A Dean’s Advice on Successful Preparation for Faculty Evaluation
Reappointment, Continuing Appointment, and Promotion

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I. Official institutional policy; what this document is, and is not

Official policy governing academic appointment and promotion at SUNY Potsdam is contained in the institutional “Guidelines for Academic Appointment and Promotion” (available on the SUNY Potsdam website at http://www.potsdam.edu/offices/hr/upload/Guidelines-for-Academic-Appointment-Promotion-2011.pdf), which in turn reflects official criteria approved by the SUNY Board of Trustees.

While the document you are reading is intended to be consistent with the official guidelines, it does not have the standing of institutional policy, nor does it represent an interpretation of that policy officially endorsed by Crane School governance. Rather, it is offered to faculty members in the reappointment and promotion process as a set of helpful observations and practical advice from the point of view of a dean who both plays a role in the process and is experienced in reviewing faculty members going through the process.

Candidates should review the official institutional guidelines carefully, since they alone have official standing as established criteria, and since each stage of evaluation is done with reference to those criteria: Personnel Committee, Department Chair, Dean, Provost, and President. The guidelines will be referred to frequently within this document.

II. Procedural points

Initial faculty appointments are normally made, if the faculty member hired possesses the required terminal degree (see the Crane Faculty Handbook, posted on the Crane website under “Information for Crane Faculty,” for terminal degree requirements within sub-disciplinary areas), at the Assistant Professor level and with a two-year initial contract. The usual sequence with successful reappointments involves two subsequent two-year contracts, with a reappointment review prior to the end of each, followed by a final one-year contract before consideration for tenure, or “continuing appointment” as it is known in the SUNY system (normally the review for continuing appointment is also a review for promotion to the Associate rank). In short: 2 + 2 + 2 + 1, then continuing appointment/promotion to Associate. In some circumstances, the pattern of three two-year contracts followed by a one-year contract may vary.
Faculty with prior academic service may request credit toward continuing appointment consideration at the time of their initial hire. This request is made through the Office of Human Resources, which will issue an official determination and establish a “continuing permanency” date. This date (whether or not credit is granted) represents the final date by which either continuing appointment must be granted, or the employee’s final contract ends. Every candidate in the tenure track has such a date; if you have any doubt as to yours, please ask the dean.

At SUNY Potsdam, candidates may request consideration for continuing appointment prior to their required continuing appointment decision date (i.e., they may apply for “early tenure”). If a request for early continuing appointment is denied, the candidate may simply be reappointed; in other words, requesting early continuing appointment does not invoke an “up or out” decision. However, those considering such a request are strongly encouraged to have conversations with their department chair and dean, to discuss whether or not it is prudent and advisable to seek an early decision.

The official calendar for reappointment reviews is maintained by the Office of Human Resources and is published on that office’s website (www.potsdam.edu/hr). Candidates will receive official notice from the Human Resources office when reappointments are due; however, they are also notified by the Crane Dean when reappointment materials are expected, since materials must be reviewed by the Crane Personnel Committee and Department Chair before the dean’s review date as listed in the official Human Resources calendar. Candidates being reviewed in a fall semester review cycle should expect their portfolios to be due early in that term, and likewise spring semester reviews will have an early spring semester due date, as provided in each case by the Dean as the cycle begins.

For faculty members with an initial two-year contract, the first reappointment review will occur in the fall semester of the second year. Following this review, reappointment reviews occur in the spring semester of the year prior to each contract’s expiration.

The review sequence proceeds through these steps:

Crane Personnel Committee and relevant Department Chair(s)  
(simultaneous)  
Crane Dean  
Provost  
President  
Chancellor (in the case of promotion and continuing appointment)

Crane faculty members have a primary appointment to one of the School’s departments, and the chair of that department will review the candidate’s portfolio. However, many faculty members also teach some courses in another department, and
therefore have a secondary departmental appointment. In those cases, the chair of the secondary department is also invited to review the portfolio.

At each stage in the process, copies of each recommendation will be sent to the reappointment/promotion candidate. The reappointment portfolio remains available to the candidate throughout the process, and the candidate may add materials at any time, even after a level of review has been completed. This should be exceptional, however; the portfolio should be presented as complete when it is initially submitted. If you wish to add material after the initial submission, simply speak to the secretary in the Dean’s office whose responsibility it is to receive and take custody of submitted documents.

It is at the discretion of each reviewing level whether the recommendation will be a simple statement or a longer elaboration. It is this dean’s practice to write substantial commentary, and candidates should consider any such commentary, whether by dean, chair, committee, or provost, carefully, particularly when the next review arrives. When offered, commentary is intended to be formative, and may assist a candidate in identifying areas that need to be strengthened, either in substance or in documented presentation.

