

B. The Probationary Period

An individual on the tenure track who does not yet have tenure is said to be in the *probationary period*. This includes all assistant professors and some associate professors. Department actions during this period that are of particular importance include (a) mentoring, (b) informative annual reviews, (c) the reappointment process, and (d) tenure clock adjustments.

The [University's criteria](#) for tenure are generally framed in terms of excellence in both research and teaching. The colleges provide additional detail. For practical advice, faculty members on the tenure track may wish to consult the following:

[A Short Guide to the Tenure Process](#)

[Tenure Dossiers: Strategies for Success](#)

[What I'd Wish I Had Known Before I Started This Job.](#)

Mentoring

The [Office of Faculty Development and Diversity](#) maintains a comprehensive [mentoring website](#) that discusses how to structure conversations about work-life balance, professional networks, and how to navigate the complexities associated with research, teaching, and service. [What the colleges say about mentoring.](#)

B1. Why is mentoring important along the tenure track?

The hiring of an assistant professor is an investment in the future of the university. From many different standpoints it makes sense to create an environment that enables junior faculty members to realize their full potential. Junior faculty members sometimes perceive an insurmountable conflict between their teaching and research obligations. However, while balancing these obligations can certainly be challenging, it is worth noting that many of Cornell's most outstanding faculty typically excel on both fronts. Indeed, they typically find that each component informs and inspires the other. A laudable goal of any mentoring program should be the communication of this fact.

B2. What's the difference between formal and informal mentoring?

A department culture that is open and fosters natural interactions between junior and senior faculty members sets the stage for rich, informal mentoring spread out over time. But even with an environment like that there is still a place for formal mentoring. Planned, occasional meetings with a nonjudgmental designated mentor who is experienced in the ways of academic life has value. Note that this person does not have to be in the same research area as the candidate in order to be effective. Indeed, having a mentor who is not in the exact same "research space" provides an opportunity for the mentee to refine their ability to talk about their work and their balancing act in everyday terms—a most valuable skill.

B3. What should the mentor communicate to the mentee about research?

Advice and feedback about grant writing, collaboration, research ethics, journal/book publication, external visibility are all worthy topics. The Office of the Vice Provost for Research is a valuable [resource](#)

in this regard. The Office of Faculty Development and Diversity maintains a resource of [Best Practices for Mentoring](#).

B4. What should the mentor communicate to the mentee about teaching?

The Center for Teaching Innovation offers many [programs for faculty](#). These [guidelines](#) for the peer review of teaching are relevant to mentors and mentees alike.

B5. What should the mentor communicate to the mentee about service?

The mentor should explain to the mentee why it is important to render service at the department, college, and university level as well as off-campus through involvement with a professional society. How and when to say “no” to a service request is also an important skill to acquire during the probationary period.

B6. How should the Chair handle mentoring situations that are not going well?

It can be said that having a disinterested mentor is worse than having no mentor at all. Thus, care must be exercised when assigning a mentor to new faculty member. Communication between the Chair and the mentor needs to be regular enough to catch problems before they become serious.

B7. Should the conversations between mentor and mentee be private?

On the one hand, a commitment to privacy promotes forthright discussion. On the other hand, the unrestricted sharing of mentee concerns can create more problems. To strike the right balance any attempt to engage with others on behalf of the mentee must be done carefully and with the mentee’s consent.

Annual Reviews

[What the colleges say about annual reviews.](#)

B8. Why are annual reviews important?

The candidate’s “trajectory” figures heavily in the tenure review and to make a fully informed assessment it is vital to have annual snapshots that tabulate growth in the key directions of research and teaching. The ability of the candidate to modify research directions, take on students, write proposals, learn from classroom mistakes, and interact with colleagues has to be tracked and documented. In addition, annual reviews can be very helpful in clarifying departmental expectations should questions arise during the course of the tenure review about the candidate’s progress and direction.

B9. How should they be structured?

Whatever the chosen format and level of detail, the process must be respectful of both the candidate’s time and the chair’s time. In general, it should have these components:

1. Candidate responds to set questions in writing or online.

2. Chair (or equivalent) and candidate discuss the candidate's written synopsis.
3. Chair (or equivalent) provides written feedback.
4. Candidate can provide written comments on Chair's feedback.

All documents associated with the annual review become part of the dossier.

Reappointment

The Provost Office provides these [guidelines](#).
[What the colleges say about reappointments](#).

B10. Why is it important to have a rigorous reappointment review?

The reappointment review is a key part of the tenure process. As a formal matter, it is the point at which the initial appointment expires and the department decides whether or not to give the candidate a second three year appointment. Therefore, reappointment should never be regarded as "automatic" and instead should not be approved only the evidence to date creates substantial doubt that tenure will be attained. Therefore, reappointment can be thought of as a "slimmed down" version of the tenure review or as a "beefed up" version of the annual review. Regardless, it is an occasion to systematically assess research, teaching, and service. If things are not going well to the extent that tenure is highly unlikely, then non-renewal is an option. If the candidate is progressing as a researcher and teacher then reappointment is natural. A rigorous review is essential in order to provide a justification for nonrenewal or to provide constructive feedback to the candidate so that he/she can live up to full potential in time for the tenure review. There is an [appeal process](#) in the event of nonrenewal.

B11. What about switching to an RTE track?

In some unusual cases, the department and the candidate may jointly conclude that the candidate's appointment should be transitioned to an RTE track. Under current Trustee policy, such moves are permissible only if they occur before the tenure review has started. For these purposes, current practice is to view the faculty vote on tenure as the point at which moves to RTE appointments are not permitted. Therefore, chairs should be attentive to situations in which the tenure outcome is in doubt but an RTE position would be worth exploring. It is a negotiation that begins with a conversation between the chair and the candidate. Of course, the viability of such transition presupposes that there is a valid need for the destination position. Departments should not take this approach simply because a tenure denial is painful or disruptive.

Leaves and the Tenure Clock

B12. How do leaves affect the tenure clock?

[Policy 6.2.1 \(Leaves for Professors and Academic Staff\)](#) is the resource for this information. Tenure clock extensions for the birth parent and the other parent are detailed. Situations regarding adoption, foster care, care of the elderly and care of special-needs children is also discussed.