

# **Faculty Promotion and Tenure Policies, Procedures, Guidelines, and Criteria in the Samuel Ginn College of Engineering**

**June 15, 2011**

Faculty promotion and tenure policies, procedures, guidelines, and criteria in the Auburn University Samuel Ginn College of Engineering are driven first and foremost by Auburn University faculty personnel policy and procedures as laid out in the Auburn University Faculty Handbook and the official University Policies repository. The Handbook, in describing the highest academic rank to which faculty can aspire, states that professor “is a rank requiring professional peer-recognition of the individual as an authority in his or her field of specialization.” Additionally, our promotion process is designed to support the vision and mission of the Samuel Ginn College of Engineering. The long term vision is to move the college into the top tier of engineering programs. The short term vision is to position the College of Engineering to become one of America's top 20 public engineering programs by competing decisively for the best faculty and students. The three-fold mission of the Samuel Ginn College of Engineering is to:

1. Prepare our students, through high quality internationally recognized instructional programs, to practice engineering professionally and ethically in a competitive global environment.
2. Expand scientific and engineering knowledge through innovative research and creative partnerships involving academia, industry and government.
3. Provide extension programs to assist individuals and organizations to find solutions to engineering problems through education, consulting, and practical research.

## **Criteria for Promotion to Professor**

Our goal with every faculty hire is to provide an environment within which the individual can successfully demonstrate the motivation, abilities, and achievements necessary to earn the rank of Professor. For that reason we will begin with our specific criteria for promotion to Professor (supplementing and/or refining those given in the Handbook):

1. Professional peer-recognition within their specialization as a national/international leader in efforts contributing to at least one of the College's three mission areas.
2. Satisfactory performance in all relevant mission areas. The assignment percentage history of the individual in question determines the relative weight given to each mission area.
3. Participation and involvement in departmental, college, University, and professional activities.

Furthermore, the recent performance level of the candidate should be commensurate with promotion. The three criteria strongly suggest that among the most important elements of a promotion dossier are the evaluative letters provided by faculty colleagues, the department chair/head, and the Dean. No one could be better positioned to assess national leadership,

satisfactory performance, and participation than those individuals working most closely with and/or supervising the candidate. Additionally these individuals can frame the importance and impact of the achievements of the faculty member within the expectations, needs, mission, and vision of the department, college, and University. Also of great importance are the letters provided by external reviewers at peer or aspirational institutions. Although perhaps not as closely familiar with the candidate, the letters prepared by these individuals provide the frank and objective evaluation at a distance that is necessary to truly identify national/international leadership. One might argue that these criteria lack specificity – but that lack is not only necessary but is essential. There exists an incredible diversity of ways in which an engineering faculty member can contribute to the College mission. Any attempt to provide a comprehensive list inevitably discourages the enthusiasm and creativity that is at the heart of engineering leadership. This diversity of approaches only emphasizes the importance of the evaluative and review letters. It also merits note that departments may further refine these criteria as they find necessary to meet the objectives of the department, the college, and the university.

Despite the broad scope of the criteria, there are several mechanisms of expressing national/international leadership that will frequently appear in engineering promotion dossiers. Virtually all of the candidates present accomplishments relevant to our instructional mission. Most typically the dossier will include a substantial history of peer-reviewed articles in respected journals or other venues. An assessment of publication impact as measured by an appropriate citation index or other approved means is crucial. As appropriate the dossier will provide an extended history of extramurally funded research. Extramurally funded research plays a very significant role relative to the College's goal of positioning itself to become one of the nation's top twenty public engineering colleges. In this regard, achieving an over-all extramural funding level per faculty member that is comparable to those at demographically similar top public engineering colleges is important. The stature of an individual's scholarship is judged based upon multiple metrics. These may include impact factors associated with publication outlets and science citation and H index values based on ISI Web of Science, Google Scholar, or other data bases. Typically the results of this sort of systematic review are included with the promotion dossier. However, ultimately the significance of any particular publication or funding history is best evaluated by colleagues – again returning us to the importance of the accompanying letters. Nor should we let the commonality of publications and funding as performance measures blind us to other paths to national leadership and of contributing to our mission. A patent or collection of patents can be indicative of very significant achievements. Ongoing outreach involvement with constituents is yet another path to national/international leadership. A history of involvement with a particular organization can address our mission and result in a position of national/international leadership. In summary, most, but not all, engineering promotion dossiers will emphasize publications and extramural funding. However, in all cases, the evaluative and review letters are of greatest importance in determining whether a candidate has met the criteria within the context established by their particular effort distribution.

