



The Tenure Clock Timeline: A Reference Guide for Assistant Professors

“When do I go up for review?” is a common question asked by assistant professors in the tenure system.

This document is designed to serve as a resource for tenure system assistant professors who are looking to gain a better understanding of the timeline of their tenure review. It is intended to address many of the common questions and concerns about the reappointment and tenure review process and aid assistant professors in planning for reappointment review and tenure review.

This resource document was put together by the Office of the Vice Provost and Associate Vice President for Faculty and Academic Staff Affairs as a reference guide and to complement information contained in the [Faculty Guide for Reappointment, Promotion, and Tenure \(RPT\)](#).

It is important to talk and inquire with your chair/school director/dean on any questions you may have regarding your tenure clock timeline.

We hope you will consult this guide not only at the beginning of your appointment but also throughout your time as an Assistant Professor in the tenure system. We welcome your thoughts on how to improve it.



Questions or suggestions related to this guide can be sent to the Office of the Vice Provost and Associate Vice President for Faculty and Academic Staff Affairs at FASAffairs@msu.edu.

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An Overview: The Tenure Clock Timeline

The “tenure clock” timeline for an assistant professor consists of two probationary appointment periods that together comprise a timeline of seven (7) years. Each probationary appointment period has a mandatory review date. The mandatory review dates, typically found in your appointment letter, are set for the end of the third (3rd) year (for reappointment to a second probationary period) and the sixth (6th) year (for promotion to associate professor with tenure). It is important to become familiar with your probationary appointment end dates and your specific timeline so you can plan appropriately.

The following chart is a summary of the standard timeline of an Assistant Professor appointment. Each tenure clock timeline is unique and can be impacted by individual circumstances that may warrant an extension to the tenure clock. These situations are discussed on page 10.

Table 1. *The Standard Assistant Professor Tenure Clock Timeline*

The Standard Assistant Professor Tenure Clock Timeline

Does not consider any extensions to the tenure clock for childbirth, COVID or other reasons.

First Year Probationary Period

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Assistant professor first probationary period begins (4 years total)		Mandatory review for the reappointment as assistant professor	Final year of first probationary period

Second Year Probationary Period

Year 5	Year 6	Year 7
Second probationary appointment begins (3 years total)	Mandatory review for promotion to associate professor with tenure	First year as associate professor or final year as assistant professor

If you were in the tenure system at MSU as of Spring 2020 scheduled for a reappointment or tenure review, or had an employment start date in the tenure system from Summer 2020 through Aug. 15, 2023, your tenure clock was automatically extended by one-year for reasons related to COVID. If you received the one-year extension to your first probationary appointment period, the section “Calculating the First Probationary Appointment Period” will be helpful to review.

Length of Probationary Appointment Periods

The [Operating Principles of the Tenure System](#) policy states that the probationary appointment period for tenure purposes is calculated from **Aug. 16** of the calendar year in which the appointment is effective.

The [Granting Tenure](#) policy in the Faculty Handbook specifies the length of the probationary period(s) of the tenure clock.

Key Points from the Granting Tenure Policy

Assistant Professor

- (1) There are two probationary periods; the first probationary period is four (4) years. If the faculty member is successful in their review for reappointment, they are reappointed for a probationary period of three (3) years.
- (2) An assistant professor without tenure may request review for the award of tenure at any time during their probationary appointment.
 - These cases must be justified by a record of performance at another university or during a fixed term appointment at MSU that is required by immigration regulations or other relevant reason, provided the performance meets MSU standards.
 - Seek guidance and advice from your chair/school director/dean regarding a request for tenure review prior to your mandatory review date.
- (3) An assistant professor who requests promotion to tenure prior to the standard timeline, and who is unsuccessful, may request review at their mandatory review date.

Important Notes

- Although the first probationary period is four (4) years, the review for reappointment occurs in year three (3) with a final decision about reappointment made in spring of year three.
- If an individual is successfully reappointed, they are reappointed to a second probationary period of three years. The review for tenure and promotion occurs in year six (6) with a final decision made in spring of year six.

