

**Department of Horticulture  
Promotion and Tenure Mentoring Guidelines**

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## **I. The Relationship between You and Your Mentors**

Starting any new job can be disorienting and stressful. Academic jobs have their own unique challenges and pressures. The often bewildering nature of the University bureaucracy, particularly the promotion and tenure (P&T) process, doesn't help. Your colleagues have a wealth of knowledge and experience that can help you negotiate these challenges. More broadly, their creative energy and unique perspectives can help catalyze your own creative thinking and professional excellence.

Your mentors can help you understand the procedural details of the P&T process such as how to convert your CV into the required OSU format. But that is probably the least valuable (although important) service they provide. For one, there are many other resources to help you do that (see Appendix A). Also, those types of procedural questions are probably least interesting to your mentors! Mentors are much more valuable helping you work through the practical details of doing your job and advancing your career. Should you budget a graduate student, postdoc, or faculty research assistant into the grant you are writing? How many papers should you be publishing given your position? How do you document the impact your program is having? What is a good way of demonstrating leadership in your profession? Mentors can also provide you more general professional advice such as how to maintain work-life balance, how to "say no", and how to optimally manage your effort and time. Your mentors can also offer advice if conflicts arise between you and your supervisor, or if you encounter issues you just don't feel comfortable talking with your supervisor about.

Your mentors are a professional resource. They don't formally evaluate your dossier (except as part of other duties they may have such as serving on the departmental P&T committee). How you use this resource and the value you get from it is mostly up to you. You need to take an active role in developing relationships with your mentors that meet your needs.

Don't forget this is a relationship. You have to do your part by being the active partner. Schedule meetings, ask questions, and be prepared. Like any relationship it is easy to let it grow stale as your energies get sapped by other commitments. To help you avoid this, the department has developed the structure and procedures outlined below. It describes how you assemble a mentor committee and describes best practices for getting the most out of your mentors. This structure is a tool, not a strict regulation. Adjust it to meet your needs. Some of the best advice you get will probably come from outside of this formal structure: in hallway conversations, in random encounters at field days or other events, and in spontaneous phone calls.

In addition, keep in mind that your mentors are just one source of professional advice. Other faculty both within and outside our department as well as at other institutions can be valuable sources of professional advice.

## **II. Composition and Appointment of the Mentor Committee**

### **A. Size**

The committee should consist of at least **two members**. You can include more members if you wish, but be cognizant of how that will complicate logistics. You can, of course, ask people for advice even if they are not formally on your committee. Also, be sensitive to the fact that asking someone to be a formal mentor is a use of their time and energy.

### **B. Composition**

Characteristics that you want represented on your committee include:

- Working experience at OSU.
- Familiarity with how the Horticulture and College of Agricultural Sciences (CAS) P&T process works.
- An understanding of the specific challenges and expectations of your type of position and duties.
- An understanding of the specific challenges and expectations of your disciplinary focus or stakeholders.
- Someone local that you can walk down the hall and talk with.
- Someone you are comfortable talking with.
- Someone who wants to and has the time to be your mentor.

With the exception of the last two bullet points, not all of these characteristics need to be embodied within a single person. In fact, they rarely are. For example, you might be the only Horticulture faculty at your duty station, but an experienced faculty member from another department such as Animal and Rangeland Sciences could still provide valuable advice. Besides being more available to talk with, they also probably have very good advice on how to negotiate the unique challenges of your duty station. They might have even served on the CAS P&T committee. Your second mentor could then be a Horticulture faculty member who understands how Horticulture does things. They might also have other useful experience, such as understanding the quirks and needs of your stakeholders.

### **C. Assembling the Mentor Committee**

At first you probably have no clue who might make a good mentor. You should **start the mentor search by talking with your supervisor(s) within 6 months after your hire**. They have the most comprehensive understanding of who might be a good fit for you. They will provide you with several suggestions and recommendations.

Armed with a working short list, talk with potential mentors. You want to gauge whether you can easily work and talk with them, and equally importantly whether they have the interest and time to be an actively engaged mentor. These elements are very important, and only you can really assess them.

You can change the composition of your committee as time goes on. This can happen for any number of reasons from realizing that you don't really work well with a person, because your position description changes making an adjustment of your mentors advisable, or one of your mentors is no longer available for whatever reason.

