

Enhancing Your Career Trajectory: Guide to Promotion to Professor

This guide is intended for faculty who have successfully navigated tenure and promotion to Associate Professor. Congratulations! You have already achieved two major milestones in an academic career. You have now entered the midcareer stage, which is an important time in the arc of your career. This is the stage when many academics make their most significant research and creative contributions. Lack of pressure for tenure may open new possibilities in creative endeavors, such as pursuing high risk but high reward projects, and encourage experimentation with novel approaches to teaching or developing new classes. It is a time when faculty often begin assuming more significant leadership roles. Yet, after tenure there are new challenges to navigate. For example, many faculty feel they are receiving less attention and investment from the university. This decreased investment in their creative endeavors may be coupled with increased expectations for service. While it may be a relief to be post-tenure, faculty now bear more responsibility for keeping their career on track as annual reviews cease. This guide is intended to help faculty negotiate the important career transition from Associate Professor to Professor.

Note: Throughout this document the term “Chair” is used, and is intended to refer to a faculty member’s immediate supervisor (i.e., the head of one’s academic unit), although in some cases this person might have a different title (e.g., “Director” or “Dean”). Similarly, for simplicity the term “department” is used to refer to a faculty member’s academic unit, even though different terms are applicable for some faculty members (e.g., where the academic unit is a school or college). The document is also targeted to Kent campus faculty, who have a high expectation of research accomplishments for promotion to Professor. Regional campus faculty who wish to pursue promotion to Professor would be wise to consult with their campus Dean and department colleagues and Chair of their Kent campus department as well as handbooks for their regional campus and Kent department.

What are criteria for promotion to Professor?

There are general beliefs within academia about the requirements for achieving the rank of Professor. If you surveyed your colleagues, they would likely mention general criteria such as achieving eminence or having high visibility and impact in one’s discipline, making distinguished contributions, having a reputation among one’s peers (e.g., known internationally, or known for specific advances in one’s field). There is also the sense that the rank must be earned through accomplishments, and is not a reward for longevity in the field. These general beliefs may influence external letter writers or internal reviewers as they judge your record.

The more formal criteria are contained in the university promotion policy and department handbook. The university promotion policy primarily refers to procedures for applying for promotion, but it does briefly mention standards:

Promotion shall be viewed as recognition of a faculty member's sustained and distinguished scholarship, teaching, and service. For the purposes of this policy,

"scholarship" is broadly defined to include research, scholarly and creative work. For the purposes of this policy "service" is broadly defined to include administrative service to the university, professional service to the faculty member's discipline, and the provision of professional expertise to public and private entities beyond the University. From University Policy Register, section 06 - 15, section A

The university policy make clear, however, that academic units set standards for faculty in their discipline:

Criteria appropriate to a particular unit shall be formulated by that unit in light of college (if applicable) and university standards and guidelines, the mission of the unit, and the demands and academic standards of the discipline. University Policy Register, section 06 - 15, section A, #2

Department handbooks are to specify what activities count, and how different contributions are weighed:

The criteria for assessing the quality of scholarship, teaching and service shall be clearly specified and included in the handbook of each unit and campus. Guidelines for weighting the categories of scholarship, teaching and service shall be established by each unit for Kent campus faculty. For regional campus faculty, guidelines for weighting the categories of scholarship, teaching and service shall be established by each campus faculty council and this weighting shall be used at all levels of review. The handbook should indicate with some specificity, how the quality and significance of scholarship and the quality and effectiveness of teaching and service are to be documented and assessed. Only documented evidence of scholarship, teaching, and service will be used in assessing a faculty member's eligibility for promotion. In the evaluation of scholarship, emphasis should be placed on external measures of quality. University Policy Register, section 06 - 15, section B, #2

The importance of the department level review is further underscored by the following:

Due process is integral to an effective promotion policy. The guiding premise in the following procedure is that the essential phases in promotion consideration occur at the unit level and at the regional campus (if applicable). Assessments and the recommendations beyond these levels should reflect due regard for the professional judgments and recommendations made at the unit and regional campus levels. Review and assessment by extra-unit and extra-regional campus faculty and the academic administration are necessary to insure the integrity of the system. University Policy Register, section 06 - 15, section C, #1

