has been a trend of faculty members organizing their self-studies by discussing in detail each of the courses they teach. The committee discourages candidates from adopting this approach in favor of one which offers 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, it is best to include this document in the Appendix.
- Assessment of student learning is an area that should be directly addressed and documented by 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.
- The Committee is especially interested in your insights regarding problem areas that may be revealed in your 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? Committee

members do not need an exhaustive review of the quantitative data and written comment for all of your evaluations; the members have access to this information. Rather an overview of the evaluation data and attendant themes, accompanied by your narrative, is most helpful.

- In addition to student evaluations, it is important to have reviews of your teaching based on class visits by colleagues as well. The Committee has noticed a recent decline in the number of peer review reports that are in faculty files; it is important for you to work with your chair to ensure that these visits occur. Naturally you will want to reflect on peer feedback in the same way as discussed above for student evaluations.
- In the Appendix, don't forget to include copies of peer reviews, copies of course syllabi, and/or examples of course materials that offer tangible examples of the themes discussed in your narrative. Avoid including specific examples or materials (e.g., course syllabi) unaccompanied by discussion of your purpose in including them.

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 upon previous work by you 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 the Committee understand what motivates your scholarly interests and how you see them 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. In what kind of forum did public presentation take place? What forms of external peer review did your scholarship undergo? Is there documentation available to add weight to your evidence (e.g., letters attesting to the submission of articles for review or forthcoming publication

or performance or display)? Have you included in your file copies of recent articles published, or under review? Of working papers you list in your narrative or CV? Of papers presented at a conference?

- Some forms of scholarly activity are, of course, easier to document than others. Nevertheless, it remains your obligation to make the case, for example, for why a workshop, consultancy, art show, or recital, represent scholarship within the meaning of the *Faculty Handbook* criteria. Remember also, that the Committee may not be completely familiar with how your discipline conceives scholarship and the standards for its demonstration, so don't shy away from educating the Committee 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, remember to include evidence of your scholarship such as copies of papers, reviews by external peers, proposals for publications, relevant correspondence, and the like.

SERVICE

As stated in the *Faculty Handbook*, service to students, colleagues, and the College is both a privilege and a responsibility. The forms of service can be varied but service both within and outside your department is expected, as is appropriate for your current 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, it is the responsibility of the faculty member to provide clear evidence of service activities. Again some suggestions are provided below:

- You will want to go beyond a mere listing of committees, task forces, positions held in regional or national professional bodies, etc. by sharing with the Committee what you (or others in a position to know) consider to be your specific contributions in these positions and how students, colleagues, their department, school, or the College as a whole have benefited from them.
- In other words, any evidence you provide that indicates the nature or range of your contribution helps the Committee to develop a more complete grasp of 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.” Don’t forget to mention how you are achieving or planning to achieve this criterion.
- It is not necessary to list every meeting or campus function that you have attended in the past year. Rather these kinds of activities could be summarized and your reasons for participating, explained.

Some Final Thoughts

- 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?
- Since interim reviews often begin in a candidate’s first year of service, little or virtually no evidence of accomplishment at SMC will exist. In these cases, many candidates use this review as an opportunity to introduce themselves to the committee, discussing their experiences and activities at other institutions, and/or relating their ambitions for their career with us. What drew you to SMC? 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).