

**Interpretation of Faculty Manual Regarding T&P and Comprehensive Reviews
in Light of COVID-19:
Guidelines for Chairs, Reviewers and Candidates
(Updated for Summer/Fall 2021)**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FOR SUMMER/FALL 2021

- Chairs of departments with faculty undergoing comprehensive reviews in 2021-22 will likely already have conversed with candidates in Spring 2021 about how best to weight courses from Spring 2020 or academic year 2020-21 for student evaluations.
- Chairs of departments with faculty going up for tenure in a subsequent year that will include 2019-20 and 2020-21 in the probationary period should begin talking to tenure-track faculty about how the pandemic period that began in March 2020 might affect long term scholarly and artistic achievement goals.
- It is incumbent on everyone involved in faculty reviews in 2021-22 (and subsequent years) to keep in mind and acknowledge in relevant review documents how those who are undergoing review during this period have been affected by COVID-19. Contributions in the three categories of assessment may look different given the circumstances created by the pandemic. Faculty members undergoing a review should be encouraged to use their personal statements to describe any pandemic-related challenges faced, and adjustments made, to teaching, scholarly and artistic work, and service. Tenured members should be encouraged to acknowledge the effects of the pandemic on tenure-track colleagues in their letters; chairs, initiators, and Associate Deans should be expected to address these challenges (and adjustments made by faculty) in their letters.
- While the *Faculty Manual* (Section 4.V.E.2) stipulates that candidates may request to lengthen their probationary period by one year, the Deans Council and the Tenure and Promotion Committee do not support “stopping the clock” except for circumstances that extend beyond COVID-19. We do not believe candidates should be penalized simply because their probationary period takes place during a global pandemic. Pre-tenure and pre-promotion faculty members will be better served if initiators, chairs, and tenured members of department interpret the guidelines of departmental SSSAWs in a way that acknowledges the effect of the pandemic on the candidate’s progress.
- The normal [schedule for completion of reviews](#) as outlined on the Dean of the College website will be followed in 2021-22.

GENERAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Those undergoing Comprehensive Reviews in 2021-22 and subsequent years have faced challenges largely unimagined by those who underwent reviews prior to 2020. Tenure-track faculty members lost valuable time that would otherwise have been dedicated to

scholarly and artistic work due to the necessity of retooling their courses for remote or hybrid teaching and, in many cases, to attend to family-related challenges caused by the pandemic. Many faculty members lost opportunities for research travel, to present papers or give lectures, or to have submitted work reviewed for publication in a timely fashion. Faculty who underwent reviews of teaching between March 2020 and September 2021 will likely have done so under unprecedented challenges to preferred modes of teaching and unprecedented effects on their own and their students' morale.

While it is critical for the college to hold all candidates to a standard of excellence, it is also incumbent on all participants in the tenure and promotion process to keep these unique challenges foremost in mind as they review their early career colleagues' progress during this unique time in the college's history.

EVALUATING CONTRIBUTIONS TO STUDENT LEARNING

Peer Reviews of Teaching for T&P and Comprehensive Reviews in 2021-22.

In fall of 2021, the college will resume in-class teaching for all (or nearly all) courses. For the most part, peer reviews of teaching should return to the way they were conducted prior to the pandemic, though class sessions may include the use of masks and there may be limits on moving desks for group work. Certain courses, such as lab sections or courses in the Fine Arts, may require additional limitations. These limitations should be acknowledged in conversations between reviewers and candidates and addressed in the peer review document itself.

