Annual Report 2021-2022
Professional Standards Committee (PSC)

Submitted to the Faculty Senate & Office of the Provost

April 30, 2022

Members

Daisy Benson (UVM Libraries)
Jean Bessette (College of Arts & Sciences) (Spring '22 semester)
Carolyn Bonifield, Chair (Grossman School of Business)
Caroline Beer (College of Arts & Sciences) (sabbatical Spring '22)
Chris Danforth (College of Engineering & Mathematical Sciences)
Heather Darby (College of Agriculture & Life Sciences)
Evan Eyler (Larner College of Medicine)
David Massell (College of Arts and Sciences)
Cris Mayo (College of Education and Social Services) (Spring '22 semester)
Mary Val Palumbo (College of Nursing and Health Sciences)
Matthew Siket (Larner College of Medicine)
Jason Stockwell (Rubenstein School of Environment & Natural Resources)
Jessica Strolin-Goltzman (College of Education and Social Services) (sabbatical Spring '22)

Summary of Primary Activities

Sabbatical Reviews

During the 2021-2022 academic term, the PSC reviewed a total of 72 sabbatical applications.

Number of Sabbatical Applications Reviewed by Academic Unit:

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS), n=3

College of Arts & Sciences (CAS), n=42

College of Engineering and Mathematical Sciences (CEMS), n=5

College of Education & Social Services (CESS), n=3

College of Nursing and Health Sciences (CNHS), n=4

Grossman School of Business (GSB), n=4

Larner College of Medicine (LCOM), n=1

Rubenstein School of Environmental and Natural Resources (RSENR), n=9

UVM Libraries (LIB), n=1

Total Sabbaticals Reviewed, N=72

Reappointment, Tenure & Promotion Reviews (RPT)

During the 2021-2022 academic term, the PSC conducted 84 RPT full dossiers reviews.

College/ School & N of Dossiers*	2nd Reappoint-ment @ Assistant Professor Tenure Track	Promotion Senior Lecturer	Promotion Associate Professor Non-Tenure Track *(e.g., Clinical Research, Education, Libraries, Extension)*	Promotion Associate Professor & Tenure *(includes tenure only at rank)*	Promotion Full Professor Non-Tenure Track *(e.g., Clinical, Research, Education Libraries, Extension)*	Promotion Full Professor Tenure Track *(includes tenure only at rank and tenure with promotion to full)*
CALS n=6	2	1	1 (R)	0	0	2
CAS n=12	0	3	0	3	0	6
CESS n=3	1	1	0	1	0	0
CEMS n=8	2	2	1 (R)	3	0	0
CNHS n=3	1	0	0	1	0	1
GSB n=2	1	0	0	1	0	0
LCOM n=44	1	0	20 (C) 1 (R) 2 (Ed)	0	15 (C) 1 (R) 2 (E)	2
LIB n=1	0	0	1 (L)	0	0	0
RSENR n=5	1	1	0	3	0	0
Totals N = 84	**9**	**8**	**26**	**12**	**18**	**11**

*The data in this table reflect the highest action taken on the dossier; in some cases, the PSC voted on more than one of the tabled categories above on the same person (e.g., second reappointment and promotion to Associate Professor with tenure).

Summary of Persistent Issues Related to Sabbatical and RPT Submissions

The PSC reviews sabbatical and RPT (Reappointment, Promotion, Tenure) dossiers from across the university. As such, this allows us to notice issues, both recurring and new, that may help faculty, Chairs, Deans, and the Provost when considering future submissions. In this section of our report, we identify those issues that we think would be helpful to address. Some of these issues have been raised in previous annual reports, and we reiterate them here.

Sabbatical Issues

1. **Completeness of Submissions**
   The completeness and quality of submissions vary substantially.
   a. We encourage faculty and their colleges/schools to double-check applications for technical accuracy and completeness prior to submission. This includes cover page accuracy and completeness, URL links, missing bookmarks, missing letters, missing votes, missing signatures, and word count limits. Every year, some applications are returned to units for correction or to acquire missing elements, which delays the review process.

   b. Faculty Standards Committee (FSC) and Dean letters should all include dates. Otherwise, it can be confusing to tell if they are current or past letters.

   c. If a sabbatical application includes collaboration with partner institutions or organizations, letters of invitation should be included. These letters confirm that the proposed activities can reasonably be completed. We continue to see sabbatical applications that reference collaborations but do not include letters of invitation.

   d. Sabbaticals that include data collection should acknowledge the need for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and report on the status of the IRB approval (e.g., plan/date for submission).

   e. Since sabbaticals are reviewed by people outside the applicant's field, it is helpful to limit excessive disciplinary-specific language and acronyms likely to be unknown by reviewers. This is particularly noticeable in sabbatical materials submitted by LCOM. When technical language is deemed essential, a short explanation in lay language is appreciated. Additionally, the first occurrence of acronyms should be accompanied with the full corresponding text.