Once you have verbal agreements from folks to be your mentors, ask your supervisor to formally appoint them to your mentor committee (See II.D).

#### **D. Appointment**

**At your request**, your supervisor will formally appoint mentors using the appointment template in Appendix B. A formal record of your mentor committee membership will be held by the Department. The formal appointment has two main goals. It makes sure everyone is on the same page, and it also commits everyone to being conscientious and engaged in their mentoring/mentee roles.

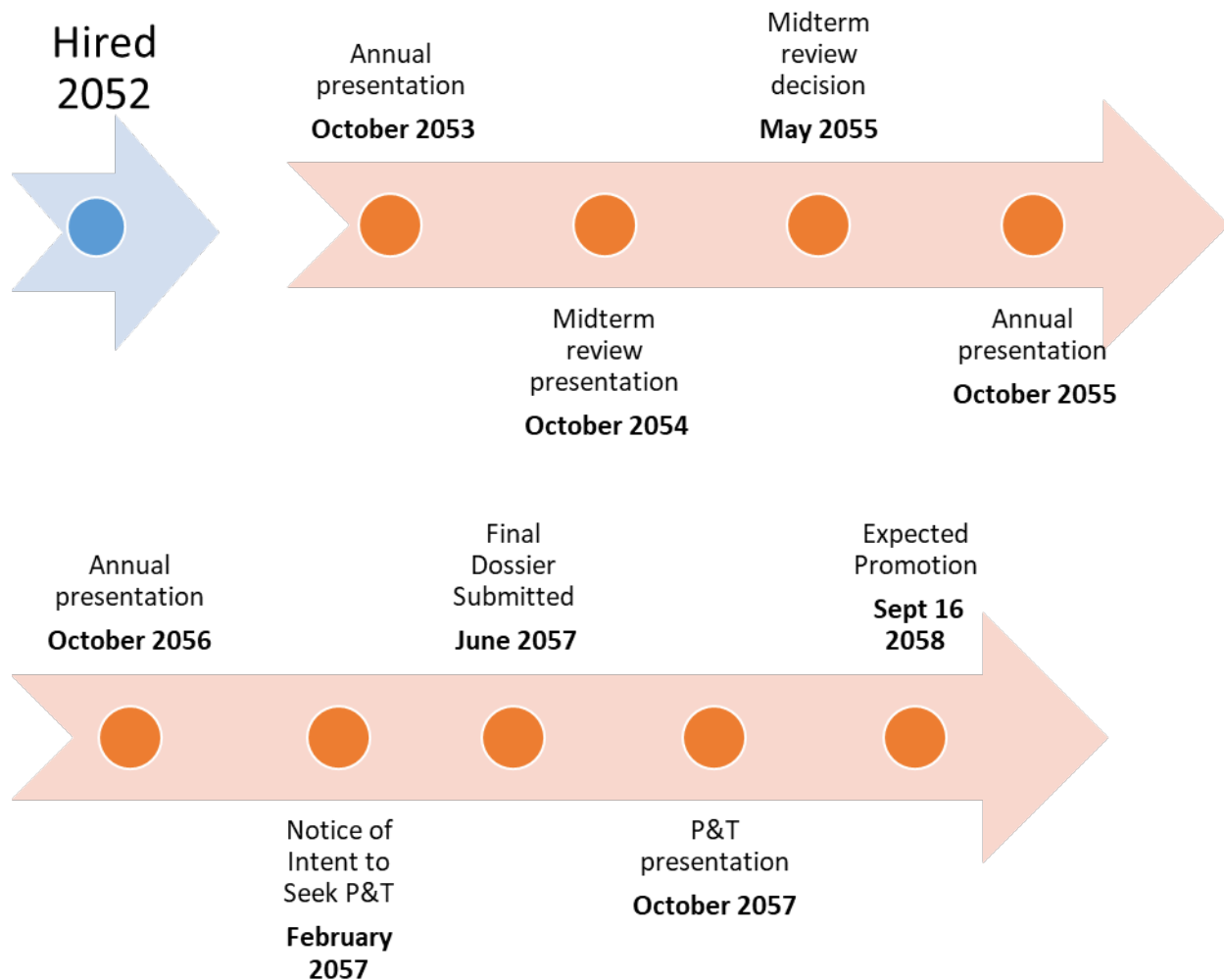
### **III. Purpose and Activities of the Mentor Committee**