The bottom line is that criteria outlined in a department handbook will be weighed most heavily by internal reviewers in the evaluation of promotion cases. Candidates should evaluate their record in relation to these criteria, paying special attention to any language that explains how the criteria or weighting of the criteria are different for promotion to Professor (compared to

expectations for promotion to Associate Professor). Even if similar criteria are described for promotion to different ranks, there may be higher expectations (e.g., in areas of reputation and impact) for promotion to Professor. Be sure you also understand what accomplishments will be counted, e.g., will your department evaluate your entire record, or only your accomplishments since your last promotion?). Ask your Chair or RTP Committee, or your Dean, to clarify criteria if needed.

How to Work Toward Promotion to Professor

Q: What is the best time to start building a record for promotion to Professor?

A: The day after you submit your tenure file.

Although many faculty feel the need to pause after the stresses of life on the tenure track, a long post-tenure pause can greatly slow progress toward promotion to Professor. It takes time to build a record, and every accomplishment after submitting your tenure file needs to be documented as it counts for the next promotion. Data from the Kent State Kent campus show that the success rate for faculty applying for promotion to Professor are lower than the success rates for Tenure or Promotion to Associate Professor, which underscores the challenges in achieving the rank of professor. This guide is intended to help faculty members stay on track in their careers by providing information about expectations for the rank of Professor and awareness of factors that can impede career progress.

It can be helpful, during the year of tenure evaluation or shortly thereafter, for a faculty member to identify goals for the next 5 years of their career. The university is initiating a career coaching program for faculty in Fall 2015. The goal of coaching is to help an employee develop a vision and goals for their career. This program (at least initially) will be available for faculty at the rank of Associate Professor. Information about the coaching program is available through the center for Teaching and Learning.

A major focus for promotion to Professor will be whether you have a record of distinguished contributions and have shown impact on your field. You established a record of scholarly achievement for tenure, which you need to continue, but guiding questions that will be especially important for promotion to Professor are: What am I known for? How has my work contributed to advanced understanding in the field? And will external letter writers be able to identify these contributions?

To sustain momentum in your career at a stage of increasing demands on your time, use sabbatical time well to reinvigorate your research, and guard against loss of research time by making it a priority (e.g., scheduled time every week). If research time is the last thing that you fit into your schedule, it will have a negative impact on your productivity.

This is also a good time to focus more on activities that build or reflect visibility, reputation, and impact. For promotion to Professor there should be some evidence of high impact contribution.

Some examples:

- serving as members on editorial boards or grant panels (rather than as an ad hoc reviewer)
- serving as an officer in organizations can increase your visibility (more so than serving on a professional committee)
- publishing in high impact journals (rather than only secondary journals) and producing high quality research
- obtaining external grants (extramural funding from major sources such as NSF or NIH may be especially important in some fields)
- making original contributions that create new directions in your field are more important than simply producing new papers or creative activities.
- invited addresses or chairing symposia you organize (rather than an individual conference presentation) for national or international conferences
- External metrics such as citation counts of your work are another way to demonstrate the impact of your research. A variety of search engines can be used (e.g., Web of Science, Google Scholar) to obtain information about the impact of your work, colleagues in your department can advise which metrics are best to use in your field. You can set up an account in Google Scholar to track citations of your work: <https://scholar.google.com/intl/en-US/scholar/citations.html>).
- In some departments, obtaining extramural funding for research is a key criterion.

Consult your department handbook for criteria relevant for your discipline. The key point is, *quality* and *impact* of activities will be central in evaluating your record.

Finally, consider what you need to take your research program to a new level. Do you need training in new techniques, or new lab equipment? Your Chair may be able to help you identify sources for seed money. The Corporation and Foundation Office on campus or Research and Sponsored Programs may also be able to provide suggestions for funding sources. Would it be helpful to form new collaborative arrangements with colleagues? Your sabbatical may be a good time to pursue new collaborative arrangements. Is it time to redirect your research focus to keep it cutting edge? Take time to read the latest developments in your field and think about programmatic ways to extend on the research questions that drove your research prior to tenure.

