ST. OLAF COLLEGE

# Student Reviews of Teaching and Advising for Tenure and Promotion:
## Information for Student Committees

Every year, faculty members from a variety of departments at St. Olaf College are reviewed for tenure, promotion, or both. A key component of the review process involves gathering systematic information from students about the teaching effectiveness of these faculty members. A student committee is appointed by each candidate's department to assist in gathering and summarizing student reviews of the candidate's teaching. The committee usually includes at least one student who has not worked with the faculty member being reviewed. The committee meets in the spring prior to the academic year of the review to help customize the questionnaire that a candidate's students will receive, and then meets again during the following October to prepare summaries of the students' responses. The student committee's summary is included in the evidence of faculty effectiveness reviewed by the faculty Tenure and Promotion Committee, the candidate's Associate Dean, the Dean of the College, the President, and the Board of Regents in determining whether to grant tenure and/or promotion. This document explains the nature of the tenure and promotion review process and the contributions of student committees to that process.

### *An overview of tenure and promotion reviews*

Tenure and promotion decisions play a vital role, not only in the lives of individual faculty members but in the life of the College as a whole. *Tenure* is a continuous (rather than time-limited) appointment to the faculty of the College; a tenured faculty member may continue to work at St. Olaf until retirement, unless he or she chooses to accept employment elsewhere. *Promotion* is a recognition of the excellence of a tenured faculty member's work. The tenure and promotion review process helps to assure that St. Olaf students continue to benefit from excellent instruction by accomplished scholars and artists who are committed to the mission of the College.

In order to be reviewed for tenure, a faculty member must hold:

- the highest academic degree (usually a Ph.D.) in his or her scholarly or artistic field.
- a tenure-track appointment (rather than a time-limited "term" appointment, or an open-ended "special" appointment, neither of which is eligible for tenure).

The requirements for promotion depend on the rank for which a faculty member is being considered. Like most colleges, St. Olaf maintains four faculty ranks:

- *Instructor* – usually, a non-tenured faculty member (whether tenure-track or term) who does not yet hold a Ph.D. (or its equivalent) in his or her academic field
- *Assistant Professor* – usually, a non-tenured faculty member (again, whether tenure-track or term) who holds a Ph.D. (or its equivalent) in his or her academic field. If a faculty member is initially employed by St. Olaf as an instructor and then completes a Ph.D.

during the course of his or her employment, he or she is automatically promoted to Assistant Professor; no review process is required for this type of promotion.

- *Associate Professor* – usually, a tenured faculty member who demonstrates excellence in teaching, scholarly/artistic work, and service to the College. Normally, a faculty member is reviewed simultaneously both for tenure and for promotion to Associate Professor, but sometimes a faculty member is considered for one but not the other.
- *Professor* – the highest academic rank of the College, awarded to faculty members who demonstrate enhanced excellence in teaching, significant and sustained scholarly/artistic work, and leadership in the College.

The timeline for tenure and promotion reviews, and the relationship between consideration for tenure and consideration for promotion, can vary somewhat. A common trajectory, however, is as follows:

1. A faculty member with a Ph.D. who is relatively early in his or her teaching career is hired into a tenure-track position at St. Olaf and appointed to the rank of Assistant Professor.
2. In the sixth year of his or her appointment, the faculty member is reviewed simultaneously for tenure and promotion to Associate Professor, and is successful.
3. After several more years, the faculty member is then reviewed for promotion to Professor. The timing of this review varies, but typically occurs within six to ten years after promotion to Associate Professor.

Faculty members demonstrate their qualifications for tenure and/or promotion through a portfolio of evidence, known as a *dossier*, compiled by the "initiator" of the faculty member's candidacy, usually the chair of the faculty member's department. The dossier is assembled throughout the summer and fall semester of the faculty member's candidacy, and includes a wide array of materials, such as statements by colleagues inside and outside the College, self-assessments by the candidate, and reviews of teaching and advising prepared by students and faculty peers. After the dossier is reviewed and recommendations are made by an elected faculty committee, the faculty member's Associate Dean(s), the Dean of the College, and the President, final decisions are made by the Board of Regents at its spring meeting, usually sometime in February.

***The role of student committees in tenure/promotion reviews***

Student committees play a major role in tenure and promotion reviews. Faculty performance in these reviews is evaluated in relation to three categories of faculty work:

- Contributions to student learning and development;
- Contributions of scholarly and artistic work;
- Contributions of service and leadership within and beyond the College.

