

Questions and Answers about “Department Guidelines” Professional Standards Committee

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General questions about the purpose, creation, and approval of guidelines:

Q. What are “Department Guidelines?”

A. Under both the old and the new University RTP policies, departments are allowed to craft documents that “relate the university-wide policy on criteria and standards to the professional standards and breadth of activities of their particular discipline(s)” (4.1.1, S15-7). In other words, these documents explain how fairly broad university-wide criteria relate to the kinds of documentation of activities and achievements that are typical within a particular academic field.

Q. Do we have to have department guidelines?

A. Except for Counseling and the Library, the answer is no. Since those two academic units do not teach in the typical sense, they need guidelines to explain to outsiders how to evaluate “academic assignment” for their faculty.

Q. OK, so we don’t have to have guidelines. Should we choose to have them anyway?

A. That depends. Currently, about one half of departments do have guidelines and one half do not. Here is a rule of thumb for making the decision: if your department’s teaching, service, and scholarly activity is not particularly idiosyncratic, then you don’t need guidelines. But if your faculty do things that faculty in other disciplines are not apt to understand, then you probably do need guidelines.

Q. How do guidelines help faculty and administrators in other departments and fields?

A. The main purpose of guidelines is not for your own department. The main purpose of guidelines is to explain to faculty and administrators outside your department what they need to know to make fair and informed judgments when evaluating your faculty. Department guidelines are *created* by a department but they mainly *guide* people outside the department.

Q. My department already has guidelines for the old policy (S98-8.) What is different about guidelines for the new policy (S15-7 and S15-8)?

A. The new guidelines need to give hypothetical “profiles of accomplishments that would warrant a given level of achievement” while the old guidelines did not. Under the new policies evaluators will be applying a rubric to dossiers and rating the level of achievements; the new guidelines will give evaluators examples of achievements that would earn the various levels (excellent, good, baseline, unsatisfactory) in the three areas (Academic Assignment, Scholarly/Artistic/Professional Achievement, Service.) These model profiles

are the most important difference between the old guidelines and the new, although there are some others too.

Q. OK, so we have decided we need guidelines. What do we do?

A. First, your department needs to create the guidelines. It is entirely up to you to decide on the best process to do that. Then your department needs to approve them. All tenured and tenure track faculty, and FERPed faculty if in their active semester, have the right to vote to approve or not to approve your draft guidelines. The vote needs to be conducted by written secret ballot. When approved, send your guidelines, with the final vote, to Faculty Affairs.

Q. And then we have guidelines?

A. No. There is a careful review process before your guidelines can be approved. Faculty Affairs will consult with your Dean, and the guidelines will be reviewed by your College RTP committee and by the Professional Standards committee. Frequently there will be suggestions for modification. Professional Standards will make a recommendation to approve or not to approve them, and the ultimate decision is made by the AVP for Faculty Affairs.

Q. How long will all of that take?

A. Often it can take a semester to conduct the back-and-forth consultation that ultimately results in approval. It is a bit shorter than approving a new piece of curriculum, but still a substantial period of time.

Q. So when should we submit our guidelines?

A. If you want to have a good chance of getting them ready to be used in AY 2016-17, they should be received by Faculty Affairs by January 27, 2016. There is always a chance that guidelines submitted later might be approved in time for next year, but given the large number of departments doing new guidelines to get ready for the new policy, it will be difficult to rush anything through.

Q. OK, well, maybe we should just continue to use our old guidelines for a while, then.

A. Your old guidelines cannot be used for the new policy. If you do not have new guidelines approved before next AY starts, then candidates who are evaluated under the new policy will not be covered by any guidelines. However, during a transition period, some of your faculty may continue to be evaluated under the old policy. For those faculty, the old guidelines will continue to apply. We have provided a separate document to explain this transition.

Questions about how guidelines should discuss “Resources”

Q. The policy says guidelines must "provide realistic estimates of the resources required to meet each given level of achievement." Why?

A. This is one of the requirements of the new guidelines that did not exist in the old guidelines. They were inserted to better guide candidates in our "resource intensive" disciplines, and to help evaluators understand their circumstances. By "resource intensive" we mean those disciplines where it is unrealistic for faculty to achieve a very high level of Scholarly/Artistic/Professional Achievement without obtaining substantial external support. Guidelines in those disciplines should explain resource issues so that 1) new faculty planning their professional development will know early on what they will need to do to be able to reach their goals, and 2) so that evaluators who are not part of that discipline will give appropriate credit to faculty who succeed in finding the resources necessary to fund a high level of achievement in their research.