Be sure to document your contributions. It can be helpful to set up a system early on for tracking your activities. This will ensure that some activities are not overlooked, and will greatly facilitate preparation of your Promotion file. Also, be thinking about who you might ask to write you letters when you apply for Promotion. They need to be senior colleagues who are aware of and admire your work, but are not active collaborators. For example, you might consider colleagues who were part of a symposium in which you participated, journal editors who seem impressed with your reviewing, or fellow members of grant panels on which you served. If you can't think of people you would ask, this is a sign that you might want to take more initiative to network, e.g., to organize a conference symposium, invite a colleague to give a colloquium in your department, organize a special issue for a journal, ask a colleague to introduce you to someone you would like to meet, etc.

Consider meeting with your Chair shortly after tenure to discuss your career plans, and 2 - 3

years post-tenure for the purposes of receiving feedback regarding your progress toward promotion to Professor. Provide your Chair a copy of your CV and a summary of your accomplishments after submitting your tenure file as well as your plans for the next 2- 3 years. In some colleges, faculty may also be advised to meet with the college Dean (consult senior colleagues for advice).

Although research contributions are generally emphasized for promotion to Professor, contributions to teaching and service are also considered (although excellence in these areas will not make up for deficiencies in research). Contributions to teaching could include evidence of high quality classroom teaching (student and peer evaluations) as well as supervision of graduates students (if relevant). In some fields (e.g., many science departments), evidence of high quality mentoring of graduate students (e.g., students publish, win awards, obtain jobs upon graduation) is also an important part of the teaching evaluation. Expectations for service vary by department, but typically at this stage faculty are beginning to take on service assignments beyond their immediate department (e.g., university wide committees, professional organizations, membership on journal editorial boards).

Pitfalls to Avoid

The following can all derail your career, or diminish the impact of the work you do:

- research or creative activities no longer cutting edge, not advancing the field, lack novelty.
- research or creative contributions appear scattered, addressing different topics, rather than progressive and programmatic; as a result, you are not seen as an expert or leader on any one topic, letter writers may have a hard time identifying contribution.
- post-tenure pause, or sporadic activity that calls into question commitment to maintaining career (gaps can be viewed negatively, you are expected to show sustained effort over time).
- focusing time on activities that may have important outcomes, but are not aligned with the criteria for promotion within your unit (consider delaying activities, or at least recognize they will not lead to promotion).
- diminishing time for research as time allocated to other activities (e.g., department service, new courses, changing teaching load, excessive number of Master's level students).; pursuit of these activities needs to be balanced with maintaining a research program.
- accepting service positions (even those that may carry some course release time) that consume large amounts of time and limit research productivity. Although these activities can be a stepping stone for those interested in administration, and may carry some weight for promotion in some departments, consider the timing of assuming these responsibilities and how they may impact your research productivity.
- assuming you know criteria for promotion, not checking with others; not

recognizing that expectations (likely) substantially higher than for promotion to associate.

- not keeping track of contributions after promotion to Associate Professor (now that annual reviews not happening), which leads to underdeveloped promotion file.
- requesting external letters for promotion from colleagues who are known to be harsh or unpredictable in their evaluations of others' work
- requesting external letters from people who do not know your work (they may have difficulty identifying your contributions) or alternatively were mentors or collaborators (their opinions will be discounted).
- not keeping track of your contributions
- not providing a self-statement of career achievements to letter writers, not providing enough information for them to know of your accomplishments

When should you stand for promotion to Professor?

As an untenured Assistant Professor, you no doubt were well aware of the date by which you had to apply for tenure. Most faculty apply for promotion to the rank of Associate Professor at the same time. One of the challenges for promotion to Professor is that there is no set time line for when to apply. It is expected that faculty will apply when they are ready (a later section discusses how to determine readiness).

Unless they are applying for early promotion, it is expected that faculty members will complete at least 5 years in rank (as Associate Professors) before applying for promotion to Professor. It is critical that faculty be "ready" (i.e., clearly meeting promotion standards) when they apply. Your colleagues and administrators recognize the unrelenting nature of the tenure clock, and may be willing to give a candidate the benefit of the doubt or overlook some weaknesses in a tenure file because the candidate had no choice of when to apply. There is a different attitude, however, when a candidate is applying for promotion to Professor. Given the flexibility of when to apply, there is a greater willingness to vote "no" if there is a perception of lack of readiness. This is reflected in statistics which show that, at Kent State, success rates for candidates applying for Professor are lower than the success rates for candidates applying for tenure or promotion to Associate Professor.