Materials are customarily submitted in a three-ring binder, possibly with more than one binder. More will be said regarding the quantity of material below. Submission in electronic form is also possible and, from this dean’s point of view, is to be encouraged, so long as the format is easily understood, well organized, and reliable on common computer platforms. Recent submissions in electronic form have been made using a flash drive which, when opened on a computer desktop, provide a clickable index leading to all categories of material.

Whether the portfolio is submitted in hard copy or electronically, it must be submitted with a paper copy of the Personnel Action Form for academic employees (http://www.potsdam.edu/offices/hr/upload/Personnel-action-Academic-Employees-fillable-use-1.pdf). Candidates should be mindful that this form will carry the recommendations at each stage of the review process, so it is preferably inserted into a pocket of the binder or otherwise made easily accessible by those in the review process.

III. Making your case

It is helpful to think of the portfolio submitted in the framework of making your case for reappointment and/or promotion. Candidates are encouraged to see every aspect of the portfolio submission through this lens: its physical (or electronic) appearance, its organization, ease of access to sections and content, clarity of presentation, logical sequence, quality of writing, and other respects. Imagine
yourself as the reviewer, and ask yourself whether or not the materials speak for themselves in a clear and compelling way to your reappointment/promotion case.

It is this dean’s recommendation that the principle of reverse chronological order be applied to most if not all aspects of the portfolio and its documents: most recent first, then older material, in order, following. As a matter of practical advice: if plastic sleeves are used to contain material submitted, be sure that the reviewer does not need to remove documents from the pocket to review what you intend her or him to review. Everything should be clearly visible as the reviewer turns the pages of the portfolio. In addition to the question of inconvenience, if materials must be removed from a sleeve, they may be re-inserted out of order or in the incorrect sleeve, making the next person in the review chain subject to a confusing presentation.

Following the Personnel Action Form, the portfolio should begin with an Academic Faculty Information Form for the most recent completed academic year (http://www.potsdam.edu/offices/hr/upload/AcademicFacInfoForm.pdf; also available on the Human Resources webpage as a downloadable Word document). Since this provides a quick summary of activities through a single academic year, candidates may wish to provide Faculty Information Forms for earlier years, in order behind the most current one.

An up-to-date and complete CV should follow the Academic Faculty Information Form(s), reflecting the candidate’s entire academic career. Here and in other relevant portions of the portfolio, take care to include clear date information for every category of information, and list items in reverse chronological order, as noted already.

The substance of the portfolio should then proceed to document the three large areas which are key to academic faculty evaluation: teaching, research or creative work, and service. While these are the three large areas, and it may be most helpful to think of the portfolio broadly organized along those lines, the Guidelines referenced above list the categories for evaluation under five headings (and should be consulted for more detailed descriptions of these broad areas):

- Mastery of subject matter
- Effectiveness in teaching
- Scholarly ability
- Effectiveness of university service
- Continuing growth

Note especially that the Guidelines construe “scholarly ability” in its broadest sense, and use the inclusive Boyer model of scholarship to encompass the scholarship of discovery, scholarship of integration, scholarship of application, and scholarship of teaching. Clearly this definition includes the full range of scholarly and creative work in which Crane faculty are engaged, including research and writing, solo and
collaborative performance, composition, pedagogical and educational research, and other variations of musical work.

IV. Speaking with your voice

While many of the documents assembled will and should speak for themselves, this dean regards it as an important principle of “making your case” that, where helpful and appropriate, you speak with your own voice. Nowhere is this more important than in presenting material on effectiveness in teaching. Substantive reflection on teaching speaks strongly to a faculty member’s commitment to continuous self-evaluation and improvement. In addition to providing clear commentary on one’s intentional efforts to address concerns in teaching and to make improvements, reflective material can also help provide context for specific teaching situations. Reflective statements can be organized in various ways; the best way may depend upon the nature of a particular candidate’s teaching load. Possibilities include a short (e.g. one page) reflective statement on each course taught, including reactions to student teaching evaluations, notes for improvement in the future, and particular circumstances relevant to a specific teaching experience. In other cases, a more comprehensive statement might be written encompassing an entire semester’s teaching. As the portfolio is built, then, the reflective comments should be clearly organized along with other material reflective of teaching excellence, especially student evaluations.

Candidates are encouraged to keep the “making your case” principle in mind in the presentation of student teaching evaluations. If they are presented with statistical summaries by course, make sure that the summary precedes the individual forms for each course, and that material is clearly divided and in order. Double-check to be sure that documents are in correct order as presented.