Each probationary period has a “terminal year” built into the length of the probationary period if a reappointment or promotion action is unsuccessful. In the event an assistant professor was not successfully reappointed to another two-year probationary period, they are able to finish their appointment through the fourth (4th) year. In the event an assistant professor was not successfully tenured and promoted to associate professor, they are able to finish their appointment through the seventh (7th) year.

Calculating the First Probationary Appointment Period

The [Operating Principles of the Tenure System](#) state that the probationary appointment period for tenure purposes is calculated from **Aug. 16** of the calendar year in which the appointment is effective.

Key Point

Regardless of your tenure system start date (e.g., Feb. 1, Aug. 16, Nov. 15) - your tenure clock for your first probationary period is calculated four years from Aug. 16 of the calendar year in which you were hired into the tenure system.

The chart below is a summary of how example start dates in the same year all have the same probationary appointment period end date.

Table 2. *Calculating the First Probationary Appointment Period with Different Dates During the same Calendar Year.*

Assistant Professor Tenure System Start Dates

Jan. 1, 2022	Aug. 16, 2022	Nov. 1, 2022
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These dates plus four (4) years from Aug. 16 of the calendar year in which hired into the tenured system equals a probationary appointment period end date of Aug. 15, 2026.

The summary above does not account for an automatic one-year extension due to COVID-19. For any assistant professor who had an appointment start date in the tenure system from Summer 2020 through Aug. 15, 2023, and thus a recipient of an automatic one-year COVID-19 extension, we've provided an example below to demonstrate how the probationary appointment end date is normally calculated, and then how it is adjusted to account for the automatic COVID-19 extension.

Example 1: with automatic one-year COVID-19 extension – appointment start date, Aug. 16, 2022

For an assistant professor who began their tenure system appointment at any time during the 2022 calendar year, the effective appointment start date is **Aug. 16, 2022**. Their first probationary period is calculated four (4) years from Aug. 16, 2022; thus, their standard probationary appointment end date is Aug. 15, 2026. This individual would normally be going up for a reappointment review in Year 3, with a decision communicated in spring of Year 3.

However, due to the impacts associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, the first probationary appointment was automatically extended by one year, for a total of five (5) years. As such, the probationary appointment end date is adjusted to Aug. 15, 2027, and the individual's mandatory review date will occur in Year 4, with a decision to be communicated in spring of Year 4.

- Aug. 16, 2022 + 4 years = Aug. 15, 2026 (standard probationary end date)
- Aug. 16, 2022 + 4 years + 1 year (extension) = Aug. 15, 2027 (adjusted probationary end date with automatic COVID extension)

The chart below depicts these calculations.

Table 3. *The First Probationary Appointment Period with an Automatic COVID extension.*

First Probationary Appointment Period				
Year 1: Academic Year 2022- 2023	Year 2: Academic Year 2023- 2024	Year 3: Academic Year 2024-2025	Year 4: Academic Year 2025-2026 *	Year 5: Academic Year 2026- 2027 **
		Mandatory review (standard timeline). Decision is made in spring of Year 3.	Mandatory review (adjusted timeline to reflect automatic COVID extension). Decision is made in spring of Year 4.	

**Standard probationary end date is Aug. 15, 2026.*

***Adjusted probationary end date is Aug. 15, 2027.*

The Second Probationary Appointment Period

If an assistant professor is successful in their review for reappointment in their first probationary period, they are reappointed for a second probationary period of three (3) years. A three-year second probationary period is added to the end of the first probationary period.

