



Guidelines for Fixed-Term Faculty Promotion Practices

Introduction

In the evolving landscape of higher education, establishing a clear and equitable process for fixed-term faculty promotion is crucial for supporting recruitment, retention and academic excellence. The fixed-term promotion policy offers a structured pathway for career advancement, allowing all faculty to develop and receive recognition for their contributions while ensuring that MSU remains responsive to the changing needs of individual colleges. This document outlines key aspects for colleges to consider as they define and implement their fixed-term promotion process, ensuring transparency, consistency and fairness in how these opportunities are awarded and managed. The guidelines aim to support fixed-term faculty development and align individual aspirations with the university's strategic goals.

General University Timeline

Date (<i>specific date will vary to year</i>)	Action	Additional Information
September	A letter sent from the provost to college leadership and fixed term faculty outlining the underlying principles of fixed term promotion. MSU Human Resources sends a list of full-time fixed-term faculty and their years of service to units.	
October	Colleges send a list of those standing for promotion to MSU Human Resources (HR) Operations, by the end of the month.	
November-April	Unit review process conducted	Each unit must determine a process that allows enough time for review at various levels, depending on the size and unit complexity (e.g., department review committee to department chair to dean or relevant unit administrator; center review committee to center director to dean or relevant unit administrator).
Date determined by each college	The chairperson/director submits the Form on Progress and Excellence as a "Recommendation for Fixed-Term Faculty Action" to the dean	
May 1	The dean or appropriate administrator submits the Form on Progress and Excellence as a "Recommendation for Fixed-Term Faculty Action" to MSU HR no later than May 1.	
July 1	The provost notifies deans or appropriate administrators of the final decision.	The college notifies the faculty member as soon as possible and no later than the start of the fall semester.

Section 1: University-Level Standards for Promotion

Basis for Evaluation

Fixed-term faculty will be evaluated only on criteria that align with their appointments, with categories averaged across the review period. Faculty should be evaluated holistically, based on their appointment percentages over time, and encouraged to include all work that may be broadly defined as such under the appropriate/relevant categories.

Promotion from Instructor to Senior Instructor

A recommendation for promotion from instructor to senior instructor should be based on several years of sustained, outstanding achievements in relevant areas, as outlined in the faculty member's appointment percentages, consistent with performance levels expected for promotion to senior instructor at peer universities. A reasonably long period in rank before promotion (typically six years or more) is usually necessary to provide a firm basis in actual performance for predicting long-term capacity for the achievement and maintenance of enduring high-quality professional achievement.

Promotion from Assistant Professor to Associate Professor

A recommendation for promotion from assistant to associate professor should be based on several years of sustained, outstanding achievements in teaching, scholarship, service and/or relevant areas of effort as outlined in the faculty member's appointment percentages, consistent with performance levels expected for promotion to associate professor at peer universities. A reasonably long period in rank before promotion (usually six years or more) is typically necessary to provide a firm basis in actual performance for predicting long-term capacity for maintaining high-quality achievement.

Promotion to Professor

A recommendation for promotion from associate professor to professor should be based on several years of sustained, outstanding achievements in relevant areas, as outlined in the faculty member's appointment percentages, consistent with performance levels expected at peer universities. Moreover, it may be an expectation that individuals should provide leadership within the department or unit, mentorship to faculty and/or students, sustained excellence in teaching, ongoing service on committees and contributions to a flourishing intellectual life for those in the broader discipline, unit, college and/or institution. A reasonably long period in rank before promotion (usually six years or more) is typically necessary to provide a basis in actual performance to permit endorsement of the individual as an expert and to predict continuous, long-term, high-quality professional achievement and service. Innovation brought to teaching, and collaboration or team building, is also part of a move from individual

work to being a university professor. Such a responsibility is even greater for those who earn a full professor promotion.

Inclusive Efforts Related to Research/Creative Activities, Instruction, Outreach and Service

The land grant mission and core values of Michigan State University necessitate that the university supports work related to expanding access, creating opportunity for all people and solving a broad range of societal challenges. To reflect this, candidates should detail any efforts to that end, providing evidence of their activities and accomplishments in the context of their appointment categories, not as a separate pillar. Faculty should describe how these efforts are interwoven and enhance all other areas of professional accomplishment. For example, candidates might: propel a research agenda that studies access and opportunity issues, or diversity in their object of study; establish/support the creation of access initiatives; foster inclusive learning environments both in the classroom and research groups that ensure that students are provided with equitable opportunities for success; participate in mentorship programs for first-generation students; create new inclusive curricula or programming; or work with varied groups/organizations on and off campus. Whenever applicable, faculty contributions and commitment to learning and engaging in these efforts will be recognized and considered in the promotion process.