While not required for every area of evaluation, it is this dean’s view that personal reflections and/or summaries strengthen other areas besides teaching excellence. A brief reflection, for example, on creative and scholarly work done since the last evaluation can offer the evaluators a helpful framework for looking at specific documents submitted. Reflections and summaries can also help in the area of service.

It is important to demonstrate a level of sensitivity when referring directly to specific students, or including material about specific students, especially if the references might be perceived as negative or inappropriately personal. In a narrative about teaching, for example, if there is justification to mention a case involving a teaching challenge involving a specific student, it is important to do this without using the student’s name, removing any details that might suggest a specific student, and couching the description in general terms. Remember that faculty colleagues will be reviewing your document, and many of them may know students you teach, so it would put those students in an inappropriate position to disclose information about them that may be sensitive or personal and ought to remain in confidence.
V. Being selective

It is the view of this dean that quantity does not correlate directly to quality in a faculty member’s portfolio, and, in fact, it is possible for a large quantity of material not clearly supportive of the case to work against the effectiveness of the presentation. Again, keep in mind the framework of making your case, and try to view the portfolio through the eyes of those who will, in fact, evaluate it. The discipline of seeking to present the case in a single binder is something to consider strongly. Depending on the nature of the documentation, a compromise may be to present a primary binder with supplemental material in another.

Suggested ways to be selective include these:

- In presenting original course material as evidence of teaching excellence, include representative samples (of study guides, worksheets, etc.) rather than exhaustive compilations.
- If evidence of scholarly or creative activity is contained within published material that is bulky, present photocopies or scans of the relevant pages, and include a note that the original publication can be provided to the evaluators on request.
- While it may be relevant in some cases to include material on accomplishments prior to employment at SUNY Potsdam, the relevance of such material should be critically examined, and it should certainly be very selectively presented. The focus is on work done at the institution.

Another important aspect of selectivity comes into play for those going through second and subsequent evaluations. This reviewer strongly suggests that, while each evaluation should present a comprehensive picture of the candidate’s record at the institution, material already reviewed in earlier cycles may helpfully be thinned out, summarized, and otherwise reduced. For example: instead of including all concert programs for prior years, make a summary list of performances by date, and omit the programs themselves, or include only especially significant ones. One might think of this as telescoping older material as one goes through successive evaluation cycles.

VI. Some observations on material in each category

a. Effectiveness in teaching

Material normally presented in support of this category includes:

- Course syllabi
- Original course material (handouts, study guides, original supplemental material, but presented, if appropriate, in the form of selected samples rather than exhaustive compilation)
• Student evaluations of teaching (preferably: summaries for each course, followed by individual student forms)
• The candidate’s reflective comments on teaching, either course by course or semester by semester, demonstrating thoughtful effort toward continuous improvement

Additional material to consider:
• Evidence of student successes (external validation of supervised student work, acceptances to graduate programs, awards and honors, etc.)
• Evidence of student mentorship, including student research projects, internships, and related cases
• Peer evaluations of teaching

With reference to the last item: the Crane Personnel Committee will arrange for one or more of its members to visit classes, lessons, and/or rehearsals for candidates under evaluation, with due advance notification of the candidate; the committee member will provide a written summary of the observation to the candidate, which is expected to be included in the evaluation portfolio.

In addition, candidates may, and in the view of this dean are encouraged to, ask other peers regularly to visit their classes, lessons or rehearsals for the purpose of offering their observations. Written summaries of such observations may be included in the evaluation portfolio, and add to the depth of information presented about one’s teaching ability.

Some comments about student evaluations of teaching:

At SUNY Potsdam, faculty members may use institutional evaluation forms available from the Provost’s office, may use forms specifically developed by and for Crane faculty members, or may use forms of their own design. All of these are acceptable ways to gather student input about teaching effectiveness. If you choose to use forms other than the Provost’s Office or Crane forms, this dean strongly encourages you to be certain that the instrument has carefully designed questions for students which allow them to make clear their opinions of the experience in the classroom, laboratory, studio, or rehearsal. If the form is vague in what it asks or if it does not clearly ask the student for her or his views on the faculty member’s effectiveness as a teacher, its ability to contribute to making the case is greatly diminished. Candidates are encouraged always to use forms which permit students to answer open-ended questions (as do the SUNY Potsdam Provost’s forms and the Crane-specific form). Comments made in response to such questions are often very useful to faculty members in highlighting specific issues that are points of success or challenge.

