

MSP GUIDE TO THE TENURE PROCESS

Introduction

This is the briefest of guides to how the tenure process is handled on the UMass/Amherst campus for faculty. We have kept it brief in order not to bog you down in details that may never be germane to your personal situations. If, after reading it, you have additional questions, please call (545-2206) or email us at mSP@umass.edu.

The Building Blocks: Your Annual Faculty Reports

Your Annual Faculty Report (AFR) is the vital record of your accomplishments for each year of your employment at UMass. Reappointments, mini-tenure or 4.2 review (reappointment through the tenure decision year), tenure, promotions, merit awards, and post-tenure reviews all depend heavily on the documentation you provide in this report. They are used from the beginning of your career here until the end and completing them thoroughly and carefully is a large favor you can do yourself.

Annual evaluation of faculty is mandated by the [collective bargaining agreement](#), so it is wise to make sure that your AFR represents an accurate and elegant reflection of your progress in professional activity or research, teaching and service. Be sure to compare the current year's form with the prior year's, since you want to be careful not to mistakenly carry over the same pending projects from year to year, or to confuse one title with another.

You will not complete an AFR in your first year, but you will at the beginning of your second year, and every year thereafter. If you are uncertain about some of the reporting categories, ask your Department chair/head or a senior colleague about what your department's norms are in filling out each section. You might ask if a colleague would let you see their report for a recent year, just to get an example of how yours probably should look. (Be careful to ask someone who is on the high end of the merit scale—no point emulating a mediocre example!)

Your AFRs will be kept on file in your department office, but you should be sure to keep a copy for your own records, complete with the comments appended by your personnel committee, Department Chair/Head and Dean. You should also read those comments very carefully; academics are sometimes indirect in their critiques of colleagues, and you need to pay close attention to what they are actually saying about your progress toward the next step in your career. Should you see anything erroneous in the comments of your colleagues/administrators, you should ask for it to be corrected. Ultimately you absolutely have the right to append a statement to your AFR at the time you are forwarding it articulating the errors/concerns should they remain on the form. Please feel free to consult with MSP if you wish to exercise this right.

Along with a file of all your AFRs, you should keep a current copy of your Curriculum Vitae. The careful review you perform to complete the AFR offers a perfect opportunity to update your CV at the same time. You can never tell when you will need a current CV – for conferences, for example – but you will certainly need one for all the major personnel actions you will undergo in your career at UMass. And you should keep on file all possible documentation to support your AFRs – teaching evaluations, thank you notes for service, copies of articles and books – in a convenient location for assembling your basic file for personnel actions.

Assembling Your Basic File

When you come up for reappointment through the tenure decision year, tenure, or promotion, you will be asked to compile a "basic file." This file is defined in the MSP Contract (Article 12.5). What is not defined in the Contract is exactly how this file is supposed to look, and that can vary depending on your department and/or college. You will need to compose a "personal statement" or divide your file into the three areas of teaching, research, service, with a separate summary statement for each. Your best bet is to talk to your Department Chair/Head or to a colleague who has recently (and successfully!) undergone a major personnel action. Ask the person what they have done in the past and what the norms are in your department. Ask if it is possible to look at their most recent basic file, to use as a model for your own. Additionally, MSP has collected a library of statements from your colleagues across campus who have successfully received the award of tenure and we are happy to share all of those with you; we regularly provide them at our annual tenure workshops.

Reappointment through the Tenure Decision Year (Mini-Tenure or 4.2 Review)

When you come up for the reappointment that will carry you through the tenure decision year, you have an intensive review of your career to date. This review is alternatively referred to as a "4.2 review" (referencing an article from the [Academic Personnel Policy](#) or "Redbook") or "mini-tenure." It is designed to provide you with feedback concerning your progress toward tenure and provide you with information about any deficiencies in your record in time for you to remedy them before your review.

One important point: The mini-tenure process, even more than the tenure process, varies enormously from department to department. What is written here applies in many cases, but not necessarily in all. If in doubt, you'll want to try to gather information about how things operate in your department.

Remember that your aim is to shape a career – and a life! – that you feel good about. Along the way you may need to make some compromises but start by thinking about what you want and value, and how you can explain to your colleagues why that's valuable and a contribution.

The Process

Mini-tenure has become like a minor version of the tenure process. In fact, some departments do seek evaluations by external referees, but most don't. Be sure to find out if your department does because you will need to provide names for them.

The mini-tenure review is a major personnel action, and you will be expected to assemble a basic file for it. This is your first opportunity to pull together and document your contributions and doing so now will help you at tenure time. Seeing what is not documented helps you identify potential weaknesses in your case and helps you to understand what you need to do prior to tenure to address those weaknesses.

The MSP Contract requires your Department Chair/Head to notify you within the first two weeks of the spring semester BEFORE your mini-tenure review is to occur. This provides you opportunity to work on your basic file over the summer. Check with your Department Chair/Head or the Chair of your Department Personnel Committee to ascertain exactly when your department performs the mini-tenure review; most occur in your third year of employment.

