

Promotion and Tenure
Policies
Auburn University, Physics Department
May 2011

This policy document is an attempt to describe the process and the performance needed for promotion and/or tenure in the Auburn University Physics Department. It is intended to be in full accordance with the requirements of the Faculty Handbook and the AU Provost Office. It may not repeat all of these requirements so the appropriate Faculty Handbook sections and directives from the Office of the Provost are to be considered as appendices to this policy statement.

An essential theme of this policy document is that evaluations for tenure and promotion are essentially holistic and therefore contain a subjective element. The decisions are made by all faculty at the appropriate level and are based upon the factors described below. The goal is to continually strive for excellence.

I. Tenure and Promotion to Associate Professor

I.A. Process

Each year while the candidate is a tenure-track assistant professor, the Department Head will provide a written appraisal of the candidate's progress toward tenure and promotion as part of the regular annual review of faculty. At the end of the third year, a formal evaluation by the tenured faculty will be made. The candidate's resume and any additional material provided by the candidate will be examined by the tenured faculty and discussed at a meeting called by the Department Head. A formal, secret-ballot vote on the question "If the current level of progress continues, is the candidate expected to be supported by the Department for tenure and promotion?" The vote and a summary of the discussion are reported to the candidate by the Department Head. If concerns have been identified, a plan for addressing these concerns may be developed.

When an assistant professor chooses to go forward for tenure and promotion to associate professor, the following steps are taken:

- 1) The candidate prepares a packet that includes a resume and a few particularly significant papers to be distributed to outside reviewers.
- 2) The Department Head in cooperation with the candidate and following the Faculty Handbook and University Policy (see <http://www.auburn.edu/academic/provost/policies.html>) solicits letters from qualified outside reviewers. The packet prepared in Step 1 is included with the request for a letter of evaluation on the candidate's behalf.
- 3) The candidate and Department Head prepare a dossier in accordance with the requirements of the Faculty Handbook and University Policy.
- 4) This dossier along with the letters from outside reviewers is made available for examination by the Physics Department's tenured faculty. The candidate is not privy to the outside letters and special care is taken to preserve the confidentiality of the reviewers.

- 5) A meeting of the tenured faculty is convened to discuss and vote on tenure and promotion for the candidate.
- 6) The Department Head reports the results of the meeting and the vote to the candidate.
- 7) If the candidate chooses to go forward, the Department Head drafts a summary of the tenured faculty discussion that also reports on the vote. All faculty present and voting at the meeting will have an opportunity to sign this summary. Because the faculty discussion is considered to be such an important part of this process, absentee ballots are considered and reported separately.
- 8) The Department Head will also include in the dossier a letter presenting the Head's recommendation regarding promotion and tenure for the candidate.
- 9) Faculty members may also contribute letters to be included in the candidate's dossier.
- 10) The candidate's final dossier is submitted to the Dean of the College of Sciences and Mathematics and then on to the University Promotion and Tenure Committee.

I.B. Performance

The candidate will be evaluated overall on performance in the areas - teaching, research, service/outreach, and collegiality.

Teaching

The candidate is expected to be able to effectively teach at all the levels of courses taught in the Physics Department, i.e., introductory service courses, undergraduate courses for physics majors, and graduate level courses. During the probationary period, however, it is possible that the candidate may not yet have taught courses at all three levels, but it is expected that the willingness and intellectual background to do so will have been demonstrated.

Effective teaching is difficult to evaluate, and there is necessarily a subjective component. Student evaluations are used as one component for evaluating teaching effectiveness, but they should be interpreted by experienced teachers. The most heavily weighted component is the summaries coming from the Learning Effectiveness Committees in the Physics Department. These committees are composed of faculty who are teaching courses at a similar level. They meet at least once a semester to discuss overall course effectiveness, structure, and what is working and what can be improved. Written reports are part of the record for each faculty member and will be included in the tenure and promotion candidate's dossier as the peer review of teaching required by the Faculty Handbook.

The professional development of undergraduate and graduate students – not only in the classroom, but also in research training – is an important part of faculty teaching. It will contribute to a positive teaching evaluation when candidates effectively involve undergraduate and/or graduate students in their research activities. Evidence for effectiveness in this area may include authorship of refereed papers and/or presentations at professional meetings as well as recognition through awards and fellowships/scholarships.

Research

Research productivity is measured in terms of refereed publications, proposals, extramural funding, and/or the development of intellectual property, e.g., patents, copyrights. There is no minimum number of publications. The fact that there is no minimum should not be interpreted as a sign of low standards. Quite the opposite. We expect our faculty to continue to achieve and seek excellence so that there is no minimum that can be considered satisfactory. For reference, research active faculty in the Department publish on average 2-3 refereed papers per year. The quality or reputation of the journals in which the papers appear is a positive factor. Candidates need not be the senior author although that may be desirable on some of the papers. The candidate is expected to submit scientific proposals to appropriate agencies either as a principal investigator or as a co-investigator. Successfully acquiring extramural funding either as a principal investigator or as a member of one of the research groups in the Physics Department is also a measure of research productivity. There is, however, no minimum amount required as this will vary significantly based upon field. It is also possible that a successful candidate may be an essential member of a research group and still may not yet have been listed as a co-investigator on a large, long-running grant. For reference, research active faculty in the Department average approximately \$200k per year in extramural funding.