2. **Specificity of Activities Beyond Standard Workload**
   a. Sabbatical submissions vary substantially in their level of specificity. Some applications include a strong rationale but lack the level of specificity necessary to understand what the faculty member will be doing during the sabbatical period. We regularly encounter the activity described in a broad way, such as, "I plan to write a book." It is helpful to understand the work that has already been completed, proposed activities (e.g., archival research, literature review, data collection, chapter outlines), and the timeline. A timeline that lists activities to be completed during each month of the sabbatical period would be appropriate. As outlined in the sabbatical elements listed in the CBA (Collective Bargaining Agreement), the sabbatical application needs to include specific activities with projected timelines.

   b. Sabbatical applicants should be explicit about how their sabbatical plan extends

beyond what they might typically be expected to complete on their standard workload devoted to scholarship. For example, if someone plans to complete an article and write one additional paper, these activities may not justify a sabbatical. It is most helpful when applicants explain how the sabbatical provides the opportunity to engage in activities that their workload would otherwise not allow.

3. **Relationship between Funding Cycles and Sabbatical Submissions**
   Due to funding notification dates, some faculty members seeking external funding for sabbatical-related activities (e.g., travel) do not know the status of potential funding before submitting the sabbatical application. Faculty members often include a Plan A, based on receiving funding, and a scaled-back Plan B in the event funding is not granted. When applications are built around Plan A, with Plan B often offered as a brief afterthought, this poses a challenge in the review process. We continue to recommend that Plans A and B be reversed. The sabbatical application Plan A should be what the faculty member can commit to doing at the time of submission. Plan B should be considered value-added, that is, the faculty member should indicate additional planned activities in the event they receive the funding. If the work is not dependent on external funding, this should be stated.

4. **Mentoring**
   It is unclear whether some applicants receive sufficient guidance and feedback prior to submission. Frequently, issues with sabbatical applications could have been avoided with earlier feedback, such as from the Chair. Given the September deadline for sabbatical submissions, sabbatical planning should be well underway during the previous spring.

Reappointment, Promotion, Tenure (RTP) Issues

1. **Overall Organization**
   All dossiers should be organized in a consistent manner. This should include a standardized order of materials, bookmarking of dossiers to make them easier to navigate (e.g., all supporting materials after basic dossier entries; external reviewer CVs positioned after all external letters rather than after each letter; use accessible/searchable pdf options by using the OCR-optical character recognition feature in Abode Acrobat; check all links to ensure they work). In addition, scanned documents should not be included because this makes it difficult to prepare a short review document for presentation to the committee. Once assembled, the candidate's dossier should be combined into one pdf with bookmarks, rather than separate pdf files.

   All faculty should adhere to the suggested word limits and make their strongest case in a concise manner. Dossiers sometimes exceed 500 pages. Some of that length results from items such as long CVs of external reviewers. When soliciting external letters, Chairs should explicitly request a short-version CV (e.g., 4 pages, akin to an NIH-style bio sketch) that clearly establishes the reviewer as a credible external reviewer.

   Additionally, similar to sabbaticals, it would be helpful to limit excessive disciplinary-specific language and acronyms likely to be unknown by reviewers. This is particularly noticeable in RPT materials submitted by LCOM. When technical

language is deemed essential, a short explanation in lay language is appreciated and the first occurrence of acronyms should be accompanied with the full corresponding text.

2. **Common Definitions**

The PSC encourages the development of university-wide common definitions of workload categories (e.g., teaching/advising, scholarship, service, administration, clinical). The overlapping and different uses of the terms service, clinical, and administration are among the most common areas of confusion.

The PSC also encourages the development of university-wide definitions for recording RPT voting (i.e., Yes, No, Absent, Recuse, Abstain). A common inconsistency relates to the differences between the terms abstain and recuse. The PSC has offered proposed definitions of these terms in our operating procedures.

At all voting levels (i.e., department, FSC, PSC), it is essential for there to be a brief rationale for votes recorded as no, abstain, or recuse. This is particularly true for "No" votes. The PSC often encounters "No" votes with no explanation given. The PSC puts little to no weight on "No" votes that are not accompanied by an explanation.

3. **Work Load Distribution by Chair**

Workload information often lacks specifics. While workload distributions may differ from year to year during a faculty member's review period, it is helpful to have as accurate an estimate as possible of an individual's workload distribution. This allows the PSC to assess aspects such as scholarship output. Course loads or administrative roles might impact time for scholarship.

We request information on the average number of courses taught with the estimates of workload percentages, as how courses are counted varies across the university. For example, in some units, 40% for teaching equals five courses and in others, it equals four courses. For the individual with fewer courses, understanding how that time has been redistributed is important to reviewing the dossier fairly (e.g., junior faculty releases with no additional responsibilities are different than a shift to externally-funded research activities or added administrative duties).