Once you have submitted your basic file, you might think things are out of your hands, but you would be wrong. You need to monitor your case closely as it goes through the various levels of review, and to respond in a timely way if inaccuracies enter the record at any level, or if a negative recommendation is made. If either situation occurs, you may want to add a response to your file. All major personnel actions are done through APWS on this campus. [APWS](#) is an online workflow system where major personnel action documents are uploaded and reviewed at each level moving through the process in an automated fashion. The system allows a candidate to choose whether they want to craft a response to a recommendation letter and five (5) calendar days have been built in at each level of review to allow for this. You may request an extension to that timeline. MSP would be happy to help with that.

Do not write the first thing that comes to mind and fire it off; it is hard to be your own best advocate. Ask a trusted colleague for help or come to MSP and we will help you formulate your statement, with particular attention to tone.

Three Important Rules

The most important rule of mini-tenure, or tenure, is to take the process seriously, to make every effort to make it easy for your colleagues to understand your record and contributions, and to **fully document everything**. (That's true for your annual faculty reports as well.) In practice most people understand this.

The second most important rule of mini-tenure, and the rule that is most often forgotten or misunderstood, is **do not over-promise**. Do not put into writing a commitment that prior to tenure you absolutely, positively, without-a-doubt will publish this, that, and the other thing, or that you will improve your teaching of large lecture classes, or anything else of the kind. Usually, it is precisely the candidate who is aware of having a potential weakness of some sort (say, that you have not yet published enough) who feels compelled to promise that, if renewed, they will publish up a storm prior to tenure. The promises you make today can and will be used against you at tenure time. If you write that before tenure you plan to publish one book and complete the manuscript for another and also publish three articles in top refereed journals, you are setting yourself up for failure and inviting someone at tenure time to say "Well, yes, she did publish a book and two articles in top journals, but she is not close to completing the other manuscript" -- when in fact no one could possibly do all that before tenure.

The third most important rule of mini-tenure, and a rule that also gets misunderstood, is **read your mini-tenure review letters carefully, looking for any indications of reservations**. Here's the sad truth: Personnel committees, and department chairs/heads, and often deans, can be reluctant to write anything critical. Partly they are uncomfortable providing criticism, but mostly they don't want to write anything that could hurt you. The committee may have spent an hour or two talking about the fact that although you have plenty of publications, almost none of them are in refereed journals, and they just don't know whether they could tenure someone with that kind of record. After agonizing about this, the committee may then write a letter 95 percent of which is glowing, with just one sentence that hints at a reservation, "The committee does, however, encourage Professor X to consider making it a higher priority to publish in refereed journals." Probably the committee will also agree that someone should talk to you and tell you in strong terms that you have a problem, which the committee didn't want to put in writing. But then in practice, half the time the person who talks to you, who often will be a person who is firmly on your side, will put the point in

such mild terms that you may not be aware how significant a problem this issue might be. It is therefore critical that you read your letter carefully, looking for anything that seems like it might be a criticism, and follow-up by asking colleagues about it, and what they think you need to do to address this concern. If in doubt, bring your letter to the MSP office or to a trusted colleague, in your own department or another department, and get someone else's help in evaluating the letter. Even if you disagree with the criticism, be sure you are aware of it, be sure you think about how to prepare for it coming up again, be sure you see if there are steps you can take to eliminate this concern in the future.

After the Review

When you have successfully completed the mini-tenure review, do make sure to take any suggestions made during it. Mini-tenure is a time to look forward. What aspect of your record is most problematic? What actions are there you can take that would strengthen that? If there is a problem with your teaching, can you go work with the [Center for Teaching & Learning](#)? If you don't have much service, is there some kind of service activity you wouldn't mind doing and which your department would count as significant? This is your chance to round out your profile so it will meet departmental, college, and University norms for tenure. If it seems unlikely that you will be able to meet expectations, consider extending the tenure clock to give yourself the best possible chance to do so. MSP can assist with requests of this nature so please consult with us.

Another thing you should be thinking about are external referees. If you had to name some, do you know who they would be? If not, are there steps you could take to help you identify potential referees? For example, could you send these people one or another piece of your work and see if they write back with comments or reactions? One suggestion is to Google yourself, and see what scholars assign your work in their courses or cite you favorably. Those are people you might be able to suggest as referees for your tenure case.

Finally, remember that "the union" is here to help you. "The union" means office staff and leaders, but much more than that it means your colleagues, from your own department and from elsewhere. Solidarity means helping you to understand the process, giving you someone with whom you can discuss the issues, and letting you benefit from collective wisdom. It may mean showing you the tenure statements that others have written (and asking you if you'd be willing to share your statement with those who come after you) or putting you in touch with people who have recently been through the process or sitting you down with someone who has served many terms on the college personnel committee. We want to help everyone to do the best possible work, to make the best possible case for themselves, and to feel supported and valued by others. That's what a union is all about.