Q. So, if we are not one of those "resource intensive" disciplines then our guidelines do not need to talk about resources?

A. You still need to talk about resources if you create guidelines, but the discussion can be relatively brief and straightforward, since it is likely that your discipline's resource issues are relatively standard and well understood by committees and administrators throughout the university. For example, as with the old dossiers, candidates still must list assigned time, grants, sabbaticals, etc.

Q. So do we need to discuss both internal and external resources?

A. Guidelines should "guide" candidates to list all resources in their dossiers, whether internal or external. But only those "resource intensive" disciplines—where external resources are more or less mandatory—need to explain the resource situation in greater depth.

Q. Can we define "Good" in RSCA to mean that the candidate has obtained \$100,000 in grants?

A. No. Levels of achievement in the RSCA category should not be defined by the size or amounts of grants or external support, but by the quality and quantity of scholarly work. Department guidelines produce "guidance" and can inform candidates and those evaluators who stand outside the discipline what amounts of external resources are typically needed to reach the various levels of achievement. But since a candidate may be able to find a way to reach a high level of achievement with fewer resources than expected, such guidance is just that—guidance.

Q. What if guidelines say that candidates must have \$100,000 in start-up funds, but the candidate doesn't receive that? Are they released from the requirement to do scholarship?

A. Guidelines provide guidance, they cannot establish requirements, so such a requirement would be inappropriate for guidelines. The size of a start-up package is, however, routinely negotiated and appears in the appointment letter, and the appointment letter becomes part of the dossier, so evaluators can take it into consideration.

Questions about the content of guidelines

Q. How can we use our accreditation standards in our guidelines?

A. Since department guidelines “provide hypothetical examples of profiles that would warrant a given level of achievement,” the best way to utilize accreditation standards is to adapt their language for use in those examples. So while the basic descriptors in S15-8 may not be changed or replaced to account for specific accreditation standards, department guidelines may illustrate these descriptors with examples that can be drawn from accreditation language.

Q. Can we use guidelines to require candidates to obtain external reviews of their scholarship?

A. Department guidelines cannot require anything—they provide guidance. However, it is well within the intent of the policy to allow guidelines to explain what kinds of documentation would typically be needed to establish that scholarship has reached a given level of achievement. So the hypothetical profile of an “excellent” level of scholarship could include some number of external reviews that attest that the assembled scholarship is “recognized as significant within the discipline,” as the descriptor for “excellent” requires.

Q. If we include something into our guidelines--for example, external review-- and the candidate doesn’t do it, does that mean we should deny tenure or promotion?

A. No, you cannot deny a candidate simply for deciding not to follow your guidance. A candidate can only be denied for failing to meet the criteria of the policy. But if your guidance was good, then it is (unfortunately) likely that candidates who do not follow it might encounter substantive problems. It is as if department guidelines came with a warning like this: “Here is a suggested profile. Candidates who match this profile have in our view attained the level of ‘excellence’ in RSCA. You still might reach excellence by following some other model, but be aware that we have not vetted alternative approaches. If you depart from this model, there could be disagreement among reviewers about the significance of your accomplishments. Take care to consult widely beforehand and to be especially careful to document the significance of your accomplishments.”

Q. What can we suggest in our guidelines to help to help us assess the impact of scholarly work?

A. Just about any tool your discipline thinks appropriate can be suggested via your examples. Outside reviewers or impact factors or citation indexes or the acceptance rates of journals or publication in an elite university press—all of these could be used in model profiles to communicate what is typically needed to document a given level of achievement. But as with outside review, this constitutes guidance. Allowance always should be made for the candidate who comes up with a successful but unanticipated way of demonstrating scholarly impact.

Q. If we want to encourage more scholarship, we should suggest very high standards for scholarship in our guidelines, right?