Table 4. *The Typical Assistant Professor Tenure Clock Timeline*

The Standard Assistant Professor Tenure Clock Timeline		
Academic Year	First Probationary Appointment 4 years in length	Second Probationary Appointment 3 years in length
Year 1	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Year 2	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Year 3	Submit materials for reappointment review to dept/school/college, decision made in spring of Year 3	Not Applicable
Year 4	If reappointment review is not favorable, final year as assistant professor	Final year of first probationary appointment and reappointment to second probationary period
Year 5	Not Applicable	First year of second probationary period starts
Year 6	Not Applicable	Second year of second probationary period (submit materials for tenure and promotion, decision made spring of Year 6)
Year 7	Not Applicable	Third year of second probationary period. -First year as associate professor with tenure OR -Final year as assistant professor (if unsuccessful)

To illustrate this with actual dates, we will continue with Example 1 from the previous section. In this example, the three years is added accordingly:

Example 1 (continued)

Recall, this faculty member began their tenure system position in calendar year 2022. Their standard probationary end date is **Aug. 15, 2026**. However, they received an automatic one-year COVID-19 extension and their adjusted end date is **Aug. 15, 2027**. Let's say they do not opt out from using the COVID-19 extension in their first probationary appointment. Let's also say they go up in year 4 and are successfully reappointed to a second probationary period.

The three-year second probationary appointment end date is **Aug. 15, 2030**, and the individual's mandatory review date will occur in Year 7, with a decision communicated in spring of Year 7.

The tenure clock timeline, with the COVID-19 extension to the first probationary appointment, is reflected in the chart below.

Table 5. *An Example Assistant Professor Tenure Clock Timeline with a COVID-19 Extension*

First Probationary Appointment Period				
Year 1: Academic Year 2022-2023	Year 2: Academic Year 2023- 2024	Year 3: Academic Year 2024- 2025	Year 4: Academic Year 2025-2026	Year 5: Academic Year 2026-2027
Assistant professor first probationary period begins.			Mandatory review for reappointment as assistant professor.	Final year of first probationary period.

Second Probationary Appointment Period		
Year 6: Academic Year 2027-2028	Year 7: Academic Year 2028-2029	Year 8: Academic Year 2029-2030
Second probationary appointment begins.	Mandatory review for promotion to associate professor with tenure *	First year as associate professor OR final year as assistant professor.

**Collection of materials begins in spring of Year 6.*

If they are successful at promotion to associate professor with tenure, this action will take effect on July 1, 2029. If they are unsuccessful, they will complete their final year as an assistant professor through the academic year of 2029-2030.

Tenure Clock Extensions

Michigan State University recognizes that for our faculty to be successful, we must create and sustain a supportive work environment that recognizes all facets of faculty life. Creating a supportive work environment necessitates strong organizational commitment in our policies and practices. One such policy is the [Extending the Reappointment/Promotion/Tenure Review Timeline](#) policy.

MSU provides automatic extensions, extensions granted automatically upon request, and extensions approved by a peer university committee upon request. The intent of this policy is to recognize various life events and/or challenges that a faculty member may face, and to have support mechanisms in place to create an environment in which our faculty can thrive.

Automatic Extensions

The tenure system probationary appointment for the next reappointment/promotion/tenure review is extended automatically (i.e., no faculty request or UCFT review needed) for one year for the following reasons:

1. Leaves of absence with or without pay that are one semester to 12 months in length.
2. Changes in appointment to 50% time or less for one year.
3. Immigration/visa status that does not permit the award of tenure for candidates who have been recommended for tenure.
4. An extension recommended as an outcome of a hearing and/or appeal conducted pursuant to the [Faculty Grievance Policy](#).
5. The impact of COVID-19 for any probationary faculty member who: a) was in the tenure system at MSU as of Spring 2020 scheduled for a reappointment or tenure review, or b) has an employment start date in the tenure system from Summer 2020 through Aug. 15, 2023.

Extensions Granted Automatically Upon Faculty Request

In addition to the automatic extensions (1-5) described above, faculty can request an extension of the next reappointment/promotion/tenure review for the birth or adoption of a child. Extensions for this reason are limited to two separate one-year extensions during the entire probationary period (first and second periods). The request for an automatic one-year extension for the birth or adoption of a child must be submitted within two years of the birth/adoption, but no later than the due date for the submission to the department/school of the dossier for the next reappointment/promotion/tenure review.

