

## Promotion for Fixed Term Assistant and Associate Professors

### Frequently Asked Questions

Spring 2023

**How is the promotion process different for fixed term faculty?** The annual timelines, materials, and procedures for promotion of fixed term assistant and associate professors are generally the same as for tenure system faculty. The main difference is that there is no year 3 “reappointment” step in the fixed term system and no year 5 “critical year” for consideration to promotion to associate. Fixed term assistant professors skip reappointment and set their own year to pursue promotion to associate. Fixed term associate professors, like tenure system associate professors, face no required year for submitting promotion materials. Fixed term assistant or associate professors should consult their mentoring committee and supervisor as part of their decision process about the timing of pursuing promotion. All assistant/associate professor promotions follow the same annual calendar of steps. It is important to familiarize yourself with your unit and the college calendar for the various annual deadlines associated with the promotion process.

**Will I get a pay increase?** Tenure system faculty are awarded pay increases at levels annually set by central administration. Central administration does not make additional allocations to colleges or academic units to cover fixed term pay increases. Pay increases therefore must be borne by the academic unit or any external-to-MSU entities funding the position. While the college prefers that fixed term increases associated with promotion match those awarded to tenure system faculty, increases may sometimes differ from the centrally determined tenure system increases. This is especially relevant in cases where the funding is exterior to the university. The RPT process includes a requirement that the unit leader obtain a confidential letter from any external funding source paying a faculty member’s base salary, and this can be helpful in helping to negotiate the increased pay from the external source if a promotion is obtained. It is therefore good practice to have conversations to get a sense of whether any external funding partners will be supportive of a higher rate of pay before you initiate steps to seek promotion.

**It seems like a lot of trouble for a small pay increase that is not guaranteed. Why bother?** The process is optional but there are good reasons to seriously consider trying for a promotion. First, a long time in rank without promotion sends a signal to the outside world. This can impact you if you are competing for grants or seeking work elsewhere. Second, the process of going for promotion produces feedback and mentoring that can be valuable in your own professional abilities. Third, it is a chance for you to tell your story to colleagues in your unit and to upper administration. This can open new possibilities. Finally, requests to your unit leader for increases in base pay sound a bit hollow if you have not bothered to pursue promotion, and you will be compared with peers at the same rank in equity considerations.

**There’s no deadline year for pursuing promotion. Is there advice on which year to pursue promotion?** There is variation but it is best to wait approximately the same number of years that tenure system faculty wait. If you are already an associate professor, then a reasonable waiting period might be 5 to 7 years before going for full. Also, try to avoid going for promotion after a productivity lull or if you just had one very good year after a string of lower years. The RPT committees will be looking for sustained excellence over several years.

**What about external letters? Can I list fixed term faculty in other universities as possible external letter writers?** It is fine to list fixed term faculty elsewhere as possible external reviewers. Bear in mind that the faculty on the list must hold the rank you seek (or higher). They should be full time faculty, not adjuncts or holders of other honorific titles. Consult with your mentoring committee before finalizing the list. Remember that the external reviewers must also conform to unit preferences.

**I raise 100% of my salary through grants. I therefore have less to spend on graduate students than tenure system faculty with equivalent grant dollars, and I have no teaching assignment. How will I be evaluated?** At MSU promotion is assessed based on the assignment. Assignments in CANR vary tremendously. If there is no teaching assignment, lack of activity in teaching will be understood. With respect to self-funding through grants, it is important to clearly specify this in your reflective essay. Your external reviewers may not be familiar with self-funded faculty, so you need to communicate the situation in materials they receive. Similarly, if the grants are for applied work this needs to be communicated and tied back to the assignment under which you were hired.

**I hold a 95% teaching and 5% service assignment. How can I be promoted in a culture that values research?** At MSU promotion is assessed based on the assignment, so a 95% teaching faculty member must demonstrate scholarly excellence in teaching. This can be done, for example, through curriculum innovation or publishing on teaching in your discipline.

**What is the success rate for fixed term assistant and associate professors requesting promotion?** The success rate for faculty who submit their materials is high. Before taking the time to start the formal year-long procedure, it is important to complete appropriate pre-work by consulting your mentoring committee and your supervisor to make sure they feel you are ready to meet the standards for promotion.