

A Guide for Tenure-Track Faculty

Welcome to USC! This guide aims to provide more information about your new role in the university, resources, and expectation for tenure. In addition, all tenure-track assistant professors should read closely the [Faculty Handbook](#) and the [Manual of the University Committee on Appointments, Promotions, and Tenure \(UCAPT\)](#).

There will no doubt be questions particular to your field that will not be covered here. However, there are many other sources of information available, including research offices around the university (see the [USC Office of Research](#)) and the [USC Center for Excellence in Teaching](#). UCAPT gives annual workshops about the tenure process (announced to candidates and departments), and the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs is also available to meet with faculty members individually on issues of concern.

Most of all, you should look to your department chair and senior colleagues for guidance regarding field-specific standards for scholarly production, teaching, and criteria for tenure. Chairs and senior colleagues are committed to a culture of mentoring at USC. It is also often helpful to seek out multiple mentors, perhaps including mentors outside your home department or the university. For more on mentoring at USC, visit <http://mentor.usc.edu>.

The key advice for all tenure-track assistant professors is to produce scholarly or creative work that meets the university's expectations for scholarship or artistic production (detailed below). In addition, you will have some teaching and service responsibilities. You should be aware of [USC policies on teaching](#), which include rules on syllabi, harassment training, privacy, and so forth. You may do some service, but tenure-track faculty members as a rule should be shielded from excessive service demands. Some service is fine; doing too much service to the detriment of your research is not. You should feel free to decline requests that compromise your research time. Some schools help in this process by course relief, paid leave, or research grants, and there are also [university-wide research grants](#).

The Tenure Process and Timeline

Your offer letter should provide your Tenure Decision Date, which is one year before the end of your probationary period.

You should receive a mid-probationary review midway through your probationary period. For schools with a six-year probationary period, this review happens in a faculty member's third year. (For schools

with longer probationary periods, the timeline is adjusted accordingly.) At this time, your overall contribution will be considered by the home department to determine whether you are on track for tenure and to offer constructive advice toward achieving that goal.

The year before your Tenure Decision Date (the fifth year, for candidates with six-year probationary periods), your department will begin building your tenure dossier. Depending on your department and school, the route may be first to a department subcommittee, then the tenured faculty of the department, then to any school-wide committees, then to the dean of the school, then to UCAPT and the Provost. Your tenure dossier must ultimately be submitted to UCAPT and the Provost (via the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs) by February 1 of your Tenure Decision Date year. However, you should check with your department as to its internal deadlines. These internal deadlines determine when you must submit your portion of the dossier materials. For detailed information about each of the dossier components, please see section 7 of the [UCAPT Manual](#).

If you believe that your Tenure Decision Date was not set properly according to the guidelines in section 4-D of the [Faculty Handbook](#), or if you believe that there are any special circumstances that justify an extension of your Tenure Decision Date, it is important that you make a written request promptly to your department chair for an extension. Your department chair will route the request to the dean, the Provost, and the Committee on Probationary Deadlines. All tenure-track faculty members may apply for Tenure Decision Date extensions due to parenting and primary caregiver responsibilities (*see section 9-D of the Faculty Handbook*).

Standards for Tenure

While you are expected to be a good teacher and university citizen, it is primarily upon the significance and influence of your research or creative work, as well as your promise of continued productivity, that your tenure dossier will be evaluated. (For more information, see also section 1.1 and section 3 of the [UCAPT Manual](#), available on the Faculty Portal. Those evaluating your dossier include not only the school, department, UCAPT, and the Provost, but also referees from around the world.

As a candidate for tenure, you are expected to have produced significant and original scholarly or artistic contributions. You should have a substantive body of work that has had a high impact on the field and is on par with the accomplishments at the tenure stage of the leading scholars in your discipline. You should also have a program of scholarship independent from your Ph.D. supervisor or post-doctoral mentor. It is understood that some of your early work may be outgrowths of your dissertation or postdoctoral or graduate work, but you should have additional work that shows further intellectual growth. If you do most of your scholarship jointly with senior scholars, it is particularly

important that your tenure dossier include evidence of your own original contributions to this work (*see section 2.8 in the [UCAPT Manual](#) on collaborative work*).

