Promotion Decisions at Wharton and Elsewhere:

Some Factors Reviewers May Consider in Evaluating Candidates for Promotion to Full Professor¹

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Each candidate for promotion to Full Professor presents a unique set of accomplishments. At most top-quality schools, and certainly at Wharton, there is no formula for determining whether a candidate will be promoted to Full Professor; there are no hard and fast numerical criteria. In evaluating the merits of each candidate’s case for promotion to Full, reviewers undertake a careful, detailed, analytic, and qualitative assessment of the candidate’s record.

In evaluating candidates’ research, internal and external reviewers often consider, implicitly or explicitly, the questions and factors that we outline below, though different reviewers may give different weights to these questions and factors. Our description of these questions and factors captures the shared observations and reflections of a subset of Wharton’s faculty and does not constitute official or unofficial Wharton policy.

Wharton contacts experts in the candidate’s field, asking for their commentary on and recommendation regarding the candidate’s case for promotion to Full Professor. Accordingly, prospective candidates should consider, very soon after their promotion to Associate Professor with tenure, what they would like leading scholars in their fields to say about their work and contributions when they are evaluated for Full Professor.

In evaluating candidates for promotion to Full Professor, external reviewers are likely to focus primarily on the strength of the candidate’s research record, reputation, and impact as that is likely to be the aspect of the candidate’s record that they are in the best position to evaluate. Internal reviewers also consider the candidate’s teaching, service to the Department, School and profession, work with doctoral students and junior faculty, and contributions to the intellectual environment of the Department and School. Individuals are most likely to be promoted to Full Professor if their research record, reputation, and impact are strong and they have made valuable contributions to the Department, School, and profession.

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¹ Note: This document was prepared by the co-chairs of the Committee on Faculty Attraction and Retention (Bob Holthausen and Katherine Klein). Other senior faculty members, with experience as department chairs and/or members of Wharton’s Personnel Committee, provided comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this document. This document was also discussed at the April, 2011 Department Chairs’ meeting and benefited from the comments of the attendees. The views and comments expressed in this memo are meant to be helpful to those who are tenured Associate Professors, but in no way should this be construed as a legally binding document or a statement of some official Wharton Policy. Associate Professors should seek the advice of their department chairs and other senior colleagues.
Has the candidate continued to publish research that is important and novel?

To answer this question internal and external reviewers are likely to assess the extent to which:

- The candidate’s post-tenure publications are perceived to be thought-provoking, innovative, and persuasive, rather than obvious, derivative, repetitive, technically competent but little more, or unconvincing.
- The candidate’s post-tenure publications have defined or substantially contributed to new and important research areas, or substantively extended existing areas of research in new and useful directions.
- The candidate’s post-tenure publications suggest that the candidate is a mature and engaged scholar as evidenced by the superb quality of the candidate’s thinking, insights, theoretical and/or empirical analyses, and conclusions.
- The candidate’s post-tenure publications have enriched and deepened the field’s understanding of important topics in the field, whether these topics are new to the candidate (that is, investigated by the candidate only post-tenure) or instead represent a continuing pre- and post-tenure focus for candidate.

Is the candidate recognized as an established intellectual leader with regard to a given subject area, methodology, or set of topics?

To answer this question, internal and external reviewers are likely to assess the extent to which:

- The candidate’s work has had a strong influence on others’ scholarship, both in the US and internationally subsequent to being granted tenure
- The candidate’s work is focused, thematic, and programmatic, yielding cumulative impact regarding one or more topics.
- The candidate’s contributions are clearly his/her own vs. attributable to co-authors (especially senior co-authors, former advisers, etc.)
- The candidate has written and published high quality manuscripts with junior co-authors or as a sole author.

Is the candidate highly respected and well known in the field?

To answer this question, internal and external reviewers are likely to assess the extent to which:

- The quality and quantity of the candidate’s pre- and post-tenure publications place him or her among the top individuals in the cohort of other academics who received their doctorates at approximately the same time.
The candidate would be hired and granted the rank of Full Professor at other top-tier schools. (Do external letter writers say so explicitly?)

The individual has been recognized as an intellectual leader by being selected to serve on editorial boards or as an editor of one or more top-tier journals in the field.

The candidate has won research awards.

Citation counts suggest that the candidate’s work is having an impact.²

The candidate continues to present work at leading institutions and academic conferences in the field.

Is this person likely to continue to have an impact in the field?

To answer this question, internal and external reviewers are likely to assess the extent to which:

- The quality, quantity, and pacing of his/her publications give confidence that the candidate will continue to conduct research and publish impressive work at a reasonable rate in the future.
- The rate of productivity has diminished little, if at all, post-tenure.
- The candidate’s “three best [or most representative] publications” at the time of evaluation for promotion to Full Professor include at least one and, in most cases, preferably two post-tenure papers.
- The candidate’s pipeline of research (e.g., working papers, data sets, current research projects, and research agenda) gives confidence regarding the quality and quantity of the candidate’s future scholarly productivity and intellectual impact.

Because internal reviewers have a somewhat different vantage point than external reviewers do, they also ask, implicitly or explicitly, how valuable the individual is to the School and Department.

To answer this question, internal reviewers are likely to assess the extent to which:

- The candidate’s scholarship and reputation enhance the prestige of the department and the School.
- The candidate is highly regarded as a teacher and/or has developed valuable new courses or course material.
- The candidate mentors and advises doctoral students and junior faculty in the department.
- The candidate is an active and important contributor and participant in the intellectual life of the department.
- The candidate is an important contributor or leader on the departmental, School, or University committees on which he or she serves.

² Some reviewers include citation counts and make comparisons to the citation counts of other scholars; others do not. Citation counts can be an imprecise measure of an individual’s research impact for a variety of reasons. Wharton does not have an official policy regarding the use of citation counts and the School does not require or request that citation counts be calculated.