Note: Receipt of an automatic extension for any of the reasons above does not preclude consideration for reappointment or promotion with tenure at the standard time. However, if the extension for the first probationary appointment is waived by the faculty member, the extension does not carry over to the second probationary appointment (except in the case of the impact of the COVID-19 one-year automatic extension). In addition, a faculty member is bound to the outcome of the reappointment review if unsuccessful.

Extensions Reviewed by the University Committee on Faculty Tenure

Extension of the probationary appointment may be requested from the University Committee on Faculty Tenure (UCFT) for reasons related to **childbirth, adoption, the care of an ill and/or disabled child, spouse or parent; personal illness, receipt of prestigious awards, fellowships and/or special assignment opportunities, or other such serious constraints**. The procedure for requesting an extension of the probationary tenure system appointment is included in the statement on [Extending the Reappointment/Promotion/Tenure Timeline](#) (Extending the Tenure Clock).

A Special Note on the COVID-19 Automatic Extension

Due to the impacts associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, the tenure clock was automatically extended for each assistant professor who a) was in the tenure system at MSU as of Spring 2020 scheduled for a reappointment or tenure review, or b) has an employment start date in the tenure system through Aug. 15, 2023.

A set of [Frequently Asked Questions](#) is available that addresses frequent logistical questions on how the COVID-19 extension was implemented, how to opt out, etc.

A Timeline View: Preparing for your Tenure Review by Year

We prepared the timeline of activities below to assist you in your planning for your tenure review.

First Year

- Attend [New Faculty and Academic Staff Orientation](#) and other development workshops such as [Thriving in the Tenure System](#)
- Appointment of mentor
- Start documenting and collecting material for reappointment review (research, teaching, extension, outreach, service, clinical activities)
- First Annual review with unit administrator (typically, the annual review meeting is held in the spring but can vary by department/school/college; check with your unit administrator)
- Update information for your dossier annually

Second Year

- Attend [Thriving in the Tenure System](#)
- Continue documenting and collecting material for reappointment review (research, teaching, extension, outreach, service, clinical activities)
- Annual review
- Update information for dossier annually, prepare materials to submit in Year 3

Third Year

- Submit Reappointment, Promotion, and Tenure (RPT) materials to department/school/college – typically in Fall - check on specific dept/school/college deadlines with your unit administrator
- Continue documenting and collecting material for next tenure review (research, teaching, extension, outreach, service, clinical activities)
- Annual review
- Update information for dossier annually

Fourth Year

- Continue documenting and collecting material for next tenure review (research, teaching, extension, outreach, service, clinical activities)
- Annual review
- Update information for dossier annually

Fifth Year

- Continue documenting and collecting material for next tenure review (research, teaching, extension, outreach, service, clinical activities)
- Attend [Thriving in the Tenure System](#)
- Update information for dossier annually
- Annual review
- Candidate and department identify potential external reviewers. External review letters solicited – typically in the Spring (check on specific dept/school/college timelines with your unit administrator)

Sixth Year, Fall Semester

- Receipt of external letters
- Departmental RPT committee reviews, meets, and votes
- Department finalizes dossier and chair/school director writes summary statement
- Department submits dossier to dean for approval (deadlines vary by dept/school/college)

Sixth Year, Spring Semester

- College RPT committee reviews, meets and votes
- Dean's Office finalizes dossier and dean writes summary statement
- Feb. 28: Dean submits the dossier to Human Resources
- Human Resources verifies the dossier is complete, and transmits the dossier to the Office of the Provost
- Early May: Provost Office notifies Deans of decisions for recommendation to the President and Board of Trustees
- Mid-May: Deans send notices of action by the Office of the Provost to Chairpersons, Directors and faculty members.
- Mid-June: Meeting of the Board of Trustees for final tenure approval action.