

## FAQs about New Promotions Changes

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### *Why are we making changes to our promotions policy?*

The main driver has been feedback from SMD faculty members, both in last year's AAMC Faculty Forward survey and in informal / individualized feedback. Too many faculty members view our current system as either not fair or not clear. While we're no worse than most peer institutions in this perception, we want to do better!

Most faculty familiar with the current SMD Regulations of the Faculty recognize that the existing system actually *is* clearly stated in the Regulations, and is implemented using processes carefully designed to be as fair as possible. But based on faculty feedback, we believe we can do this in a way that is clearer to more of us, by better operationalizing the promotions criteria. Indeed, feedback from faculty at several steps along the way has been quite positive, with further helpful suggestions now incorporated into our proposal.

The proposal also addresses other specific issues:

1. *Perceptions that our current academic 'options'* (i.e., 'Researcher-Teacher,' 'Clinician-Teacher,' etc.) *are too hierarchical*: On the one hand, many faculty members do not care what option they are promoted on, and in principle the option is for internal use only. However, other faculty members do feel strongly that some options are more highly valued than others, and some feel disappointed if they are promoted on an option other than the one they wished.

2. *Changing research funding environment*: In the current environment, past precedents (e.g., expecting that one must have a certain number of R01s) might prevent us from promoting and retaining many successful, productive, and valuable scientists. Also, the growing importance of team science makes it critical to recognize key collaborative scientific roles. Given the restrictive funding environment, the current academic 'clock' for 'R'-faculty at the Associate Professor level (i.e., maximum number of years in which one must be awarded tenure, which has been tied directly to funding record) also has been of concern.

3. *Tenure on the 'Teacher-Institutional Scholar' option*: Our current criteria for T-IS state that tenure is only possible in exceptional cases at the Professor level. However, many faculty on this option are in fields where it is common nationally to receive tenure at the Associate Professor level

### *Who came up with these proposed changes?*

Given the importance of these issues, the proposal was drafted initially by a workgroup consisting of senior faculty representing multiple disciplines and career paths at SMD. The proposal received further input and revisions from MEDSAC Steering Committee (i.e., the committee that on behalf of the Dean decides on promotions for all SMD faculty), full MEDSAC (i.e., all Department Chairs and Center Directors), members of the Medical Faculty Council, faculty members attending two 'Town Hall' meetings, and broad faculty input after distribution to all faculty via Faculty Focus (the Dean's newsletter). The ideas in this proposal also have been presented to many groups of faculty in several Departments, at faculty development workshops, and at new faculty welcome/orientation sessions.

### *OK, so what are the changes being proposed?*

#### 1. NO FORMAL ACADEMIC 'OPTIONS'

Academic appointments will no longer specify an option; the official appointment would read simply, for example, "Associate Professor." Behind the scenes, candidates for promotion will need to demonstrate excellence in at least one of the following components: Research, (non-research) Scholarship, Clinical, and/or Institutional Scholarship. Candidates also must demonstrate excellence in Teaching. Recognition

at regional, national, and international levels (depending on rank and activity component) will continue to be expected.

## 2. BETTER OPERATIONALIZED DESCRIPTIONS OF EACH OF THESE COMPONENTS

The Appendix to the Regulations of the Faculty now contains more specific, bullet-pointed examples of expectations in each of these activity components.

## 3. BROADENED DEFINITION OF 'RESEARCH'

The criteria, and the Appendix examples, now make clear that the key ingredient of excellence in Research is a sustained program of intellectually independent investigative work, recognized by competitively peer-reviewed grants as PI and/or as a collaborative investigator. In other words, the core concept of "independent" research is not PI funding, but intellectual stewardship of an identifiable part of the research program.

## 4. CHANGED ELIGIBILITY FOR TENURE AND THE ASSOCIATED ACADEMIC CLOCK

The proposal now allows the possibility of obtaining tenure at the Associate Professor level for Institutional Scholarship. Tenure remains possible for Research at the Associate Professor level, and at the Professor level for (non-research) Scholarship. Our proposal maintains the current tenure 'clock' for those promoted on the basis of the component Research (i.e., maximum of five years at Associate Professor for those without the Clinical component, 10 years for those with Clinical activity); however, it newly allows up to three-year postponements of the tenure decision at the request of the Chair and with the approval of the Dean, for situations where there is reasonable expectation that the faculty member may be viewed favorably for the awarding of tenure at the end of the extension period (e.g., after obtaining new or additional external funding).