The purpose of your mentor committee is to consult and advise you as you advance through the P&T process and as you advance professionally in your career. As such, you have the autonomy and flexibility to shape the relationship and interactions with your committee in a way that works best for you. As you work with your mentors you will probably find that some approaches and structures work better than others given your and your mentors' idiosyncratic circumstances. That said, you probably won't have a good sense of how to optimally get the most out of your mentors in the beginning. What follows are some suggestions for how to organize things. In addition, no matter what organization you choose, there are a few things that you and your mentors should do. These are highlighted in bold.

#### **A. Scheduling Meetings**

How often and how you meet with your mentors is up to you. Much of your interaction with mentors will likely come in the form one-on-one meetings. However, it is a good idea to have at least some meetings with your full mentoring committee. Sitting down together as a group allows everyone to hear your questions, understand your challenges, and bounce ideas off of each other. A meeting with scheduled objectives (See section III.B) can also identify issues or problems early on that might otherwise get overlooked.

Your target promotion date establishes a sequence of events and deadlines (Figure 1). The appropriate timing and frequency of meetings with your full mentoring committee is influenced by your target promotion date, which in turn is influenced by your type of position and specific needs.



**Figure 1.** An example timeline of important workflow milestones leading up to an expected promotion or tenure date. This example is for a tenure track faculty with an expected promotion date of September 16, 2058, OSU’s bicentennial year! Note that in any given year the universal promotion date is September 16 for 9 month appointments and July 1 for 12 month appointments. The timeline and milestones for your position may differ from this example. Consult with your supervisor for your specific schedule and with the Horticulture Promotion and Tenure Guidelines and Procedures (Appendix A) for a more detailed timeline.

*Tenure track*

In this case the promotion decision date is fixed. It is advisable to have at least one meeting per year of your full mentoring committee as you progress towards that date.

### *Non-tenured positions*

If you are in a non-tenured position, your date of possible promotion is more flexible. Professors of Practice (POP) are generally expected to follow a timeline similar to that of tenure track faculty, although this is not mandatory. If your position is largely self-funded from external sources that may be a factor influencing your decision to seek promotion. It is a good idea to have a meeting of your committee soon after you constitute it so that your mentors can advise you about your promotion schedule and how that influences the development of your dossier. It is also good to have a meeting of your whole mentoring committee a little more than one year prior to you needing to have your documents ready (approximately 2 years prior to September 16 of the year you want to be promoted). The Department also requires paperwork indicating you are planning to go forward for promotion the following year and a presentation to the full faculty (for input) the autumn before this (1.5 years prior to July 1/September 16 intended promotion date).

### *Tenured faculty*

Like non-tenured positions the date of possible promotion is flexible (e.g. Associate to Full Professor). Also, the members of your original mentor committee may have retired or no longer be at the University. It is still a good idea to convene a committee meeting of mentors a little more than one year prior to you needing to have your documents ready (approximately 2 years prior to July 1 of the year you want to be promoted). You are strongly encouraged to prepare by giving a presentation the year prior to the actual “promotion” presentation so you can get feedback from the full faculty. The Department also requires paperwork indicating you are planning to go forward for promotion the following year and a presentation to the full faculty (for input) the autumn before this (1.5 years prior to July 1 intended promotion date).

Again, you should feel free to adjust the frequency, timing, and nature of meetings with your mentor committee to fit your preferences and circumstance. For example, you may find that asking your mentors to comment on and edit your CV and candidate statement via an email thread is effective and efficient. If you frequently see your mentors and can easily have individual conversations with them, you might have less need/desire for meetings of your full committee. However, if you are at an off-campus duty station, you might value scheduled meetings of the full committee. **Ultimately, you are responsible for scheduling mentoring meetings.**

## **B. Mentoring Tasks**

Similar to scheduling, how you utilize mentors is up to you. The most valuable advice you get is going to be highly personalized and perhaps unexpected. For example, when a mentor pulls you aside and tells you that you need to put everything else on hold and devote a month to getting those three draft manuscripts published. Still, the highly structured nature of the P&T process creates some clear areas in which to involve your mentors.