A. Departments are best advised to be pragmatic and realistic when writing the model profiles for their guidelines. Otherwise the guidelines could produce unanticipated consequences. For example, if your department highly values scholarship you may be tempted to create profiles that suggest extremely high levels of accomplishment. But if the examples seem unattainable or extremely difficult, guidelines could have the effect of encouraging your faculty to deemphasize scholarship in their careers and instead to focus energy on the remaining categories. Instead, offer examples that some faculty in your department have actually attained in recent years, and make the various levels of achievement (Excellent, Good, Baseline) represent a reasonably wide range of achievement.

Q. Should we create guidelines for Academic Assignment or for Service?

A. If you are the Library or Counseling, then the policy requires that you create guidelines for Academic Assignment, since most evaluators outside of your units will not understand how to fairly evaluate this category without your guidance. For everyone else, your department should ask whether the teaching or the service that your candidates do is sufficiently idiosyncratic to demand explanation to outsiders. Some kinds of professional service, for example, may not be commonly understood outside your department. Read the Criteria and Standards policy to see if the basic language might be enough to cover your achievements. The new policy is more helpful than the old in this regard.

Q. Can guidelines discuss documentation?

A. Absolutely, that is one of their best functions. This is especially useful if your discipline has ways of documenting achievements that are idiosyncratic and not commonly understood outside your department. For example, most evaluators outside of Art will not know much about juried shows, most evaluators outside of Counseling will not know much about the Academic Assignment of counselors, etc. How should these outsiders distinguish between Excellent, Good, and Baselines levels of achievement? They cannot do so unless your guidelines explain how. Guidelines "guide" their judgment to help it be fair and informed.

Questions about Professional Service

Q. Faculty in my department engage in a lot of professional service. What do we need to do in our guidelines to make sure that this kind of service is appropriately rewarded?

A. Excellence in professional service will likely help candidates more under the new policy than under the old, since it now contributes to raising the level of achievement in the new "Service" category. In contrast, under the old policy this kind of service was duly noted but often languished as an afterthought under the same category as publications and artistic achievements.

Q. That is well and good, but in our discipline we won't have much to go under the Scholarship category since most of what we do is Professional Service.

A. The policy has made allowance for your situation. If in fact “professional activities are the primary method of demonstrating expertise within the discipline” (S15-8, 2.3.4), then you may make the case in your guidelines that professional service be evaluated under the RSCA category instead. Note the word “primary.” If your discipline uses both conventional scholarship and professional service to establish expertise, you are probably better off leaving professional service in the “Service” category. Under the new policy, “Service” can be important in establishing the case for advancement, and moving the professional activities to the RSCA category could weaken a candidate’s ability to demonstrate a strong service profile.

Questions about College guidelines

Q. How do we create college guidelines?

A. “Department Guidelines” are the only official documents sanctioned by the University Policies, while “College Guidelines” is an unofficial designation. College guidelines can be created *de facto* by the act of all the departments of a college adopting the same text for their department guidelines and then calling them “College Guidelines” for convenience. The individual departments each file their department guidelines with Faculty Affairs individually, and report the votes to approve them by department, even though the text of the guidelines might be the same in each case. This is necessary because an individual department might decide to independently revise its guidelines at some point in the future.

Q. So can we adopt college-wide guidelines with some individual variants?

A. Yes, if the departments each separately vote to approve a common document. You could, however, reach a point where common guidelines with variants defeats the purpose of guidelines, given that the purpose is to communicate a discipline’s unique issues in professional development to outside evaluators. If the “variants” get too elaborate they are apt to be more confusing to outsiders than helpful, in which case separate department guidelines would be a more straightforward solution.

Q. What if most of the departments within a college adopt a common document, but one or two do not?

A. Then most of the departments are covered by a common document, but one or two are not.

Questions on submission, review, and approval of department guidelines

Q. What kind of format is needed for the guidelines? Can they be embedded in the current descriptors or do they need to be in a separate document?

A. Guidelines should be in a separate document although they will obviously make reference to descriptors and the University Policies. When a department’s faculty vote on guidelines, there should be no confusion about what they are voting on—they must vote on the language of the guidelines and not vote on the language of the University Policies. Therefore, guidelines should NOT be integrated into the University Policy language.

Q. Who has to approve our guidelines?

A. There are only two official approvals that must be obtained: 1) the department vote to approve or not to approve, and 2) acceptance by the AVP for Faculty Affairs “in consultation with the Professional Standards Committee.” However, the new policy establishes that “Prior to making its recommendation, the Professional Standards Committee shall solicit the input both of the home department and of the corresponding college RTP committee.”