Other activities that may contribute to a positive research evaluation include a) invitations to present colloquia at other universities, b) invited presentations at national or international conferences or topical meetings in the candidate's area of research expertise, c) organizing meetings, workshops, or conference sessions, d) serving on national or international topical panels in the candidate's research area, e) refereeing papers for professional journals and/or f) reviewing proposals for granting agencies.

Service/Outreach

The candidate is expected to participate in Departmental Activities that may include serving on university, college and/or departmental committees, participating in outreach activities, and participating in appropriate professional organizations. The expectations for service/outreach are higher for tenured faculty than untenured ones.

Collegiality

Collegiality is a professional requirement, not a social one. The candidate is expected to collaborate with other faculty in teaching and research where appropriate. For example, the candidate is expected to teach courses with syllabi consistent with the learning objectives of the Department and to co-operate with others who are teaching the same course during a particular semester. The candidate is also expected to collaborate with other faculty members in common or related research activities. Evidence for effective research collaboration may be co-authorship on publications, presentations, and/or proposals. Interdisciplinary research activity would also be a positive indicator for collegiality.

II. Promotion to Full Professor

II.A. Process

After an appropriate number of years as a tenured Associate Professor, e.g. 4-7 yrs, a faculty member may choose to go forward for promotion to full professor. In this case the following steps are taken:

- 1) The candidate prepares a packet that includes a resume and a few particularly significant papers to be distributed to outside reviewers.
- 2) The Department Head in cooperation with the candidate and following the Faculty Handbook and University Policy (see <http://www.auburn.edu/academic/provost/policies.html>) solicits letters from qualified outside reviewers. The packet prepared in Step 1 is included with the request for a letter of evaluation on the candidate's behalf.
- 3) The candidate and Department Head prepare a dossier in accordance with the requirements of the Faculty Handbook and University Policy.
- 4) This dossier along with the letters from outside reviewers is made available for examination by the Physics Department's full professors. The candidate is not privy to the outside letters and special care is taken to preserve the confidentiality of the reviewers.
- 5) A meeting of the Department's full professors is convened to discuss and vote on promotion for the candidate.
- 6) The Department Head reports the results of the meeting and the vote to the candidate.
- 7) If the candidate chooses to go forward, the Department Head drafts a summary of the discussion by the full professors that also reports on the vote. All faculty present and voting at the meeting will have an opportunity to sign this summary.
- 8) The Department Head will also include in the dossier a letter presenting the Head's recommendation regarding promotion for the candidate. Because the faculty discussion is considered to be such an important part of this process, absentee ballots are considered and reported separately.
- 9) Full professors may also contribute letters to be included in the candidate's dossier.
- 10) The candidate's final dossier is submitted to the Dean of the College of Sciences and Mathematics and then on to the University Promotion and Tenure Committee.

II.B. Performance

The candidate will be evaluated overall on performance in the areas - teaching, research, service/outreach, and leadership.

Teaching

The candidate is expected to have demonstrated effective teaching at all the levels of courses taught in the Physics Department, i.e., introductory service courses, undergraduate courses for physics majors, and graduate level courses.

Effective teaching is difficult to evaluate, and there is necessarily a subjective component. Student evaluations are used as one component for evaluating teaching effectiveness, but the most heavily weighted component is the summaries coming from the Learning Effectiveness

Committees in the Physics Department. These committees are composed of faculty who are teaching courses at a similar level. They meet at least once a semester to discuss overall course effectiveness, structure, and what is working and what can be improved. Written reports are part of the record for each faculty member and will be included in the promotion candidate's dossier as the peer review of teaching required by the Faculty Handbook.

Research

Research productivity is measured in terms of refereed publications, proposals, extramural funding, and/or the development of intellectual property, e.g., patents, copyrights. Candidates need not be the senior author although that may be desirable on some of the papers. The quality or reputation of the journals in which the papers appear is a positive factor. The candidate is expected to submit scientific proposals to appropriate agencies either as a principal investigator or as a co-investigator. Successfully acquiring extramural funding either as a principal investigator or as a member of one of the research groups in the Physics Department is also a measure of research productivity. For reference, research active faculty in the Department publish on average 2-3 refereed papers per year and receive approximately \$200k per year in extramural funding.

Other activities that may contribute to a positive research evaluation include a) invitations to present colloquia at other universities, b) invited presentations at national or international conferences or topical meetings in the candidate's area of research expertise, c) organizing meetings, workshops, or conference sessions, d) serving on national or international topical panels in the candidate's research area, e) refereeing papers for professional journals and/or f) reviewing proposals for granting agencies.

Service/Outreach

The candidate is expected to participate in Departmental Activities which may include serving on university, college and/or departmental committees, participating in outreach activities, and participating in appropriate professional organizations.

Leadership

The distinguishing feature for a full professor is leadership. The candidate is expected to be a recognized, accomplished leader in the chosen field of research. This will be attested to primarily by the outside reviewers. The candidate is also expected to have demonstrated leadership in the Department in one or more of the areas teaching, research, and service. In addition, the candidate is expected to have taken a leadership position at a Departmental, University, and/or national professional level.