The PSC would like to call attention to the discrepancy that sometimes occurs between the assigned workload and the actual activities of the candidate. For example, if a clinical faculty member has 5% of their workload devoted to scholarship, the expectations for scholarly productivity should be modest. Moreover, if the workload indicates 0% for scholarship, the faculty member should not be evaluated on research productivity. In general, evaluations at all levels should not be at odds with the candidate's workload.

4. **External Letters**

Clarity around when external letters are required would be helpful. For example, LCOM includes the following language in its '*Process & Criteria for Arm's-Length Evaluation of Scholarship/Research/Creative Activity*': "The Department must solicit from outside the University arm's-length evaluation of the quality and significance of the candidate's creative work when that has been an assigned responsibility."

However, even when scholarship is not indicated as part of the workload, external letters are sometimes expected.

Additionally, issues pertaining to "arm's-length" external letters for tenure and promotion consideration continue. While this has improved over time, some are still clearly not sufficiently at arm's length. Faculty members and their Chairs both share responsibility for ensuring that letters are arm's length. The PSC discourages solicitation of letters from people with academic kinship relationships. We understand that there are small, highly specialized, fields of research in which it may be difficult to avoid soliciting letters from evaluators who have not previously intersected professionally with the candidate, or who do not belong to the same academic network.

Credibility of arm's length letters are enhanced when the letters come from reviewers who: (a) work at an institution of higher education at least comparable to UVM (R1, R2) or other relevant organization, (b) have attained the rank or a higher rank as the promotion being sought, (c) have submitted a CV that reflects a substantial body of work that establishes them as an appropriate reviewer, and (d) have no real or perceived bias related to the applicant.

5. **Nature of Contributions to Scholarship**
The applicant's contribution to co-authored scholarship should be specified. Given differences among disciplines, it is helpful to know the approximate nature and percentage of the contribution. It is helpful to know what the faculty member did with regard to a particular publication (e.g., write the literature review, develop the research plan, collect data, analyze data).

Colleges/Schools, Departments, and Chairs are encouraged to continue to clarify expectations for scholarship, depending on the percentage of workload devoted to scholarship and the pathway. For example, the volume and type of acceptable scholarship might differ for a Clinical or Extension faculty member compared to a Research or Tenure track faculty member.

6. **Tenure Review for Incoming Administrators with Faculty Appointments**
As a relatively new policy (passed by the Faculty Senate in November 2018), the *Tenure Review for Incoming Administrators with Faculty Appointments* is not always on the radar of search committees. This is particularly true with respect to the timing of the process. Expedited review is intended to be conducted pre-hire, when an individual has been identified as a finalist. The review should be completed before a final decision is made to hire an individual. This is often a short window of time, and thus requires pre-planning with highly ranked candidates to provide them with advance notice that if they are selected as a finalist, they will need to undergo this process if they are seeking tenure with their appointment. This short time window is why the expedited process has a five workday turnaround that occurs simultaneously with concurrent tenure (only) review and voting by the proposed home department, corresponding college/school Faculty Standards Committee, and the Faculty Senate Professional Standards Committee. Since the submission is purposely designed to be less time consuming and burdensome for prospective candidates, it does not follow the full "green sheets" paperwork. Instead, it relies on: (a) a memo written by the search Chair summarizing eligibility for an expedited review and credentials/qualifications for tenure, (b) a candidate's CV,

(c) evidence of teaching effectiveness, and (d) reference letters (if already available as part of the search process) or Chair summary of information from referees pertaining to suitability for tenured position. During the discussion leading to the vote to approve this new policy, evidence of teaching effectiveness was discussed. Faculty expressed concerns about hired applicants potentially relinquishing their administrative roles at some future time and joining the departmental faculty. As such, evidence of teaching credentials was deemed important. Search committees are encouraged to make highly ranked candidates aware of the expedited process, including the requirement for evidence of teaching effectiveness. A statement of teaching effectiveness might be a page or two describing: (a) the candidate's teaching history (e.g., number and types of classes taught over time), (b) teaching formats (e.g., in-person, online, hybrid), (c) a summary of course evaluation data (e.g., course summary metrics with scale included), (d) teaching awards, or (e) other evidence that the candidate has been a successful teacher at a tenurable level. For some administrative positions, external search firms are utilized. In such cases, it is essential that the primary UVM liaison make the search firm aware of these expedited tenure review requirements.

Gratitude for the Work

Serving on the PSC involves a significant investment of time and effort. One of the most common sentiments expressed by PSC members is that the time and effort are worthwhile. We appreciate the opportunity to review the breadth and depth of work produced at UVM. Members of the PSC approach each dossier with great respect for the work of our UVM colleagues and carefully review each dossier. PSC members have the unique opportunity to interact with disciplines that we would not otherwise encounter. It is an experience that contributes to our sense of UVM as a special place where talented people produce important work.