### *Reviewing the CV and candidate's statement*

One of the most important roles mentors can provide is reviewing your CV and CS. Part of this is simply to catch errors with sharp-eyed copy editing. More importantly, your mentors can help mold your CV and CS into compelling advocacy documents for your promotion. Keep in mind that many of the people who will be evaluating your promotion will only know you and your work from these two documents. You want the good work you've done to be conveyed in the best way possible. Your mentors can help you do this.

You should continually revise, and your mentors should review and provide feedback on, your CV and CS. **If you are tenure track faculty or a Professor of Practice, you and your committee must do this every year prior to dossier submission. If you are in a non-tenure track or tenured position, you and your committee must do this a little more than one year prior to you needing to have your documents ready.**

It can easily take several hours to evaluate and review a CV and candidate's statement. You should be considerate of this and **provide your documents to your mentors WELL in advance of you needing to have them done.** Some mentors may need more time than others because they have several other mentees submitting documents for them to review or because they are swamped with other responsibilities. Talk to them and ASK how much time they need and work with this making sure you send them your materials in time.

Like anything you are hoping to get feedback on, the more you prepare the more substantive and valuable the feedback will be. Asking to get a mentor's feedback on a CV or CS you hurriedly put together late the night before and that you need to submit later that day is not a recipe for success. Even worse, is not asking for help at all. Don't put the people invested in your success, such as your supervisor and colleagues on the P&T committee, in the position of worrying that the documents you submitted are not the best that they could be. It is NOT the job of the Department Head or P&T Committee members to review and fix any errors. It is your job to make sure it is in good shape **before** it goes forward for mid-term review or external review for promotion. Your CS and CV **cannot** be fixed or altered in any way **AFTER** it has gone out for external review. This is understandable as external reviews may make a comment about spelling errors or contradictory numbers of publications in their letter – if documents are then changed later this will raise a flag when the dossier is reviewed at the CAS or University level. Take responsibility, plan ahead, and invest the effort. That includes giving your mentors the opportunity and enough time to maximize the feedback they can provide.

### *Advising on the development of other dossier elements*

You will coordinate the development of the other elements of your dossier. Your mentors can advise you on the best way to go about doing this. This includes helping you choose peer reviewers of your teaching, helping you by suggesting names to put forward as outside reviewers of your dossier, and advising on clientele or student survey/lists.

### *Reviewing your position description*

Your PD is a crucial part of the P&T process because it is what you will be evaluated against. You therefore want this to accurately reflect what you do. That sounds obvious, but your job will likely evolve – sometimes to the point that it no longer closely resembles your existing PD. It can be easy not to notice this, and often the first people who do are the members of the P&T committee evaluating your dossier. You don't want that to happen. Your mentors can help you catch any divergence in enough time to correct things, either by redirecting your efforts or by discussing a change of the PD with your supervisor. But, like you, your mentors are probably not thinking about this. It is therefore a good idea to regularly review your PD with your mentors and to remember to critically review it at each annual review with your supervisor(s).

### *Keeping on track*

The P&T process has a structured sequence of events and timing. The schedule is based on your established tenure date (for tenure track faculty) or your expected/desired promotion date (for non-tenure track or tenured faculty). The sequence and timing are spelled out in the Horticulture and CAS P&T guidelines (Appendix A). That schedule will have an overarching influence on your professional life up until your promotion. It is therefore important that you and your mentors know what that schedule is. Make sure that you discuss it with them soon after you constitute your mentor committee.

## **IV. Annual Departmental P&T Meeting**

If you are in the active P&T pipeline you will be asked to give an annual update of your work and professional progress at the Departmental P&T meeting in early October starting after your first full year of employment. You will also share the current versions of your CV and CS with the faculty. It is important that you attend and participate fully in these meetings. The meetings help you in several ways.

First, the meetings serve as mileposts around which you should schedule working on your CV and CS and getting substantive feedback from your mentors. You want to work on those documents and get feedback well before you need to submit them for the meeting.