While the above discussion has focused on scholarship and outreach, including implicitly the scholarship of teaching, it has not dealt directly with the evaluation of the contributions of the candidate to the instructional mission of the department, college, and university. If the assignment of a candidate includes instruction, instructional effectiveness is a requirement for promotion. Initial assessments of effectiveness are based upon the peer review processes

established within the candidate's department and student teaching evaluations. These data are normally supplemented by less direct information, including student and alumni comments and involvement of the candidate with instructionally related activities. If the candidate is asserting national/international leadership in an area directly connected with the first of our three missions – student preparation, then the expectation is that the aforementioned assessments will be exemplary. Additionally, in these circumstances, further evidence regarding the prominence of the candidate's achievements relative to this mission is expected. This further evidence may include formal recognitions and awards on a national level, materials, funding, and publications generated in pursuit of the scholarship of teaching and learning, widely used instructional or other materials produced by the candidate, or other indicators of prominence gained related to instructional efforts and activities.

Finally, in light of our vision of being recognized as a top tier engineering program, a level of professional service, both within and beyond the borders of Auburn University, is expected from candidates for promotion to professor. Professional service is important in bringing visibility to the university, college, and department. In some cases, excellence in this arena can be a critical element in achievement of professional peer-recognition.

### **Criteria for Promotion to Associate Professor**

The College of Engineering criteria for promotion to Associate Professor have been framed in light of the criteria for promotion to Professor. The criteria for promotion to Associate Professor are:

1. Demonstration of progress towards national leadership within their specialization as evidenced by professional peer-recognition.
2. Satisfactory performance in all relevant mission areas. The assignment percentage history of the individual in question determines the relevant mission areas.
3. Participation and involvement in departmental, college, University, and professional activities.

Again the most important gauge relative to these criteria is provided by evaluative and review letters. The discussion provided above remains applicable. We expect that most dossiers will focus on instruction, publications and external funding, but this will not be to the exclusion of alternative approaches. The evaluation of candidates for promotion to Associate Professor is exactly analogous to that applied for promotion to Professor with the exception of degree. External review letters are recommended but not required at this stage. As stated in the faculty handbook, the candidate for associate professor should have demonstrated mastery of the subject matter of his or her field and the ability to apply it well in the primary area(s) to which he or she is assigned whether in teaching, research/creative work, or outreach. Additionally, the candidate should have contributed, typically through significant scholarly or creative work, to his or her area of specialization; participated in professional life; and served on departmental, college or school, and/or University committees. Through his or her scholarly and professional activity, the candidate should demonstrate an emerging stature as a regional or national authority. It is this emerging stature that demonstrates the potential for national leadership.

The vision of the Samuel Ginn College of Engineering requires both excellence and diversity among its faculty. The criteria for promotion given above support both this excellence and diversity, but in doing so, place a considerable obligation on the department. Junior faculty need to be appraised of expectations relative to their performance and accomplishments. It is critical that the department head/chair provide ongoing guidance to junior faculty. Additionally, senior faculty must be prepared to provide mentoring as needed. While it may not be possible to provide a concrete list of accomplishments that provide a minimum level of achievement necessary for promotion, the department and its faculty accept their obligation to steadfastly work with each and every junior faculty member in the provision of individualized guidance. Beyond this personalized direction, summary information providing dossier characteristics associated with successful tenure and promotion applications will be distributed on an annual basis to junior faculty. This distribution will respect the essential role that confidentiality must play in tenure and promotion.

### **Criteria for Tenure**

The criteria for tenure include the requirements for promotion to Associate Professor. Additionally tenure requires what is defined in the faculty handbook as collegiality. As indicated therein, “Collegiality can best be evaluated at the departmental level.” In this regard, the issue of collegiality in tenure decisions is addressed by departmental faculty. A summary of the third year review (described below) will be available for departmental review for each candidate for tenure. The summary will be a written report prepared by the head covering the findings of the review, and characterizing the nature of the vote.

