

Date: Fall 2009

To: New and tenure-track faculty

From: University Reappointment, Tenure and Promotion Subcommittee

Re: Suggestions for Candidates

[Special thanks to members of the Biology Department, who wrote the original document from which this was adapted.]

The following suggestions supplement the University RTP policy but do not contravene university-wide policy. In fact, these suggestions are intended to be helpful in a spirit of collegiality for candidates and committee members alike. They are only suggestions, and are to help you present your professional work in the most favorable light to the Department, School, University, and people outside of your field.

The University RTP process allows your performance to be reviewed by your professional colleagues. It is an opportunity for you to examine yourself in light of what your students tell you, your faculty peers observe about you, and you yourself reflect on your professional growth and development in the context of your career at Sonoma State University. You can also identify changes in your professional responsibilities or scholarly agenda, if needed, and establish goals for further development in your career as a teacher and a scholar. Your preparation of the materials you give to your Department RTP Committee is an opportunity for you to provide your best expression of your professional self. Ultimately you are presenting yourself not only to your department, but to the school and the University at large, including your Dean and the President of the University. The University RTP Committee recommends that you:

- 1. Take charge of your own RTP process.** Anticipate deadlines. Seek out members of your department RTP committee and ask them questions. You don't need to wait for the reviewers to contact you first. Use available campus resources, such as attending RTP workshops and consulting with faculty peers from other departments. Past members of the University RTP Committee often volunteer to be RTP mentors. If you think this would be useful, contact the chair of the URTP Committee.

Being proactive serves your interests best. Committees up the line frown on excuses for not following requirements of policy, even when glitches are to blame. Anticipate that for each review cycle you will need two peer evaluations of your classroom teaching and course content. Don't wait until the last minute to arrange for your colleague(s) to observe you. Begin now to collect documentation that substantiates your university and public service. While you may not be able to obtain documentation for everything you've ever done for the University or the community, a letter from a committee chair that explains your role on a committee and your contribution makes your presentation stronger than merely listing the committee by name as one on which you've served. Start a file and add materials to it as you go along (conference programs, presentations made, papers accepted, workshops attended, service participation, community speaking engagements, etc.).

Keeping your materials organized as you go along makes it easier when deadlines loom. Be sure to read the University RTP Policy, especially sections I.C.3.a-d, regarding which documents are actually forwarded to subsequent levels of review.

- 2. Organize your CV specifically for the RTP process.** After outlining your academic preparation, beginning with the most recent degree, organize your CV in the order of the four RTP criteria: teaching effectiveness, research and/or scholarship and/or creative projects, university service, and community service. Be consistent in format and organization from one section to the next. Within each section, list your contributions chronologically, beginning with the most recent. Some people also highlight the items added since the last review (or hire). This really helps evaluators review many files carefully and consistently within the limited time frames available.

Make sure all entries in the CV are accurate, such as titles of journals, courses, and committees. Include full citations for publications and presentations. State clearly if a work is in progress, has been submitted, has been accepted, or has been published/presented. Write out acronyms, as necessary, to make them understandable for people unfamiliar with your field. Provide some context, if necessary: if you spoke at the preeminent conference in your field, say so; if your article was published in a journal with a low acceptance rate, or high impact factor, say so; if you were awarded one of only five grants funded nationwide, say so. Don't assume everyone will understand the significance of your accomplishments.

Prepare your CV knowing that its most important reviewers may be from other departments or schools, people who may not know who you are or what you do or the jargon of your discipline. The CV must make sense, by itself, to everyone who reads it.

Remember that we have already hired you, so we don't need your list of references, for example. What we want to focus on now is what you have done while at SSU.

- 3. Give preeminence to developing the section on “teaching effectiveness and professional activities.”** While all four sections (teaching, professional development, university service, and community service) are important, the section on teaching effectiveness carries the most weight in the review process, especially for newer faculty. The University wants to make sure that you can teach effectively. You need to supply solid evidence that you are effective and to describe ways you are continuing your growth in these areas.