Second, the meetings are a way to get feedback from the broader faculty not just your mentors. Getting the perspective of fresh eyes is always good, particularly from folks who may not closely understand your program. Your P&T will be evaluated mostly by people who don't know your program very well and have a limited amount of time in which to learn about it (by reading your dossier). If a Horticulture faculty member is confused by how you present your program in the CV and CS, it is likely that an evaluator of your P&T documents external to our department will as well.

Third, the meetings are a fantastic horticulture symposium that will catalyze new ideas, foster collaborations, and hopefully energize you to keep doing exceptional work.



## **V. Important Dates**

As is mentioned above, you and your mentors should understand what your specific promotion schedule is. This varies depending on your type of position, when you were hired in it, and your preferences. Talk with your supervisor and mentors to establish a clear timeline and schedule. There are a couple of particularly important dates to keep in mind.

### *Tenure or expected promotion date*

For tenure track faculty this is explicitly stated in your offer letter, and it is a **serious deadline**. For other positions or circumstances the promotion date may follow general guidelines or be entirely set by you and your supervisor. The tenure or promotion date sets the timing of everything else. Figure 1 describes some of the important milestones leading up to a P&T date. For example, a typical offer letter will say that you need to have a tenure decision by June 15, XXXX. You will need to go forward with documents (CV, CS, and some other dossier items) to external reviewers in **the early summer of the year prior to your tenure decision date**, give a presentation to our faculty at our October P&T meeting thereafter, and provide any needed addenda to your CV (new refereed papers accepted, extension publications in press, new peer-reviewed grant funded) prior to Dec. 31 in time to be considered by CAS and University committees. You will hear about your successful P&T in May (just prior to your July 1/September 16 tenure date).

### *Mid-term review*

Roughly halfway towards your P&T date, CAS will conduct a formal review of your progress. The Departmental Administrative manager will calculate your mid-term review date based on your tenure date or expected promotion date. It's usually 2.5 years after your hire date. So, if you were hired on September 16 of year XXXX, your documents (CS, CV and other required forms would go to the Horticulture Department in Aug/Sept of year XXXX + 2 (give presentation at Hort Dept. P&T meeting in Oct.), provide any updates to CS and CV by November of year XXXX + 2 in time for Hort Dept. P&T committee review. CAS P&T review is usually in March-April (only stays at college for mid-term). It is up to you to find out when your mid-term review is and work backwards so you can meet the required deadlines.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Useful Links**

[OSU Performance Coaching](#)

[OSU Leadership Training](#)

[OSU Faculty Affairs Webpage](#)

[OSU Faculty Handbook](#)

[OSU Promotion and Tenure Guidelines](#)

[CAS Promotion and Tenure Webpage](#)

[Evaluations Guidelines & Procedures](#), the Horticulture webpage contains links to the following documents:

- Horticulture Promotion and Tenure Guidelines and Procedures
- A Brief Primer on Faculty Dossiers - Revised June 2020
- A Quick Start Guide to Promotion and Tenure

## APPENDIX B

### Mentor Appointment Letter Template

[month, day, year]

To: [mentor]

From: [department head]

RE: Mentoring Committee for [mentee], [rank]

Dear [mentor],

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a mentor for [mentee]. Faculty face many challenges at the different stages of their career and having experienced faculty as resources can be a great benefit. Your role is to be a coach, providing advice and information on things like how to bring on a graduate student or post doc, expectations for research and Extension productivity, program direction, networking on/off campus and abroad, teaching tips, and departmental policies.

Your mentee will need your help and guidance for preparation of their dossier for Promotion and/or Tenure. I strongly encourage you to have one “formal” meeting per year with your mentee and all committee members. Whether as part of a scheduled meeting or otherwise, the committee should review the mentee’s CV and candidate’s statement annually. However, for the most part, your interactions with your mentee should be casual, so they feel comfortable coming to you anytime.

Please be accessible and try to actively share your experience and knowledge with your mentee. Encourage your mentee to meet with the P&T committee in their first year and to integrate with the department. Talk to them about work-life balance and how to stay sane. Particularly helpful advice is how to prioritize the multiple requests of their time, and when it is appropriate for them to say “no”. If you have any concerns, please let me know so we can work together with the mentee on a solution to the difficulty.

Faculty mentoring is a critical role for experienced faculty, and can have an enormous positive impact. Thanks again for being willing to serve as a mentor.

CC: [mentee]