In typical tenure and promotion cycles, candidates undergoing reviews are given the option of undergoing one or more peer reviews of teaching during the spring term preceding the year of the review. Due to the unique circumstances of the 2020-21 academic year, chairs and faculty members undergoing review may have needed to move to remote or hybrid teaching observation. Initiators should be aware of which candidates, if any, opted to include a remote or hybrid observation and should share with peer reviewers the same guidance as was provided in 2020-21:

- Reviewers and candidates must acknowledge that the circumstances for remote or hybrid peer observations are different from in-person observations. Reviewers and candidates should discuss the distinctive circumstances of the observed courses and the ways the candidate has thought about how to address them. Reviewers and candidates should acknowledge that remote or online teaching is still a relatively new experience for instructors and students. Reviewers should be open to various ways in which virtual activities might constitute the equivalent of a single class "day."
- Reviewers should describe the "type" of class being visited: i.e., a synchronous class observed through Zoom, Meet, etc.; an asynchronous class that uses Moodle or other software to create a forum or chat; a series of activities that are part of a larger learning module that may "count" as more than one class day, etc.

- Reviewers should also describe the mode by which they observed the class, e.g. attending a zoom class, or observing students completing an asynchronous activity. As with in-person observations, reviewers should record the day and time they observed, including when they observed an asynchronous module.
- Most practices that demonstrate effective teaching in the current [Tenure and Promotion Handbook](#) will also apply to virtual teaching, i.e., there should be content-related, communication-related, and climate-related practices that are observable in a virtual class situation. Peer reviewers should refer to these practices in their reviews.
- Reviewers should engage in pre-and post-observation discussions of the class observation with candidates. Discussions should be focused on learning goals of the in-person or virtual "class day." Conversations with the candidate may include discussing faculty engagement with college-sponsored activities designed to support teaching. Reviewers should be sensitive to the added stress of conducting a virtual or hybrid class experience.

Student Surveys/Feedback for T&P and Comprehensive Reviews in 2021-22

As with the case of faculty members under review for tenure or promotion, chairs and candidates may choose to weight their sampling of courses used by the Provost's Office for the Student/Alumni survey to limit student/alumni responses from courses taught in Spring 2020, Fall 2020, Interim 2021 or Spring 2021, while taking care to ensure a robust pool of potential survey-takers. At the same time, given the fact that IE&A typically surveys students from a three-year period, the sheer length of the pandemic affected teaching will mean that the faculty members will likely need to include at least some students taught during the pandemic.

The ways in which the pandemic and the circumstances of teaching during the pandemic may affect student evaluations of teaching will not fully be understood for some time. Yet the disruptions students experienced to traditional ways of learning -- as well as the psychological effects of the pandemic more generally -- may result in greater student dissatisfaction overall, which may in turn negatively affect evaluations of teaching. Chairs and initiators should acknowledge these circumstances of the pandemic in review letters and letters of guidance and should instruct department members to consider these circumstances as they evaluate student feedback. Chairs and initiators might suggest using the additional question on the student survey to address the instructor's efforts in adjusting their courses in response to the pandemic.

EVALUATING SCHOLARLY AND ARTISTIC WORK

While the most obvious effects of the pandemic in 2020-21 have involved teaching, it is likely that effects on scholarly and artistic work will become increasingly evident over time. Like all faculty members, those on the tenure track were forced to retool their courses for online or hybrid delivery and lost valuable time for professional activity in a shortened summer and a more labor-intensive course load; many tenure-track faculty also

found themselves with unanticipated family or childcare obligations that affected their time for professional activity. Unlike their more senior colleagues, tenure-track faculty members faced these extraordinary challenges against the backdrop of a finite tenure clock.

There are a variety of ways in which scholarly and professional activity may have been adversely affected by the pandemic:

- As it pertains to scholarly research, some faculty members may have been prevented from engaging in necessary travel; some may have been prevented from accessing research libraries; some may have found that journals to which they submitted work slowed their review process or went on temporary hiatus; while some academic conferences were held virtually, others, particularly early in the pandemic, were cancelled.
- As it pertains to the performing arts in particular, venues necessary for performance have been closed, and it is still far from certain when such venues will reopen; faculty members in the performing arts have largely been limited to giving virtual presentations, which are more difficult for external reviewers to evaluate.
- As it pertains to the lab sciences, faculty members who needed to work physically in their labs for research experienced unique time and space constraints; labs were closed for much of summer 2020; necessary spacing in labs required faculty members to increase contact hours with students at the expense of research time; some may have experienced equipment related problems due to irregular use; childcare and homeschooling placed an additional burden on faculty members who needed to be physically in the lab.

