

**Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication
Statement of Support for Creative Scholarship
in the Reappointment, Tenure and Promotion Process**

The Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication (ASJMC) supports member schools and faculty in their effort to effectively demonstrate the value of creative scholarship in the annual evaluation and reappointment, tenure and promotion (RTP)¹ process. Creative scholarship that meets the same standard of rigor and review should be considered equivalent to traditional scholarship in the evaluation process.

This document provides guidance to help faculty and administrators better prepare and present a portfolio based on creative scholarship or a combination of creative and traditional scholarship and includes best practices as examples.

Through an analysis of faculty handbooks, unit bylaws and candidate narratives in successful cases (in both journalism and mass communication units and related disciplines with creative pathways) as well as interviews with provosts and deans, four criteria came to light consistently as the most effective indicators to determine the value of scholarship (both traditional and creative):

- Peer reviewed
- National exposure
- Advance knowledge or improve application in the discipline
- Impact

Further, there are four areas that are most critical in providing evidence of the value of scholarship:

- Faculty Handbook/Unit Bylaws
- Personal narrative
- External reviewers
- Administrator's evaluation

Faculty Handbook/Unit Bylaws

By almost any measure, the unit's faculty handbook or unit bylaws (could be known under a different name in your institution), is *the* most important document that clearly defines expectations for reappointment, tenure and promotion.

For institutions with faculty union representation, the faculty handbook may serve as an extension to the collective bargaining agreement (CBA).

It is critical for faculty and administrators to clearly and unambiguously define both the unit's expectations for traditional scholarly and creative work and to provide examples within the handbook/bylaws that demonstrate expectations and definitions of impact.

¹ The process may be known as a different name in your institution.

Within a more traditional scholarly agenda (where impact can be measured in publication in refereed journals with a high impact factor as defined by the Social Sciences Index, for example), it is easier for both those within and outside the unit to understand impact. There are fewer clear mechanisms to define impact factor with creative scholarship. But measuring impact remains central to providing evidence of a successful portfolio. In the words of one university administrator, “Candidates who do not have peer-reviewed publications to demonstrate their standing within their fields need to be able to demonstrate their impact and recognition in other ways.”

University administrators caution faculty and unit administrators to use care when applying aspirational words to unclear expectations. From one university administrator: “In faculty handbooks, words like ‘significant,’ ‘sustained,’ ‘excellent’ or ‘active’ should be defined and contextualized within disciplinary expectations. Tenure and promotion decisions require faculty and administrators to make substantive academic judgment on each case. What this means is that the quantity and quality of the candidate’s work must be assessed by each reviewer within the framework for evaluation that is established by the academic unit. Clear evaluation rubrics are essential for both the candidate and the reviewers.”

The following represent some of the best practices from well structured unit handbooks/bylaws:

- Isolate creative scholarship or use the term research/creative scholarship (so that the term creative is included).
- Clearly define the various types of creative scholarship and their relative merits (for example, writing an article that, after publication, leads to change in public policy or launches a federal investigation, or being selected for a nationally competitive photo exhibit)
- Clearly define that the unit accepts on an equal basis traditional scholarship and creative activities.
- Consider comparing professional experience to advanced degree.
- Emphasize the importance of the narrative or personal statement.
- Consider acknowledging expectations in other disciplines in handbook to provide context for your own.
- Consider including what is not as important in your discipline, not only what is.
- Caution when using words that must be defined or contextualized: meaningful, demonstrable, exceeding, sustained, substantial, etc. (*be specific wherever possible*).
- Quantify and qualify in both the handbook and narrative (acceptance rates, citations, description of audience, etc.).
- Include rubrics that the unit will use to assess the scholarship/activity.
- Explain sole-produced and collaborative efforts (those outside our discipline may define these differently).

Now that you and your colleagues have created the clearest, most unambiguous faculty handbook, it is time to explore the next crucial component of a successful path to tenure and promotion.

Candidate’s Personal Narrative

The candidate’s narrative (or personal statement) serves as the strongest opportunity to provide context and evidence that a candidate’s portfolio or file is worthy of tenure and promotion. This is reinforced by university administrators and within faculty handbooks/unit bylaws from both units of journalism and mass communication and related disciplines. In its “Standards for Evaluating Scholarship and Creative/Professional Work,” the Institute for Liberal Arts and Interdisciplinary Studies at Emerson

College refers repeatedly to the candidate's Personal Statement (or narrative) as an important vehicle to "address the question of the significance of the body of work in the Personal Statement by, for example, citing impact factors, blind vs. non-blind peer review processes, acceptance rates, reputation of the editorial or curatorial staff, prestige of the other contributors to the production, and/or other relevant measures of the significance of the context in which the work is disseminated."²

It seems the most common mistake in a personal narrative is writing for the wrong audience. Faculty have a tendency, particularly when there is minimal or inadequate guidance from administrators or faculty mentors, to write the personal narrative to their colleagues in the unit.

A personal narrative should be written with an *external audience* in mind and should provide evidence of a strong scholarship trajectory.

As discussed in the previous section, it can be difficult to explain how a documentary or published articles or columns in national media can have high impact, especially to those in other departments on campus.

From a university administrator: "The candidate should do his/her best to present the file (e.g., narrative, required documentation) so that a faculty reviewer or administrator who is not in the discipline can easily understand the expectations, criteria and standards of the candidate's discipline. As the file moves through the review at the College and University levels, reviewers, from multiple disciplines, evaluate the file. It's up to the candidate to 'educate' reviewers who are not in his/her discipline so that they are able to understand the academic unit criteria and disciplinary norms and expectations."