Tenure

Let's start before your tenure decision year (TDY) in this section. If you feel you are not ready to undergo the tenure review, you may be able to postpone the decision – but only if you make arrangements prior to the beginning of your TDY. The [Redbook](#) gives examples of acceptable reasons for altering the timing of the review: up to three years for an equivalent amount of administrative service by agreement at the time the service is undertaken, leave without pay unless otherwise stipulated when the leave is approved, and temporary service at less than two-thirds time with the approval of the Dean and Department Head. There are also other circumstances that may allow for postponement such as prior credit toward tenure, illness, family medical/caregiving needs, COVID-19 disruptions, and other issues that have impacted one's ability to successfully fulfill the

probationary period for tenure. All these cases need to be presented to the administration for consideration, as early as possible prior to the TDY. The MSP can be helpful in advising faculty members about such requests and all assistance remains confidential.

For new parents, a one-year extension is a contractual right. A faculty member (female or male) who becomes a biological or adoptive parent will have their TDY delayed for one year upon written notification of the birth or adoption by the faculty member to the department chair. The faculty member may have the tenure decision year restored to its original date if they wish by providing written notification to the department chair no later than three months prior to the start of the original tenure decision year. You may ask for further extensions for later births or adoptions but allowance is discretionary.

Tenure is virtually identical in process to the mini-tenure review (see above), but it is even more rigorous and, in all cases, requires outside letters of reference. Tenure cases begin in the fall semester, with notice going to candidates within the first three weeks of the spring semester BEFORE the academic year in which they will be reviewed for tenure.

Ask a recent (successful) tenure candidate in your department if you can see their basic file -- you can use it as a pattern for style and content and make it easy for both your department and college personnel committees to follow. You should include all the information listed in Article 12.5 of the [MSP Contract](#). You should also include pertinent back-up documentation for the activities listed in your CV and AFRs, such as letters of commendation for a presentation, analysis of your SRTI scores over the years, etc. You will need to write a personal statement – either an overarching one covering all three areas as a unified whole or an individual preface for each area. MSP keeps on file a collection of sample statements from faculty members who have recently gone through the process. (You should have received an invitation to access a ONEDRIVE folder with these statements in it at the workshop you attended. If not, please feel free to ask [MSP](#) to provide you with such access.) We have samples from every college on campus and likely even from your own department. You also need to be sure your publications or other scholarly works accompany your file when you submit it. And you need to prepare a list of outside referees that has a number of renowned scholars in your field, preferably individuals not close to you or your research, with a short paragraph for each, outlining who they are and why they are suitable as a referee in your case.

A note about deadlines: You must have materials ready for your external referees by May 1st of the academic year before your review is scheduled to take place. This means having your updated CV, personal statement, and research pieces ready for that deadline. Given the external referee deadline, be sure to sit down with your department chair in advance to come up with the list of referees. The rest of your basic file won't be due until September of your review year.

MSP has often received questions about how letters writers are chosen and whether the candidate is allowed to know who wrote for them. The normal practice is for the chair and candidate to sit down to look over the lists of names generated by both the candidate and the chair (sometimes the chair enlists the help of the PC in coming up with names of people to ask). The final selections must include, but are not limited to, those that the faculty member suggests. The contract does provide the right for the candidate to receive copies of 1) the solicitation letter that will go out to potential referees and 2) the list of proposed referees being asked to write on your behalf. This right is provided so that you, the candidate, are given an opportunity to comment on the appropriateness of both. Should you see a name that is problematic, now is the time to talk to your chair about why

you feel the person is not appropriate to be asked to write for you. You do not have veto power but often, a discussion beforehand with your chair can result in the removal of that person from the list before the letter goes out. If the chair insists on soliciting from the problematic referee, be sure to document your objections in written form. Actual referee letters are only accessible to the faculty member if they did not waive access to them.

Once you have submitted your file, you must monitor your case as it travels through the various levels of review. You are entitled to a copy of the table of contents and the recommendation letter at each level – as it is being forwarded onto the next level. Receiving your letter AT THE TIME the file moves to the next level is extremely important especially if you wish to respond. This should all be automatic now with the APWS online workflow system but it's still a good idea to check the [Master Calendar](#) for deadlines for your file to move from one level to the next.

You can also request to see the materials in your file (except for letters you have waived access to) at any time subsequent to the recommendation of the DPC.

If at any point you disagree with the content of a recommendation, you have the right to respond and to have that response added to the file going forward. The APWS system allows a candidate to choose whether they want to craft a response to a recommendation letter and builds in five (5) calendar days at each level for this purpose. We urge candidates to seek assistance in crafting responses, from MSP and trusted colleagues. It is best not to write and send your initial thoughts without some assistance with content and tone; these are emotionally charged situations, and you deserve the help of an advocate in dealing with them.

If the Provost's recommendation is positive, your case will go to the President's office and from there to the [Board of Trustees](#). For the most part, these levels are formalities. In any case, if you are not going to receive tenure, you must be so notified by August 15th; if you don't receive proper notice, you receive an extra year's employment beyond the terminal year that normally follows your TDY. If you are successful, you can start planning your trajectory to your last promotion!

As a final reminder, [MSP](#) encourages you to come and talk with us well before the tenure decision year if you are concerned or confused about any aspect of the review. We also offer tenure workshops annually (you may contact [Lori Reardon](#) for more info about those sessions) and we are happy to advise faculty during the process so please don't hesitate to call. It's always best to seek assistance/advice sooner rather than later and all discussions are kept in complete confidence.