It is important also to acknowledge that the Covid-19 pandemic will likely not end suddenly but gradually: libraries and performance venues will open on their own schedules, and foreign countries will determine when to allow visitors. Even as venues open up, moreover, faculty members may face delays due to a backlog of demand, and junior scholars may find themselves at the back of the line as senior, more connected, scholars are given precedence. Faculty members who rely on professional networks for support may find a similar lag on the reconstruction of those networks. Encouraging candidates to discuss how they remained engaged with, or found new scholarly networks, might allow them to more fully describe their creative responses to the pandemic.

Faculty members undergoing Comprehensive or Tenure and Promotion reviews should be encouraged to share in their personal statement how their scholarly or artistic progress may have been affected by the pandemic. Tenured members reviewing their junior colleagues should be encouraged to take this into consideration, and chairs, initiators and Associate Deans should be expected to address any concerns raised by faculty members in their letters. As it pertains to faculty members reviewed for tenure and promotion in 2021-22, it should be acknowledged that they will have had the final two years of their probationary period potentially affected by the pandemic.

While in certain rare cases, chairs might discuss the option of extending the probationary period with faculty undergoing review (as described in the Faculty Manual), this option should be considered carefully given the long-term effect it would have on a candidate's career. It is important in most cases for chairs and tenured members of departments to interpret their department SSSAW in a way that takes into account the challenges posed by the pandemic. Chairs are encouraged to communicate with candidates throughout the probationary period about strategies for adjusting research and publication plans accordingly.

EVALUATING SERVICE AND LEADERSHIP

Capturing faculty contributions to the organizational effectiveness and community life of the college has always been an imperfect art, and assessment of faculty contributions to Category 3 have always taken into consideration a broad range of formal and informal contributions. Ultimately, successful candidates have a record of meaningful contributions that are appropriate for their time at the college, and that indicates the potential for future productive engagement. Service and leadership work undertaken during the period of the pandemic, in which so much of the work of college has been done virtually, may look different than it has in prior years. In some cases (such as meetings with students), it may be less easily observed than previously. Tenure-track faculty members should be encouraged to document their work so that it can be recognized, and chairs should initiate conversations with those undergoing reviews to consider alternative ways to contribute to the work of departments and the college.

The tenure review dossier includes statements prepared by three colleagues from outside of the candidate's home department. These statements are often contributed by faculty members who have served with the candidate on a college-wide committee or task force. As with all areas of review, Associate Deans, chairs, and directors should keep in mind the unique circumstances of Spring 2020 and the 2020-21 academic year when evaluating service for future tenure evaluations. Given the potential challenges posed by the pandemic to opportunities for faculty members to serve outside one's department or become acquainted with a diverse group of faculty colleagues, chairs are asked to communicate proactively with tenure-track colleagues about opportunities to meet and work with faculty across the college.

PROBATIONARY PERIOD AND TIMING OF THE REVIEW

Tenure track faculty members going up for tenure in 2021-22 and after may request lengthening their probationary period by one year, as is already available as outlined in the *Faculty Manual* (Section 4.V.E.2). St. Olaf acknowledges that some institutions automatically extended probationary periods for those undergoing review in 2020-21 or 2021-22. As noted above, however, we recognize the long-term effect such a decision will have on a faculty member's career, and hope to avoid this option except in certain rare circumstances.

The deadline for requesting to extend the probationary period is August 31 of the year preceding the year of the tenure review. Faculty members initiate the process by sending a written request to the Dean of the College. Earlier requests allow for a possible rearrangement of the remaining comprehensive review schedule so as to maximize the value of review feedback to the candidate.