Q. How does our department approve our guidelines, and where do we send them?

A. Your department must vote on the document and approve it by majority vote. The document should be sent along with the vote directly to Faculty Affairs. Tenured, tenure-track, and FERP faculty in their active semester may vote.

Q. What is the role of College RTP committees?

A. The new policy also establishes some criteria for evaluating department guidelines that must be used to decide whether to approve them. Among them is the requirement that “They are equitable across departments.” College RTP committees will be asked to look at Department guidelines in part to determine if they are in fact “equitable across departments.”

Q. What will be the procedures for the College RTP Committee review?

A. When department guidelines are submitted to Faculty Affairs, the guidelines will be distributed to the appropriate College RTP committee for feedback. (To facilitate speedy consideration of the guidelines, the electronic addresses of all members of the College RTP committee should be kept available so they can be promptly contacted.) It will be up to each College RTP Committee to decide whether to meet to discuss draft guidelines, whether make a formal recommendation via a committee vote, or whether simply to respond individually to Professional Standards and the AVP with concerns and suggestions. Whatever advice the College committees provide will be welcome and reviewed by PS prior to its making a recommendation to the AVP for Faculty Affairs.

Q. What is the role of the Professional Standards committee?

A. We advise the AVP for Faculty Affairs, who has worked closely with us in reviewing guidelines.

Q. What is the role of the Dean?

A. The involvement of the Dean in reviewing guidelines will be supervised by the AVP for Faculty Affairs, since this is an administrative matter. It is expected that the AVP will solicit the Dean’s review as soon as guidelines are delivered to Faculty Affairs. However, Professional Standards recommends that departments consult with their Dean earlier than that--as they develop their guidelines-- to avoid problems further along in the approval process.

Questions about timelines and the transition from old guidelines to new

Q. We have guidelines for the old policy. Do we have to review these in five years?

A. No. You do need to keep them available during the phase-in of the new policy, since you may have candidates who will choose to be reviewed under the Criteria and Standards of the old policy to which your old guidelines apply. But Professional Standards had decided to suspend the regular review of those existing guidelines made under the old policy S98-8 during the phase-out. When S98-8 is entirely phased-out, all old guidelines will become irrelevant.

Q. When do we need to submit our guidelines for approval?

A. January 27, 2016.

Q. Is it possible that the 1/27 deadline can be extended?

A. It is possible that Faculty Affairs and Professional Standards may be able to approve guidelines that reach us after 1/27, but we can make no guarantees. Guidelines that reach Faculty Affairs must then be shared with College RTP Committees and Deans for feedback prior to our committee's deliberation. It is also common for guidelines to be returned for suggested revisions before approval by the AVP. All of this takes time—and a full semester could likely be needed.

Q. If we don't have new guidelines in place until next year, what guidelines will cover the faculty we are currently hiring?

A. Since new hires (hired AY 2015-16 to start in AY 2016-17) must be reviewed under the new policy (S15-8) any old guidelines approved for S98-8 will not apply to them. If there are no new guidelines approved for S15-8 by the time your new hires start, then they will be reviewed with no department guidelines. If department guidelines are eventually approved after they start, then they may choose to be reviewed with the new department guidelines or with no guidelines.

Q. If departmental guidelines are voted on in Fall16 at the first day faculty meeting, will they go into effect immediately?

A. No. Department guidelines must be reviewed and approved through a process after a Department votes to approve them, so a department vote at the beginning of Fall 16 would only start a review process that would take some time to complete.

Q. What happens if we pass some guidelines but decide to change them later?

A. Provided that your department complies with the policy, this is permitted. As is true now, whenever department guidelines change during a faculty member's review period, the faculty member has the choice of whether to include the old guidelines or the new guidelines when submitting the dossier.

Questions about Cross-Department concerns and Interdisciplinary Achievements

Q. Our college wishes to promote interdisciplinary work. How will department guidelines play out in interdisciplinary context?

A. Guidelines by themselves are probably not going to answer all the questions about interdisciplinary work. The new policy does contain a number of improvements to encourage flexibility that may be useful in an interdisciplinary context—apart from guidelines. But one possible option to promote interdisciplinary work is to not use department guidelines at all.