Since student evaluations of teaching will be compiled over time and viewed in terms of the ongoing record they present, it is important not to change the form employed unless there are important reasons to do so, and then only rarely. If the form changes from semester to semester, it becomes more difficult
to *make the case* with regard to consistent excellence, and continuous improvement, in teaching.

In the administration of student evaluations of teaching, it is almost inevitable that occasional negative ratings and/or comments will appear. Candidates should be mindful that most Personnel Committee members, and certainly the chairs and dean, have reviewed many collections of student evaluations, and are experienced in reading them in context. Isolated outliers are understood as such; overall patterns are much more important. Furthermore, the highly recommended inclusion of personal reflective comments on teaching provides an important and appropriate opportunity for the candidate to acknowledge particular ratings or comments which might be of concern, and to provide context for them and/or indicate steps taken to address the concern that was raised. This becomes a positive and proactive statement in the candidate’s portfolio.

Please see notes above, under “Speaking With Your Voice” (IV), regarding sensitivity to privacy issues related to specific students.

b. Scholarship and/or creative activity

It has already been mentioned that the SUNY guidelines for appointment and promotion adopt the broad Boyer definition of scholarship, and thus allow wide latitude in the kinds of activities documented as part of the portfolio, so long as they relate clearly to the faculty member’s area of appointment and teaching duties.

Within The Crane School, this documentation may take a wide variety of forms, including but not limited to:

- Performances (as soloist, collaborative artist, or conductor), listed with dates, locations, and program information; actual concert programs should be included, but can be presented selectively (as noted) especially for less current periods
- Documentation for performances of original compositions, including commission information if appropriate; selective samples of scores and/or recordings may be presented
- Evidence of commercial recordings of performances or compositions, as physical media or through reference to externally available sources
- Publication of scholarly research, in any of a variety of forms: books, book articles, journal articles, reviews, and others, either in physical copies or through reference to external sources; these may be singly authored or jointly authored
- Documentation of presentations, panel participation, and other forms of participation (beyond attendance) at conferences and symposia
• Documentation of workshops, masterclasses, and similar sessions (note that some of these may overlap into the service category, below)
• Participation in special festivals or other unique events
• Awards received that clearly relate to work as a scholar, performer, conductor, or composer

It is helpful always to make clear when performances or publications represent selection by peer review or invitation by an institution or body. While other kinds of activity are appropriate to include, those activities that have been distinguished by peer invitation or validation should be duly pointed out.

c. Service

Service may helpfully be thought of, and perhaps organized, in expanding outward circles: service to the department, the School, the College, the profession, and the community.

Examples of service include but are not limited to:
• Service on departmental or School-wide committees
• Service on College-wide committees, or as a member of the Faculty Senate
• Other forms of campus service (for example, service to special programs, such as Honors)
• Service on search committees
• Service to professional organizations related to one’s discipline, including service as an officer in such organizations, roles in the operation of conferences (as distinct from conference presentations), etc.
• Service to organizations or efforts in the community, whether local or beyond, that may not be directly related to the musical discipline but relate more broadly to the mission of the School and College. This may include service on boards or committees engaged in support for educational or the arts, for example. Note, however, that in the opinion of this dean, involvement with external organizations whose missions are not clearly consonant with those of the School and/or College do not strengthen the case of a reappointment or promotion candidate.

For Crane, one type of service is of special importance: student recruitment. Efforts made on behalf of student recruitment to Crane, in addition to participation in the Crane on- and off-campus audition process and campus Open House days, should be pointed out in the portfolio. These might include visits made to high schools and/or workshop/masterclass presentations in those contexts; special studio-specific or program-specific initiatives; representing the school in a recruitment capacity during large off-campus events; and others.
VII. Criteria for promotion

When an evaluation cycle involves a request for promotion to the next academic rank, it is critical for the candidate to review carefully the specific criteria for the rank in question as presented in the *Guidelines* referenced above. Both the Associate and Professor ranks, which are those normally under consideration in an evaluation process, are described in detail, and the expectations for promotion differ between them. The case presented must address the specific expectations of each promotion stage in order to make a successful case.

VIII. Other observations

Letters from colleagues and others:

It is a common and appropriate practice to include in the portfolio letters of support, written at the candidate’s request, by colleagues. This dean encourages this practice, with the suggestion that such letters be as broadly representative of the faculty as possible, crossing departments, disciplines, and ranks. As already noted in a general sense, and here true in a particular way: quantity does not equal quality.

SUNY Potsdam does not currently require any input from outside the institution in its reappointment and promotion processes. However, you may wish to request a few professional colleagues at other institutions, or appropriate professionals who may not be working in academia, to write letters of support for your portfolio. This, too is a practice I encourage, though it is not required.