Please note that the maximum time allowed at the Assistant Professor level remains unchanged.

## 5. CLEARER STATEMENT ABOUT EXISTING POLICY RE: DECISIONS TO NOT REAPPOINT OR PROMOTE

It has always been the case that decisions to reappoint or promote faculty depend not only on meeting the promotions criteria, but also on the 'fit' between the faculty member's activities and the institution's needs. This concept, widely recognized across all Departments and Centers, also was stated in communications to faculty from the Dean in past years. However, we believe it helpful to have this stated directly in the SMD Regulations of the Faculty. Thus this statement, while new to the Regulations, is not a *change* in policy; rather, it is part of our efforts to be as clear as possible.

### *Do these changes apply to all faculty?*

These changes, if adopted, will apply to all faculty with academic appointments. *All other types of faculty appointments will remain as they are currently*; these include those with Research appointments ("Research Assistant Professor"), professional appointments ("Assistant Professor of Clinical XX"), voluntary appointments ("Clinical Assistant Professor"), and others.

### *You haven't really eliminated the hierarchy completely, because some academic-appointed faculty can get tenure and some can't. Why don't we either allow tenure for everyone, or just get rid of tenure entirely?*

We are not aware of any peer institution offering tenure to faculty members who do not have independent scholarship of some type, e.g., to those on what we currently call the 'Clinician-Teacher' option. As for eliminating tenure, while some faculty members might welcome this, not having tenure would put faculty from some disciplines/fields at a distinct disadvantage compared to peer institutions, limiting our ability to recruit and retain such individuals. The proposed system substantially reduces the sense of hierarchy, but we acknowledge that there are and, we believe, must be some differences among the career paths. In this new system, no one other than the faculty member, the Department Chair, faculty writing referee letters, and faculty serving on the ad hoc committees and Steering Committee will know what activity components were put forth for promotion; faculty titles, and the letter they ultimately get from the University President and the Board of Trustees, will simply state the new rank, not the components.

*You propose to do away with our current academic 'options,' but isn't this really the same options system, just packaged differently?*

It is true that the new components map directly from our current options. We did this on purpose; faculty members need markers to know how their careers are progressing, and referee letter-writers and the peer ad hoc and Steering Committee members need structure to guide assessments as to when the promotions criteria have been met! But we believe and hope that the new approach to these guides will not cause the same sense of hierarchy and angst over "am I C-T or T-C-S?" types of questions.

*Does eliminating the 'options' mean that we will no longer be striving for excellence? Does this mean the promotions system no longer incentivizes scholarly activities?*

We absolutely will expect the same level of excellence as we do now. Indeed, other than the purposely-broadened approach to defining excellence in 'Research' (for reasons described above), the expectations of excellence in each component are the same as now, albeit now more clearly explicated.

Regarding promotions incentivizing scholarship, we believe that the most successful scholarly careers are driven primarily by internal motivations rather than externally imposed rewards. Still, in our proposed system the desire to be eligible for tenure will drive scholarly activities for some faculty members.

*Community is one of our four URM missions — why isn't "Community" its own component? Where do community activities appear in the proposed promotions criteria?*

We considered very seriously whether to create a separate activity component for community; many of the faculty on the workgroup, Steering Committee, and others who provided input have had successful careers built around community activities. In the end we felt strongly that community activities relevant for promotion and tenure already have a home in the current components, as now described explicitly in several areas. For example, professional services that directly improve the health of the community fall under Clinical, similar to other professional services. Education of community members/organizations obviously falls under Teaching (and is now explicitly mentioned as one of the potential educational audiences/venues). And investigations in the community, or other scholarly products related to community work, are captured well by the Research and Scholarship components.

*Why don't the Appendix examples get even more specific? Just tell us how many papers we need to publish!*

We believe strongly that quantitative metrics such as numbers of papers or presentations, or citation indices, fail to sufficiently capture the nuances of originality, significance, impact, and 'fit' with larger priorities of the institution and/or the field that are so important in the assessment of candidates for promotion. For example, precisely how many less-read papers in less-influential journals are equivalent to one prominent paper that has changed a discipline? This is why peer assessments, including referee letters and the ad hoc and Steering committees, are and remain so critical to the process. The new Appendix bullet-pointed examples strive to achieve more specificity, to aid clarity, without using what would be highly problematic quantitative specifics.