### **Third-Year Processes**

The Third-Year Review is another important milestone in the promotion and tenure process. The process is less formal than consideration for promotion or tenure but sets the stage for those evaluations. Under most circumstances, all departmental tenured faculty members participate in the review. The focus is on the likelihood of the candidate to achieve subsequent tenure and promotion. Three outcomes are possible. The most favorable outcome is that the faculty member under review is perceived as appropriately positioning themselves for promotion and/or tenure. This is not a guarantee of subsequent promotion or tenure, but rather an indication that if they are able to maintain and extend the trends they have established, promotion and/or tenure is likely. The next most favorable outcome is that the candidate is perceived as capable of achieving promotion or tenure, but to do so, they must address one or more weaknesses identified during the review. Typically the weaknesses can be, and are, fairly precisely delineated – for example the review may cite the need for improved performance in the classroom or for an increased success rate with proposal or publication submissions. If the weakness is in the instructional arena, the faculty member will be instructed to engage with the Biggio Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in a collaborative effort to address the concern. The premise in this second case is that if the weaknesses are successfully addressed, promotion and tenure are possible, perhaps likely. The least favorable outcome is that the reviewed faculty member is not an appropriate fit for Auburn University. Under these circumstances, non-continuation procedures should be initiated. We suggest in the case of seeking non-continuation after three years, the approved process for non-continuation be used.

## **Promotion and Tenure Procedures**

All promotion and tenure processes begin at the departmental level. Evidentiary materials (including external review letters for promotion considerations) are reviewed by the appropriate departmental faculty. A meeting or meetings occur and the evidentiary materials and other related observations are discussed. The review culminates in a vote. The results of the process are reviewed with the candidate and a decision is made as to whether the application should continue forward. With the approval of the candidate, the results of the vote, the evidentiary material and letters are forwarded to the Dean and a college committee. Supplementary letters are prepared by the department chair/head and other departmental faculty and also forwarded. In preparing the materials to be submitted to the college and university committees, the department is guided by the checklist that concludes this document.

The membership of the Samuel Ginn College of Engineering and Promotion Committee is made up of two elected representatives from each of the eight departments within the college. Membership is restricted to tenured faculty with rank of professor or associate professor. Only those members who hold the rank of professor are involved in decisions concerning promotion to that rank. Votes of the committee are by secret ballot. Committee members do not vote on candidates from their own department. The Dean does not vote. The process begins with a distribution of the dossiers of all candidates under review to the committee members. The credentials of each candidate are then formally presented to the committee by the department chair/head. A discussion with the department chair/head about the candidate frequently follows the presentation. Finally the presenting department chair/head is excused from the meeting and further discussion may ensue. This college level review also culminates in a vote with the results again shared with the candidate. With the approval of the candidate, the results of both of the votes, the evidentiary material, and the letters are forwarded to the Provost and the university committee. Typically strong endorsements have been forwarded without extensive discussion with the candidate. If there is questionable or weak support of the dossier it is always discussed with the candidate. A supplementary letter is prepared by the Dean and appended to the submitted package. The letter from the dean includes a description of the promotion process, the results of the promotion votes at both the departmental and college levels, and the position of the Dean relative to promotion and/or tenure. Accompanying this letter is a summary of the observations of the college committee relative to the candidate. This summary is reviewed by the members of the college committee prior to submission to ensure accuracy. Finally, particularly in cases where complete consensus has not been achieved, the Dean may provide personal observations relative to the candidacy. At every stage in the process, emphasis is given to open and frank discussions in order to increase the likelihood of consensus. From this point forward, promotion and tenure procedures are common across all Auburn University colleges and schools.

## Promotion and Tenure Checklist Guiding Departmental Submissions

The items identified below are not intended to mandate a particular format or structure to promotion applications. As each situation is unique, the candidate and the department must have the freedom to structure the application as they deem most appropriate. The items listed below describe essential evaluation characteristics and categories. A promotion and/or tenure dossier should provide access to:

1. Workload Distribution History (weight assigned to subsequent categories determined by the workload history)
2. Evidence of Teaching Effectiveness
3. Evidence of Research Productivity/Scholarly Activity\*
4. Evidence of Extension/Outreach Achievements
5. Summary of Service Activities
6. Third Year Review Results (Tenure only)
7. Letter from the Department Head/Chair addressing the performance of the candidate relative to the college and departmental promotion criteria and missions
8. Letters from faculty colleagues addressing the performance of the candidate
9. Letters from external reviewers as appropriate\*\*

\* Impact/citation indices compiled and presented to assist in evaluation

\*\* Contextual biographical information on the external reviewers accompanies the letters