The following represent some of the best practices from well-structured personal narratives:

- State your intent to achieve tenure and promotion (hard to believe, but this isn't always clear).
- Quote your unit's handbook/college bylaws, where applicable.
- Divide your narrative into clear sections, such as scholarship, teaching and service (or university citizenship).
- Clearly, and succinctly, explain your creative scholarship.
- Clearly explain where your creative scholarship is disseminated.
- Thoroughly explain how your creative scholarship is impactful.
- Be specific. No one knows your path as well as you do.

Here is an example of a clear and succinct introduction to the creative scholarship component of one candidate's personal narrative:

"My scholarship encompasses the trajectories of design pedagogy (emphasizing process, learning methodologies, and K-12 design education) and typography. The *Faculty Handbook* states, "creative scholarship and/or scholarship should have a direct correlation with each faculty member's area of expertise, interest, and teaching assignments" (p 19). My research is most fulfilling when it heightens my teaching capacity and impacts my students on a daily basis. This research has allowed for a linear connection with my classroom activities, improving my courses, enhancing student

² This language applies to both traditional and creative scholarship.

success, while providing the opportunity to ascend to the level of expert in my areas of emphasis.

My research and scholarly activities are disseminated through various platforms. Throughout my time at _____, I have presented at seven international conferences and four national conferences, in addition to an invited speaking engagement. Conference proposals undergo a rigorous peer-review process (conference specifics listed on CV). Apart from published conference proceedings, my research has been published in two journals and three design periodicals. My work has been exhibited at a national juried exhibition and has received multiple design awards. Further, my scholarship has led to the development of two new courses and two special programs within our school.

The rest of that section expands on what is introduced in the first two paragraphs. Take note of the key words and terms that may resonate with reviewers both internal and external to the unit (including external reviewers outside of the university). Words or terms like, “scholarship,” “research,” “teaching,” “impacts,” “expert,” “areas of emphasis,” “international,” “national,” “rigorous peer-review process,” “published,” “exhibited,” “national juried exhibition,” “multiple design awards,” and “development.” If all other words were removed from the paragraphs above, almost any reviewer would deem this candidate worthy of consideration for tenure and promotion, especially when compared to the expectations outlined in the unit’s handbook/bylaws and university policies.

External Reviewers

The selection of external reviewers is a process that can also determine the ultimate success of a candidate’s file. The candidate will work with an administrator to identify appropriate external reviewers (this process is, typically, outlined in university policy or collective bargaining agreements).

Do not underestimate the importance of a thoughtful selection process.

In its “Standards for Evaluating Scholarship and Creative/Professional Work,” the Institute for Liberal Arts and Interdisciplinary Studies at Emerson College includes, “The external reviews solicited by the College for the promotion and tenure review are especially important in measuring the scholarly/creative significance of the candidate’s work. The external reviews must be seen in the context of the evidence provided by the candidate and be viewed as offering additional, well informed assessments of a scholarly/creative agenda.”

University administrators and review panels within the university want to understand how your creative scholarship is viewed externally. The external reviewers are the best opportunity you have to provide that perspective.

Here are best practices in the selection process:

- Make sure the external reviewer understands the faculty member's work.
- Consider the reappointment, tenure and promotion guidelines at the external reviewer’s unit (although the reviewer must apply your work to your university’s guidelines, it is in your best interest to determine the culture of the reviewer’s home unit).
- Consider a mix of aspirational and peer reviewers (do not rely on only reviewers at peer institutions—or only at aspirational ones).
- Send your RTP documents—both the unit handbook and any university policies to the reviewer.

- The unit's administrator must remind the external reviewer to apply the standards and expectations from the candidate's unit and university to the file, and not their own.
- Provide enough time for the external reviewer to thoroughly review the faculty member's file and write an appropriate assessment.

One provost stresses the importance of external reviewers, "First and foremost, they (a candidate) meet the criteria outlined in the CBA (or faculty handbook, where applicable). Second, they have strong support from outside reviewers as well as the internal review panel."

Administrator's Evaluation

A positive evaluation from an administrator, of course, is a significant factor in the success of a candidate's file. The letter itself is a critical piece as the review process moves out of the unit and to the university level.

Here are best practices for a strong letter (assuming that the evaluation is positive):

- Appropriate reference to the unit's handbook/bylaws and apply the candidate's progress to the expectations defined by the unit.
- It should effectively represent faculty ballots and input from the unit.
- It should effectively represent the external reviewers' letters.
- It should effectively establish the candidate's present and future contributions to the unit, university and discipline.

In the case of a positive evaluation, the administrator's letter must be as clear and compelling as the candidate's personal narrative. When it is not, it can lead to confusion as the file moves to the next level of review. A university administrator specifies that clarity is key, "The primary focus of review committee discussions at all levels (department, college and provost's level) is whether the candidate was successful in meeting the unit's criteria and standards that are included in the faculty handbook. Normally, a review committee or administrator's application of those criteria and standards form the basis of any appeal."

Conclusion

Every aspect of the reappointment, tenure and promotion process is important. In addition to the indicators and evidence expanded upon within this document, original offer letters with clearly defined expectations, opportunities for candidates to present their research to their colleagues prior to the review period, and faculty ballots that are reflective of the candidate's performance relative to the unit's expectations are all part of the mosaic that is the RTP process.

Creative scholarship is a critical component of a productive and impactful faculty. When the process works, and creative scholarship and scholarship is valued, we have stronger outcomes for our students.

ASJMC is available to help you navigate the road ahead. We hope this document provides some clarity to the process.