Of these three categories, St. Olaf considers the first – contributions to student learning and development – to be the most important. Dossiers contain several types of evidence related to this category, one of which is a collection of student reviews of the faculty member's teaching. During the summer and early fall, a confidential Student Review of Teaching and Advising

questionnaire is distributed to a random sample of 60 students taught by the candidate during the previous three years. The candidate's student committee assists the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment (IE&A) in preparing and summarizing these student reviews of teaching and advising. The student committee is thus a vital partner in gathering high-quality evidence concerning the faculty member's contributions to student learning and development, the category of faculty evaluation given the greatest weight in tenure and promotion reviews.

Student committees have two principal responsibilities:

1. ***In the spring semester prior to the year of the candidate's review* – Assisting with the development of customized questions for the candidate's Student Review of Teaching and Advising questionnaire.** The Student Review of Teaching and Advising questionnaire includes a series of standard questions that reflect college-wide criteria for teaching effectiveness, and that apply to all candidates irrespective of their departmental home. In addition, the questionnaire provides for up to two supplementary questions that are designed specifically for that candidate. These optional questions can elicit helpful information concerning distinctive characteristics of the candidate's scholarly or artistic field, subject matter specializations, specific teaching responsibilities or practices, or other aspects of the candidate's teaching. Members of the candidate's department – specifically, the candidate, the initiator of the candidacy, and the department's tenured faculty – can develop one additional question, and the candidate's student committee can develop an additional question as well. Neither the department nor the student committee is *required* to add a question; sometimes either or both groups believe that the standard questions will elicit sufficient information. This work occurs shortly after the student committee has been appointed, in the spring semester prior to the academic year of the candidate's review, so that IE&A can begin sending out the questionnaires over the summer. Guidelines for preparing additional questions are available on the Provost website.

   If the department chooses to propose an additional question, the student committee is asked to offer suggestions for improving its content or wording. Students may recognize the potential for ambiguity or misinterpretation by other students more readily than faculty members do, and often have good advice for making questions more accurate or understandable. The department is also invited to offer suggestions for improving the question (if any) proposed by the student committee. IE&A carefully considers the feedback of the student committees and the department faculty on each question, and will consult as necessary with the student committee chair and the initiator to ensure that the final wording is satisfactory to everyone.

2. ***In the fall semester of the review year* – Preparing a summary of the narrative responses to the open-ended items in the completed Student Review of Teaching and Advising questionnaires.** Once the student reviews have been returned to IE&A in early October, the student committee will receive copies of all the completed questionnaires, with identifying information removed. The student committee is then responsible for preparing an impartial summary of the open-ended (narrative) responses. IE&A will prepare a quantitative summary of the closed-ended items. IE&A provides instructions and a template for the committee to use in preparing the summary, and is available to offer information and advice as the committee completes its work.

Both the individually completed questionnaires and the summary information prepared by IE&A and the student committee will be placed in the candidate's dossier. ***The summary prepared by the student committee is the only summary of the narrative portion of the student reviews included in the candidate's dossier.*** Since most of the questionnaire consists of open-ended questions, the student committee's work is a critical component of the evidence concerning the faculty member's contributions to student learning and development. The student committee members are notified by the IE&A when the reviews are available for summary. The committee members receive the responses via a shared Google Drive folder and are instructed to save a completed summary in the same shared folder by the deadline provided by IE&A.

***Expectations for student committee members***

As active participants in the tenure and promotion review process, student committee members are charged with a serious responsibility. Like their faculty counterparts, students serving in this capacity are held to the following standards:

1. **Confidentiality**. Faculty members who are undergoing review for tenure and promotion are not publicly identified, so student committee members should not discuss their work with any person other than the other members of their own committee and with the initiator of the candidacy. All information on the student review questionnaires is privileged. The narrative summary of results is shared only with those specifically authorized by the *Faculty Manual* to review the summary. Neither the summary nor any individual questionnaire is seen by the faculty member being reviewed. If any questions arise concerning confidentiality, committee members should contact the Director of IE&A.

2. **Impartiality.** Students must make every effort to prepare appropriate questions and to summarize responses on the student review questionnaires as impartially as possible. In particular, St. Olaf College recognizes that people are often influenced by unconscious and unintentional biases and expectations related to the race and gender of the instructor. Women and persons of color are systematically rated lower in their teaching evaluations than white men, even when there are no actual differences in the instruction or in what students have learned. As students complete the summaries of responses, they are asked to remain aware of their own frame of reference and focus on the responses as they are written.

3. **Accuracy.** Students must design valid and reliable questions and must report the results as completely and accurately as possible.

The student review of teaching and advising is a critical component of faculty tenure and promotion reviews. The College is grateful for the thoughtful contributions of each student committee to the quality of the information provided by the candidate's students.