It is possible to apply for early promotion to the rank of professor. "Early" typically means that a candidate applies after completing 4 or fewer years at the prior rank. In the university policy on promotion it states that early promotion is for "extraordinary cases". If you are contemplating applying early, be sure to consult your department handbook to identify any special expectations for early promotion.

A case that may require careful consultation with colleagues is if you have already unsuccessfully stood for promotion to Professor. You should not give up the goal of getting promoted, but do recognize that for a subsequent successful promotion it will be imperative to show that you have addressed the concerns raised in the earlier review. This is true even if you do not entirely agree

with the earlier evaluation. Make sure you understand the reasons promotion was denied, and have a conversation with your Chair about what you need to do to achieve promotion to professor. AAUP has trained RTP counselors who can assist you in preparing your file; they can be especially helpful in evaluating whether you have addressed the concerns in an effective and nondefensive way.

How can you judge readiness?

Unless your contributions are exceptional in regards to all your department handbook criteria for promotion, it is wise to consult with colleagues before making the decision of whether or not to apply in a given year. This can be done through consulting with different individuals or groups:

You can consult with your Chair. He or she may be able to give insight regarding the thinking of your department Promotion and Tenure Committee. In addition, the department vote on the case is only advisory to the Chair. It is therefore wise to take seriously any reservations your Chair expresses, and plan for how they can be addressed prior to your promotion application. Ideally, this conversation will not be the first time you have spoken to your department Chair since your promotion to Associate, but instead will be part of a continuing conversation about department expectations for promotion to Professor.

You may want to have additional conversations with senior faculty in your department, particularly those in your area (whose opinion on your accomplishments might hold more sway in discussions of your case). It can be helpful to share your CV and possibly an additional description of your key accomplishments with those you consult.

Another way to check readiness is to compare your record with other colleagues in your department who have stood recently for promotion to Professor. Although no two cases are alike, seeing others' records can help you gauge the strength of your own record. Your Chair may be able to provide this information. Comparisons to records of scholars in your discipline at other universities may also be helpful. Reading faculty ballots and administrator letters for prior candidates in your area may also shed light on department expectations.

If the university has offered merit in recent years, information about your merit allocation (relative to others in your department) may help with evaluating the strength of your recent research contributions.

Although the main focus will be on your research contributions, showing evidence of high quality teaching is also important for promotion. It will be helpful if you obtain peer reviews of your teaching to supplement student evaluations. In addition, service activities can show evidence of "good citizenship" and commitment to the institution.

In examining readiness, it may be tempting to focus on your areas of greatest accomplishment, but recognize that your colleagues may take a different approach to viewing your file. Instead of focusing on contributions, they may look for evidence of weakness (the "weak link" approach).

If there is a weakness in your record, your Chair or another trusted colleague may be able to help you evaluate how this is likely to be viewed in a promotion review.

One complication experienced by some faculty members is that they may have a “gap” in their record following their promotion to Associate Professor. It is possible to gain promotion following a period of reduced productivity, so you do not need to give up your goal, but it is best to be aware of the challenges you will face. If a candidate has years of very strong accomplishments, but also years of fewer scholarly “outputs”, this may raise questions about whether the individual has shown a “sustained” record of accomplishment, which is the wording in the Kent State promotion policy. Of course, this may be more typical in some fields (e.g., where publication of a book is expected for tenure/promotion to associate, and a second book is expected for promotion to professor). Gaps in records can also occur for reasons beyond a candidate’s control, such as experiencing health problems, responding to crises faced by family members, or research endeavors that unexpectedly failed. Note that while there is a tolling policy for untenured faculty, which provides a formal way of acknowledging many of these circumstances if they occur while a faculty member is on the tenure track, there is no comparable policy that addresses how to evaluate gaps in productivity post-tenure. In cases of a gap, it would be especially important to gather information about how your colleagues are likely to react to such a record, and what expectations they have in a case like this (e.g., do they expect to see a certain number of productive years after a slow period; are they primarily concerned about total record, or rate of producing scholarly “products”). It can also be helpful to include an explanation for the gap in the self-statement sent to external reviewers.

