

Resolution Regarding Continuance, Promotion, and Tenure Criteria with respect to the COVID Pandemic

The faculty of Western Kentucky University recognize that the COVID pandemic has wreaked havoc with tenure and promotion expectations. The faculty further recognize and appreciate the initial steps taken by WKU administration to help alleviate these issues as outlined by the Provost in her April 13, 2020, email, namely

1. Allowing faculty to choose whether to include data from Spring 2020 course evaluations in their continuance, promotion, and tenure materials, and
2. Allowing faculty to extend the probationary period for tenure and promotion by one year.

As the 2020-2021 academic year comes to end, we now know more about how the pandemic has affected faculty careers in terms of teaching, research productivity, and service. Faculty have had to learn how to create and deliver courses in modalities they had never worked with before. This has taken considerable time and effort but has not necessarily produced positive course evaluations given students' own stress levels. With respect to research, conferences have been cancelled, research funding has been drastically reduced, many areas of research have been harder to conduct, and publication processes have been greatly slowed. We also know how such effects have hit some populations of faculty harder than others. For example, research has shown how publication rates have differed for female faculty, faculty of color, and caregivers. We have also learned more about how the above mentioned policies have been implemented at WKU.

Having consulted with faculty members at WKU and having researched accommodations made by WKU's benchmark institutions, the Faculty Senate proposes the following two groups of actions. The first pertains to the probationary period extension and how it can be made more equitable. The second acknowledges that a probationary period extension may not be the most equitable solution for every faculty member, so additional actions should be implemented.

With respect to probationary period extensions, we propose that:

1. All affected faculty be allowed to extend the probationary period for tenure and/or promotion by one year.
2. Such probationary period extensions due to COVID shall not be denied due to previous probationary extension(s) governed by the WKU Faculty Handbook Section IV.B.4. and WKU Academic Affairs Policy 1.1241.
3. A future request by a faculty member to extend the probationary period due to reasons listed in the aforementioned Handbook section and Academic Affairs policy shall not be denied due to a previously granted COVID-related probationary period extension.
4. If a faculty member takes a probationary period extension, they may choose to go up for tenure and/or promotion in their original tenure and/or promotion year and be held to normal tenure and promotion standards, not exceptional standards associated with

going up for tenure and/or promotion “early”. If the faculty member is not granted tenure and/or promotion at that time, they may go up for tenure and/or promotion again at the end of their probationary period extension.

The faculty also recognize that at WKU promotions are typically the only opportunities for major pay raises during faculty careers. If a faculty member’s raise is delayed, their lifetime earnings are diminished. Furthermore, faculty members from historically underrepresented populations are disproportionately disaffected by the pandemic, more likely to have to take a probationary period extension, and more likely to suffer the financial effects of delayed promotion. Therefore, we propose:

1. That any faculty member who is promoted after having requested and used a probationary period extension shall be granted a lump sum payment equal to the amount of the raise associated with the promotion in order to make them whole after having their promotion delayed due to the pandemic. If a faculty raise occurred during the previous year, the raise will be factored into the lump sum payment and promotion raise as well.
2. That the provost shall require
 - a. departments to specifically and measurably adjust their tenure and promotion requirements due to the pandemic,
 - b. department chairs/heads/directors to communicate such adjustments to their faculty and to their dean,
 - c. deans to communicate adjustments to the provost, and
 - d. the provost to report to the Faculty Senate these adjustments.