Core Values Related to Conduct

Accomplishments that advance the effectiveness, climate and culture of the unit, college and university, consistent with MSU's core values and Faculty Rights and Responsibilities, should be considered in decisions, as should significant or repeated behaviors inconsistent with values.

Section 2: Dossier Preparation

Overview

The faculty member is expected to provide information on the [Form on Progress and Excellence for Fixed-Term Faculty](#) and accompanying evidence only for categories that reflect their appointment percentages during the review period. Only the relevant workload categories may be evaluated; however, the Office of the Provost acknowledges the wide range of appointments occupied by fixed-term faculty and encourages faculty members to include all work that may be broadly defined as such under those categories, if they so choose. Please note that health programs faculty have a separate form that details their clinical work more specifically.

Please note that the 85-page limit does **not** include the Form on Progress and Excellence, the faculty member's CV, review letters or annual review letters.

- The five most recent annual review letters should be included whenever possible and must be included with dossiers submitted after the spring of 2025. The supervisor, not the candidate, is responsible for gathering these materials.

- In the absence of annual review letters, the unit must provide a rationale explaining why they are not included.

Materials Submitted by the Faculty Member

1. A table of contents
2. The Form on Progress and Excellence for Fixed-Term Faculty
3. A current curriculum vitae
4. A self-evaluation of 3-5 pages about accomplishments during the reporting period, detailing the best examples of activities undertaken in the areas in which they have duties (teaching, research/creative activity, administration, service, and/or outreach). If, for instance, teaching is an assigned duty, this would include a reflective teaching statement, showing the ongoing development of effective instructional practices with examples.
5. Evidence of excellence in performing assigned duties, for example, significance, impact, and innovation of instructional activities, research or creative activities, professional development, service, outreach, curriculum development, program coordination or administrative activities. This should be a sample of the candidate's best work, and the candidate should reference these in their above narrative to provide context.
 - a. The Office of the Provost strongly encourages the use of teaching portfolios to evaluate instructional faculty. A teaching portfolio should reflect a faculty member's instructional quality and engagement throughout their assigned courses. The portfolio should be assessed holistically and may include such evidence as:
 - i. Course syllabi and assignments
 - ii. Statement of teaching philosophy and/or descriptive narrative of demonstrated excellence in teaching
 - iii. Demonstrated excellence in teaching through peer evaluations or observations of instruction, student evaluations and teaching awards
 - iv. Development of innovative teaching methods or curricula, including team teaching
 - v. Involvement in advising and mentoring students
 - vi. Contributions to course development or program improvement
 - vii. Evidence of continuous improvement in teaching effectiveness
 - viii. Exposure to real-world practitioners through curricula, guest speakers, club meetings, site visits, etc.
 - ix. Instructional design

Materials Submitted by the Unit/College (Candidate is Not Responsible)

The items mentioned under Materials Submitted by the Faculty Member, plus:

1. The five most recent annual review letters since the last promotion should be included whenever possible and must be included beginning with dossiers submitted after the spring of 2025. In the absence of annual review letters, the unit must provide a rationale explaining why they are not included.
 - [Per the faculty handbook](#), all units must have procedures for the annual written evaluation of all fixed-term faculty and academic staff to support the annual merit process and to provide a basis for a clear statement of performance expectations and accomplishments. It is recognized that unit provisions and practices may vary; however, all evaluation procedures must incorporate, at minimum, the principles included in this policy and must be applied consistently to all fixed-term faculty and academic staff within the unit.
 - [Fixed-term Faculty and Academic Staff Annual Performance Evaluation Form](#) (Microsoft Word Document). This is a sample form; units may choose a different form and should evaluate all with a consistent process.
2. External letters of evaluation. External letters of evaluation may be required, and are strongly encouraged, for all reviews of fixed-term faculty involving the granting of promotion. Letters of evaluation may be required to ensure that individuals recommended have an achievement and performance level comparable to others in the same position, and to ensure equity throughout the process. Letters may be external to the unit and/or the university, and each college should specify if they are required and what is considered “external.” **If letters are not required, the unit should include a brief statement indicating such.** It is recognized that unit practices and procedures may vary; however, the process of soliciting evaluative letters should incorporate the relevant principles and procedures, as noted in the [University Policy on External Letters](#).

External evaluations, if used, should be from someone in an equivalent position and may include evaluations from colleagues external to the faculty member’s unit (e.g., department, center, institute, school, college, university). Generally, the reviewer should have a similar or greater amount of experience in a similar role (e.g., someone with a rank of senior lecturer at another institution may be able to write a letter for an assistant or associate professor fixed term with a majority appointment in teaching). All letters solicited and received should be submitted on institutional letterhead and carry the evaluator's signature.