One caution to keep in mind is that anyone you consult can only provide a recommendation based on information available to them at this point. For example, if someone has seen your CV they may be well aware of your research accomplishments, but unaware if you had difficulties in classroom teaching. External letters of recommendation will not be available until after you have submitted your file, so it is impossible to know how they may impact your application for promotion. In some departments, candidates can seek advice from the department’s promotion and tenure committee, but even in this case new information can emerge in the review process. Thus, treat all advice from colleagues as recommendations to consider rather than absolute judgments, and understand that sometimes people’s views of the strength of your case may change as they become aware of new information.

Advice for Preparing Your File

Once you have the accomplishments and are ready to apply, the last step is preparation of your promotion file. Here are some tips to producing an effective file:

1. The self-statement, in which you summarize your contributions in research, teaching, and service, is *very* important. This is your opportunity to help others understand your contributions; do not take the attitude that “the record will speak for itself.” It should be written as a persuasive essay that documents your accomplishments, while addressing any weaknesses in the file (e.g., a semester of lower teaching evaluations, a break in the research record).

2. It should be organized in such a way that it shows how you clearly meet the promotion criteria outlined in your department handbook. All relevant criteria should be addressed. You should provide evidence that your work has had an impact on the field, using well known metrics in your field. You should also address how your record meets criteria in the areas of teaching and service.
3. The self-statement needs to be written in a way that it gives the reader a “big picture” view of your contributions. What is your area of expertise? How does your work fit in your discipline? What questions have you addressed in your research? How has your program of research made an impact? It should be highly accessible to people outside your discipline (e.g., colleagues in your college, the Provost). You may want to have someone outside your discipline give you feedback on the accessibility of your document.
4. The self-statement should be sufficiently detailed, while highlighting themes. It should have good organization and clear prose and be thoroughly proofed for spelling and grammar. The version you submit should not be a first draft, but the version completed after review by a trusted colleague and your Chair. Presentation and completeness are important!
5. Review the file of a colleague to see an example. Your Chair may be able to recommend a recent file that is a good example, or you can ask a colleague who stood recently to share his or her materials.
6. Carefully consider who you ask to write an external letter. They should be distinguished in their field, at an advanced rank, and working at a good institution at least comparable to Kent State. They should be knowledgeable about you, but not a close friend/mentor (if they are, their comments will be given little consideration). Of course, you want to avoid proposing people you have reason to believe view you or your contributions negatively. The letter writers should receive your self-statement as well as samples of your work. Make sure your Chair shows you the letter to be sent to external evaluators (this is a requirement of the university promotion policy, and provides you an opportunity to check that external letter writers have been given appropriate instructions, e.g., not asked to make judgments that are not relevant to handbook criteria).

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Helpful Sources

You may find it helpful to consult the following sources. Just remember, though, your department handbook trumps any criteria specified in these other sources!

Anita Borg Institute Wiki, Now you're as Associate Professor– What's next?
<http://digital.cs.usu.edu/~allanv/Helps/PromotionToFull.doc>

Roger Badwin, Deborah DeZure, Allyn Shaw, and Kristin Moretto, Mapping the Terrain of Mid-Career Faculty at a Research University
http://www.case.edu/provost/ideal/doc/Mapping_MidCareer_Faculty_DeZure.pdf

Santosh Devasia, Tips on Promotion to Full Professor
http://faculty.washington.edu/devasia/Talks/Promotion_to_Full_Professor.pdf

Anne Marie Canale, Cheryl Herdklotz, and Lynn Wild, Midcareer faculty support: The middle years of the academic profession
https://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/facultydevelopment/sites/rit.edu.academicaffairs.facultydevelopment/files/images/FCDS_Mid-CareerRpt.pdf

Kerry Ann Rockquemore, Mid-career mentoring. Talks about navigating mid-career challenges and setting goals
<https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2011/11/28/essay-need-tenured-faculty-members-have-mentoring>

UC Irvine Handbook on Advancement and Promotion, sections for post-tenure faculty:
<http://www.ap.uci.edu/>

University of Illinois, Provost web site- links to several commentaries on post-tenure career development
<http://www.provost.illinois.edu/midcareer/readings.html>