Raw, quantitative data from student evaluations should be summarized in tabular form to make comparisons easy among courses being evaluated and to make it easy for the reviewer to identify items that fall significantly above or below departmental medians. In fact, such items should be highlighted and then discussed in the “self-assessment of teaching” essay. Quantitative data, whether above or below the norm, need to be placed within a meaningful context and interpreted. For example,

if scores are significantly high, you might offer explanations or give examples of teaching strategies that have contributed to this effectiveness. Conversely, for lower scores, you need to explain what didn't work as well as it could have, and what changes you envision to raise the scores in the future. Qualitative comments should be compiled into a single document, with context and interpretation, as necessary. It is the department's responsibility to compile these comments, so work with your department RTP committee to ensure adequate time for this to get done.

The tabular summary of data from student evaluations and reviews from faculty peers are to be included in your WPAF, and will be sent from the Department to the School and University RTP Committees.

Your essay on "self-assessment of teaching and professional activities" is an opportunity for you to comment on the effectiveness of your teaching and professional activities from the perspective of you as a scholar in the classroom. This essay, typically no more than 5 pages (2500 words) in length, sheds light on your role as a "reflective practitioner." What is your teaching philosophy? What are your teaching goals? When you've developed new courses, or taught courses new to you, you might want to discuss what you did to make the courses unique and relevant to student needs, what instructional strategies you tried, how they did or didn't work, and what you would do differently. It's not enough for you to state: "I've made a substantial contribution..." or, "I'm a valuable asset...." You must also document such claims. Where possible, steer clear of making evaluative comments about yourself, and let the data speak for you. For example, you might state: "Reviews of my teaching demonstrate...." Your essay should include critical analysis of data and performance as you see them, a discussion of their significance to you and your students, and specific goals and plans for your development as a teacher. In other words, it is much more than a mere cataloging and description of courses you taught or even programs you've developed. Given the reflective nature of this essay, you might want to keep a journal from the outset of the semester, in which you regularly enter notes about your experiences, observations and thoughts during the course of your teaching. Essays that are "crammed" at the last minute before RTP documents are due are less likely to put your accomplishments in the best possible light.

- 4. The weighting of RTP criteria among the four categories may vary by department.** The RTP policy states that the four areas of evaluation are "in priority order" meaning teaching is most important, followed by scholarship, then university service and community service. Check your departmental criteria to see if your department has specific weights for these criteria , e.g., 40/30/20/10. The weights suggest where you should focus your efforts, but may change as faculty values change and as you move through the tenure-track process. Early on, your focus should be on teaching and establishing or continuing your research agenda. If you find you are being asked to serve on many committees, make sure this service will not adversely affect your teaching and scholarship. Conversely, if your teaching evaluations are stellar, and you've got a good handle on your scholarship and

professional activities, you should seek out opportunities for service, as this may help you when the time comes to apply for promotion or sabbatical. Talk with your department chair or dean or chair of your RTP committee if you have concerns about what is appropriate in your situation. Pay close attention to RTP committee evaluations from all levels to determine if you need to focus your attention in a different direction.

5. **Submit your documents in *final form*, or as close to it as possible, to the Department RTP Committee in plenty of time for the committee to prepare your RTP document.** Be prepared--and stay flexible--for the committee to make recommendations for re-working parts of what you submit (your CV, for example) or to add or clarify information. The candidate is responsible for submitting to the department RTP committee his or her documents (e.g., CV, student/peer evaluation data, self-assessment of teaching and professional activities, and any supplemental materials); the department RTP committee is responsible for writing up the evaluation and preparing the document to move to the next level of review.
6. **Be aware that the promotion process is separate from the reappointment and tenure process.** Promotion documents are ranked, campus-wide, among all eligible candidates. They may include information that is used in your tenure documents, and may also include additional information.
7. **Don't be intimidated by the process.** Ask questions!