In addition, colleges could consider the following for teaching faculty:

- Develop a pool of fixed-term faculty members who may be recruited as peer reviewers for teaching observations, to serve on college-level evaluation committees, etc., and encourage units to do the same.
- Provide each reviewer with a brief description of job duties and percentage of appointment or appointment adjustment if applicable.
- Give appropriate service credit to faculty serving as a peer reviewer.

3. Packet assembly and submission. The dossier should be assembled and saved as a bookmarked PDF for submission to Human Resources. The college is responsible for assuring all aspects of the packet are complete before sending it to fasreviewnon-tenure@hr.msu.edu. A [list of bookmarks](#) is available for use.

Section 3: Committee Formation & Preparation

Overview

Being thoughtful and purposeful about who makes up the review committee is important to ensuring a fair and equitable process, acknowledging that fixed-term roles are different from those of tenure-stream faculty, and upholding the standard of academic peer review.

Recommendations are as follows:

1. Committee members should familiarize themselves with this document and the college policy to fully understand promotion processes and criteria for identifying excellence by appointment type for fixed-term faculty. This will allow for the most accurate and robust review possible.
2. Ideally, any committee that reviews fixed-term faculty for promotion will have a minimum of three members and be composed primarily of fixed-term faculty members (at least a majority). These fixed-term faculty members may come from outside the unit if necessary. Additionally, unit selection procedures should include provisions to encourage diverse participants.
3. It is suggested that the fixed-term faculty member on the review committee hold the rank of associate or full professor if such an individual is available; if not, it is suggested that someone with the rank of associate or full professor fixed-term should be selected from another unit or college as applicable and selected in consultation with the unit or college administrator. If the candidate is being reviewed for a full professor fixed-term position, then it is suggested that the review committee include at least one full professor fixed-term.

Goal of the Committee

The committee goal is to review all relevant documents as outlined by the unit review committee that are relevant to the review process, including but not limited to the Form on Progress and Excellence, CV, narrative, annual performance reviews and external peer reviews, to submit a recommendation on promotion to the unit administrator.

Joint Appointments

Only the primary unit will establish the review committee and submit a recommendation for promotion with a joint appointment. However, the primary unit administrator must consult with the unit administrator of all joint units on the committee's composition before establishing

a committee to seek input and should solicit feedback on the recommendation for promotion before submitting a recommendation.

Opportunity to Confer

The fixed-term faculty member under review must be allowed to confer with the review committee before advising the unit administrator regarding the awarding of promotion. The committee should provide reasonable notice and outline the meeting format to confer to allow the candidate an opportunity to appropriately prepare to address the committee's questions.

Section 4: Additional Information

Summary for Fixed-Term Faculty Member

After the recommendation is forwarded to the provost by the unit administrator, the unit administrator must provide the individual with a summary of the recommendation and inform the individual of the action recommended to the provost within 15 days of submission. Even if not supported by the unit administrator, the recommended action and all review materials supporting such an action will be made available for review by the provost and their staff.

Denial of Promotion

Denial of promotion requires a conversation between the administrator and the fixed-term faculty member to detail the rationale and next steps to become eligible.

Appeals and Grievances

If the promotion is denied, the fixed-term faculty member may appeal through the faculty Grievance Policy, and/or an Administrative Review Process ([see the administrative review policy in the Faculty Handbook](#)). A denial of promotion to senior instructor, associate or full professor does not change the faculty member's current or future employment status.

Mentoring

Each college should have a mentoring program to enhance academic excellence, build a strong faculty and achieve the university's goals of ensuring access, opportunity and inclusive excellence, and a respectful, positive work environment for all educators. There are many informal and formal mentoring programs. Best practices suggest multiple mentors are needed to address the different needs of faculty at various career stages and/or in varying work areas. This can also involve providing information about professional development opportunities that help faculty address needs and interests.

It is important to minimize conflicts of interest, protect confidentiality, and provide a space where faculty can raise issues of concern without fear of retaliation. Awareness of and sensitivity to potentially different challenges that diverse faculty face is critical.

Mentoring policies should be communicated to all faculty, including expectations for mentors and those being mentored. Excellent mentoring should be considered in annual reviews. Formative evaluations of mentoring efforts by mentors and those being mentored should be part of department/college processes. Faculty may also choose not to have a mentor or to have a mentor from outside of their unit/college.

Resources

To access the Form on Progress and Excellence, frequently asked questions about the fixed-term faculty promotion process, and a list of bookmarks for promotion packets, [visit the Faculty and Academic Staff Affairs website](#).