

CRITERIA FOR PROMOTION TO TENURE

of the

CORNELL COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING

Approved by the Engineering Policy Committee, January 30, 2017

Preamble:

The purpose of this policy statement is to give explicit tenure decision guidelines for faculty, administrators, and future candidates within Cornell's College of Engineering.

The tenure review generally follows upon a multi-year process of faculty development. Throughout the period leading up to the tenure review, it is important for senior colleagues to monitor the research and educational productivity of junior faculty members, to assess their potential for scholarly leadership, and to offer appropriate guidance regarding career decisions and management. However, both mentors and candidates should bear in mind that tenure is not a right but an earned privilege. Informal reviews may not accurately predict the outcome of the much more demanding review that accompanies a tenure decision.

It is the policy of the College of Engineering to offer faculty positions only to candidates for whom tenure is a reasonable expectation. The initial hiring decision is based upon judgments of apparent teaching ability, a promising research record and its potential for impact in the academic community and beyond, plans for future research, the perceived importance of the field of research, and other factors such as teaching requirements. Many factors can alter these judgments during the period before a candidate is considered for tenure. A faculty member may prove to be an uncommitted or ineffective educator. The research may have less impact than was anticipated, construing this broadly to encompass both academic and external communities, or the initial promise of a field of research may be unfulfilled by subsequent developments. Technological changes may outmode an area or redirect attention. The researcher's work may prove to be extremely narrow, so that it is not representative of the broad promise of the area, or extremely broad but lacking in substance.

Thus, the initial judgments of promise, made at the time candidates are hired, cannot be taken as a priori justification of their educational ability or of the significance of their research areas. The assessment during the tenure review of a candidate's educational skills, research, and the significance of the area of research are all legitimate reflections upon the candidate, and hence valid components of an eventual recommendation for or against tenure.

Rationale:

The awarding of tenure represents an institutional commitment by Cornell to faculty members that will often last throughout their professional lifetime. It is expected that a candidate for tenure will enhance the performance and reputation of the College of Engineering faculty as outstanding researchers and excellent educators. The candidate should also have the potential for leadership as a researcher, educator, and member of the Cornell community.

Criteria:

Tenure decisions are based upon the candidate's research and educational record, together with consideration of service to the University and the professional community. The research and education criteria must be satisfied with distinction for a candidate to be granted tenure at Cornell. Candidates are expected to participate in service to the University and the Cornell community and to their field of research.

Implicit in the tenure decision is the possibility that the department might select and appoint someone else. The recommendation for tenure, therefore, should be made with the assurance that the candidate is on a par with the best possible individuals that Cornell could expect to attract to the position. The following three criteria should be interpreted with this in mind.

Criterion 1. Outstanding research.

Compelling evidence of research quality, impact, and potential for intellectual leadership in the field is expected as a condition for tenure. Research impact may be recognized in several ways. Letters will be solicited from recognized leaders in the candidate's field of research, broadly construed. The opinions of these experts carry great weight. Successful candidates should be considered by most outside reviewers to be among the premier researchers at an equivalent stage in their careers. Other evidence of recognition, listed in random order, may include invited papers and chaired sessions at professional conferences, success in attracting funding, references in publications and textbooks, patents, adoption of the candidate's software, membership on editorial boards and program committees, activity as a reviewer or panelist for funding organizations, consulting activities, leadership in engineering practice, and presentations at other educational and research institutions. This evidence focuses on the scholarship primarily in terms of its impact on the academic and research communities.

Evidence of quality and vigor in research includes a strong record of accomplishments as well as ambitious plans for the future. The candidate is expected to provide a statement of research and future plans, and external reviewers will be asked to evaluate them. Measures of accomplishments include papers published in high quality, refereed journals and in proceedings of top-ranked conferences. Ambitious plans for the future may be indicated by a series of related publications and technical reports and by efforts to secure research funding from a variety of sources. Research activity outside the direct area of a candidate's PhD dissertation topic is highly desirable, and results of an innovative (and not merely incremental) nature are expected. The quality and impact of the research results are stressed over their quantity.

The significance of a candidate's research program is related to the significance of the research area. A research area can be judged significant in a number of ways — for example, the area may be important to industry, the area may have a relatively high level of research funding, or the area may receive significant coverage in current textbooks. Emerging areas may have none of these attributes, but there should still be evidence of their potential importance. Where possible, evidence of a trend of growing importance should be cited. This evidence could consist of key articles, presentations, general media coverage of the area, or comments of outside experts.

Evidence of research impact assembled for the tenure review may include material that discusses scholarship incorporating engagement beyond the academic community. Such external engagement is particularly relevant to Cornell Tech, where it is expected to play a role in the candidate's academic activities. External engagement entails interaction between the candidate and organizations beyond academia that amplifies the societal or commercial impact of a candidate's academic scholarship and brings back real-world problems that influence the candidate's academic work. Evidence for external engagement can be obtained as part of the expectations discussed above, as well as through commentary from additional outside reviewers. Such additional evidence is appropriate when external engagement is part of a candidate's scholarly activities. Evidence of external engagement does not diminish the requirements for research quality, impact and potential articulated in the previous paragraphs.

Criterion 2. Excellence in education.

Cornell expects its faculty to excel in education, interpreting this broadly to include teaching at various levels, advising, and other educational activities. Evidence of educational excellence includes nomination for, or winning of, teaching or educational awards, as well as such factors as success of the candidate's graduate students and advisees. Educational excellence should be attested to by subjective evidence such as personal and solicited letters from successful former students and student evaluations of teaching and academic advising. Numerical scores on confidential course evaluations are not sufficient for determining educational excellence, although they may complement other forms of evidence. Accordingly, it is expected that a direct peer review will be undertaken. As part of this review, it is appropriate for representatives of the departmental tenure review committee to attend lectures or courses given by the candidate.

Evidence is expected of an ongoing commitment to education. This may include teaching and development of courses in varied subjects or levels. Documentation of this commitment may consist of teaching materials and instructional aids developed by the candidate. Publication of lab notes, software, monographs, and textbooks, and adoption of such materials outside Cornell, is considered highly significant. Further evidence may include participation at national conferences on education, introduction of new instructional programs, advising student academic and honorary organizations, participation in special programs, and academic advising of individual students at all levels.

Criterion 3. Service to Cornell and the engineering profession.

Service to Cornell includes activities such as serving on committees (at any institutional level), participation in student recruiting and orientation, participation in outreach programs, and serving as faculty advisor to organizations.

Service to the profession includes memberships and chairs of committees of professional organizations, holding an office in a professional organization, editorships of journals and conference proceedings, and refereeing papers and research proposals.