Q. Not use guidelines? Why not?

A. The main purpose of guidelines is to communicate a specific discipline's idiosyncrasies to outsiders who otherwise might not understand them. As such, guidelines by their nature will tend to give evaluators a narrower view of the standards and criteria as they apply to a given candidate. If your college wishes to keep the view as broad as possible, then relying on the breadth of the policy's generic descriptors could be a good option.

Q. Are there other solutions that might promote interdisciplinary work without abandoning department guidelines altogether?

A. Yes. As has been described in an earlier answer—guidelines can more explicitly describe the kinds of documentation that are appropriate for establishing any given level of achievement. Department based guidelines could give examples of appropriate documentation to do this for interdisciplinary work. If constructing such guidelines, keep in mind the unique needs of faculty who are trained in a single discipline who find themselves working a new interdisciplinary context; and those faculty who have actually been trained in an interdisciplinary discipline. These two approaches may both need to be respected.

Q. What is to prevent separate departments from adopting guidelines that have the effect of making tenure and promotion more difficult for faculty in one department than in another?

A. The review process. See an earlier answer about the role of College RTP committees and the policy requirement that guidelines be “equitable across departments.”

Q. How should our guidelines deal with joint appointments, or with faculty who are shared with outside institutions?

A. Such faculty are rare at SJSU, and for the most part their situations needs to be worked out with Faculty Affairs, through their appointment letters or other agreements. The policy does allow “Departments which contain more than one discipline, or contain very different subdisciplines, may produce more than one set of specialized guidelines.” So it is possible for your department to craft specialized guidelines just for a unique kind of faculty member. You might wish to do so if this is an ongoing issue for faculty in your department, rather than a rare case.

Other concerns that are indirectly related to department guidelines.

Q. Into what category does faculty mentoring of students go? Can't a case be made for any of the three, depending on the kind of mentoring?

A. Yes, it does depend on the type of mentoring. Service is described in S15-8, and in 2.4.1 it says that service includes "Advising, mentoring, and participating in activities to enhance student success that are not subsumed in teaching or the primary academic assignment." This is the same basic distinction made in the old policy S98-8 between I.A and I.B.

Q. Is the intent of guidelines in relationship to the new RTP policy to make it harder, easier, or clearer to obtain tenure and promotion? Will Professional Standards take a public stance on this?

A. The intent is not to make it harder or easier to obtain tenure or promotion, but to increase the flexibility of professional development while making the requirements more transparent. While the level of achievement expected for advancement in any one of the three categories could become more difficult at the highest level (excellent), the additional flexibility between the three categories should make it easier for candidates to choose to play to their strengths rather than their weaknesses.

Q. How will descriptors be used for RTP - What if someone is baseline in every category?

A. Baseline is a minimal but not sufficient level for advancement. Falling below baseline in any category is unacceptable, but the policy requires a higher level of achievement in at least one or two categories for advancement, with certain limits. This is explained in section 4.0 "Standards required for Tenure, Promotion to Associate, and Promotion to Professor" of S15-8.

Q. I am concerned that the rating system "grades" faculty and could be disruptive.

A. At first, the process of assigning ratings to a faculty member's three areas of achievement may be uncomfortable both for the evaluators and the evaluated. But the new policy was formed in response to a faculty survey that generated numerous faculty complaints about a lack of transparency in the existing system. By requiring ratings in the three areas, the policy protects the ability of an individual candidate to shape his or her professional development pathway within certain limits. It also assures that negative votes or decisions cannot be cloaked in ambiguous or generic language, but must be justified in terms of specific levels of performance in one or more specific categories

Q. I am concerned that the new system will allow faculty to reduce their service.

A. The new policy was designed to increase the seriousness with which service is evaluated and credited. Every candidate will now receive a rating in the new service category. Candidates who fall below "baseline" will not be tenured or promoted. Similarly, good or excellent service can now be more expressly rewarded. For example, at the level of promotion

to Professor, it would be very difficult for a candidate to advance without at least a “good” level of service. Furthermore, the new policy established that “Significant service should be systematically evaluated” rather than simply listed or enumerated. Crucially, to achieve the level of “Good” the descriptor requires that “In at least one facet of service, the candidate will have demonstrated leadership resulting in tangible, documented achievements.”