Specific scholarly expectations for tenure vary by field. If you are in a field that emphasizes book production, for instance, you should have a book or books published or in press by a university press or a press with an equivalent reputation. This work should preferably have received published reviews. (See section 7.4 of the [UCAPT Manual](#) for UCAPT's definition of "in press") If you are in an article-producing field, you should have articles in high-impact journals. If you are in a grant-getting field, you should have an independent research program as principal investigator with a sustained record of substantial peer-reviewed external funding from federal agencies. If you are in a creative field, your creative work should be widely perceived among your peers as outstanding. Your dossier should detail discipline-specific standards, practices, and measures of impact (artistic exhibitions and cinema festivals, for instance, typically have their own forms of peer review).

Meeting numerical expectations is not the standard for tenure. Contribution and impact are matters of quality. However, they often benefit from cumulative quantity. Usually a series of published journal articles is more influential than just one article, for instance. The amount of intellectual output plays a role in tenure decisions because it is indicative of productivity and stature in the eyes of peer reviewers.

It will likely be helpful to get an idea of national standards for tenure by looking at the online CVs of those who have been newly tenured at the leading national departments in your field. Your dossier will contain a cohort analysis, in which you are compared to your peers at other prestigious institutions. The work of those colleagues can serve as benchmarks for your own targets and timelines for publishing articles, submitting grant proposals, and so forth.

Key Pieces of Advice

In addition to focusing above all on publishing scholarly work, UCAPT has four major pieces of advice for assistant professors:

- Have a multi-year research plan so that, by the end of the fifth year, you have published or produced the quantum of work (books, articles, grants, creative work, etc.) usual in your field as the way to have impact. (Note: if your school has a probationary period longer than six years, this timetable should be adjusted accordingly.) Ask senior colleagues to walk you through a realistic time line on how long it takes to publish articles or books, get R01 grants, receive peer reviews on your work, and so forth. Remember that your work is circulated to referees at the end of your fifth year.

- Don't allow yourself to be distracted from producing articles, books, grants, creative work, etc. by excessive devotion of time to any of the other activities that, while worthwhile, can take time away from your core scholarly work. These other activities may include, for instance, committee service, mentoring undergraduates, multiple new course preparations, service to external professional or community groups, clinical work, work in a joint appointment department, and so on. In addition, don't allow yourself to be distracted by leaves that do not lead to work directly benefitting the dossier. If you believe you have excessive teaching, service, or other professional obligations, ask your chair, dean, or the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs to help you protect the time you need for your scholarship.
- Understand that the quality of the publication venue, performance venue, or the grant peer-review process is important evidence of scholarly contribution and impact. Your work should have an impact on both the field and sub-discipline; an overly narrow portfolio may present challenges for demonstrating impact.
 - It is important to develop a national or international intellectual or artistic community that knows your work. Depending on your field, this may lead you to present colloquia at leading universities, to speak at conferences, to teach master classes, or to serve on journal editorial boards. Consider who the national leaders in your field are, and try to make sure they know your work. The external referees on your tenure decision will be drawn from among that group.

Planning and Balancing

Think ahead to the time your tenure dossier must be submitted and plan accordingly. Grant proposals take time to be judged. Articles and books take time to be published. Creative exhibitions take time to be staged.

Choose your projects judiciously. Once again, do not burden yourself with an excessive number of conference presentations, book reviews, panel discussion, encyclopedia entries, or other work that, while valuable in itself, at this stage in your career can take time away from more substantial contributions. As always, the key is balance. Your primary focus should be your scholarship.

Envoi

Achieving tenure should be a goal but not an end in itself. It is a milestone in your career, but not a grand finale. You have been hired because the university believes you can succeed. Your colleagues look forward to witnessing your accomplishments as a fellow faculty member.