One particular case I would caution against, however, is requesting that *current* students submit recommendation statements. Requesting them would risk placing the student in an awkward position, and might easily be misperceived.

Letters from alumni, however, might well be considered for inclusion.

Finally, letters submitted as part of the portfolio should be current or nearly current. While you may wish to keep letters written for one evaluation cycle and include them again in the next, it is important that most of these be clearly up to date and reflective of your current professional work.

Overlap between categories:
In some cases, it may be difficult to decide whether an item belongs in one category or another. Certain activities which seem to belong in the “scholarship” category may, for example, overlap into that of service. This is understood by those evaluating, and it is this dean’s suggestion that the candidate include complete documentation of the item in the category which seems to have the strongest association, with a brief reference or mention in the other.

Miscellaneous material, including congratulatory notes:

Candidates likely accumulate a great deal of material which, on the surface, would seem appropriate to include as support, including congratulatory notes or e-mails on a successful performance or presentation. This dean encourages a high degree of selectivity with regard to this kind of material. Inclusion of a few such notes for a few items in the portfolio can adequately demonstrate that the candidate is well regarded by colleagues (whose support is likely evident elsewhere in the portfolio, in any case); to include voluminous informal messages or notes, again in the opinion of this reviewer, begins to undermine the character of the portfolio, and hinders rather than helps in making a clear, concise, and compelling case.

Asking colleagues to review the portfolio before submission:

This practice is one which this dean encourages strongly, along with the possibility of requesting that faculty members who have already been through a reappointment or promotion process share portfolios for review and study. New faculty members are assigned a senior faculty mentor, and this process of consultation appropriately begins with one’s own mentor. However, this reviewer particularly encourages candidates to make such requests of several faculty members, rather than a single one, and that those faculty members be representative of a variety of ranks and/or areas. Keep in mind that the Crane Personnel Committee itself will have a different makeup each year, and that it will include a variety of faculty members. Therefore, the wider the variety sought in those whose advice is requested in assembling the portfolio, the better. In the end, consider the advice that each faculty member consulted provides, and make your best decision.

Consulting with department chairs and the dean:

Although the department chairs and dean are part of the evaluation process, do not hesitate to ask questions of them regarding the process or the portfolio submission. While it would not be appropriate to submit a draft complete portfolio to them for comment, it is absolutely appropriate to ask questions.

IX. Second and subsequent evaluations

Once the first evaluation is successfully completed, you will possess a series of recommendations from the review process written by the Department Chair,
Personnel Committee, Dean, Provost and President. While some of those may simply state that reappointment is recommended, others (including those made by this dean) will include comments specific to the case, and may reference items for suggested improvement or issues of concern.

It is, therefore, essential to begin the next reappointment cycle by reviewing the last cycle’s recommendation statements, and clearly to address any specific items pointed out. If comments are made, their intent is to provide guidance toward future success, and, if they are not responded to, future reviewers will likely take note. Such comments should be addressed in future documentation presented, in personal reflective commentary, or both, as appropriate to the issues involved.

X. Notes on promotion to full professor rank

There is no policy restriction at SUNY Potsdam on when, after achieving continuing appointment and promotion to the Associate rank, a faculty member may request promotion to full professor. As noted above in the case of seeking continuing appointment early, a faculty member considering an application for promotion to full professor is strongly encouraged to have a preliminary conversation, well before she or he begins to assemble the portfolio, with the department chair and dean. It is common in academia to put oneself forward for promotion to the highest rank no sooner than six years past promotion to Associate, and in some institutions this is a policy requirement. Even though this is not the case here, anyone considering such an application at an earlier time is even more strongly encouraged to consult with the dean, chair, and perhaps other senior colleagues as to advisability. Although an unsuccessful application for promotion to full professor does not carry consequences other than the immediate one of not achieving the goal, it may bring lingering harm to interpersonal relationships, so this should not be undertaken lightly. (A candidate may apply again for promotion to full professor, in a future review cycle, if the first application is not approved.)

In the case of seeking promotion to the highest rank, it is especially important to read carefully the criteria stated in the Guidelines for this promotion. In the view of this dean, two items in particular carry special importance:

- The opening statement that “Promotion to Professor indicates very substantial and sustained performance on all of the Trustees’ criteria” (emphasis added). In this promotion, the Guidelines suggest less flexibility in terms of significant variations in a candidate’s strengths, among the stated criteria for promotion (as described already); there is a clear expectation that strength be exhibited in all categories, sustained over time.
The relevant statement in the *Guidelines* then spends a noteworthy amount of time addressing the importance of teaching in this evaluation step, concluding with this statement: “The College does not believe that a faculty member who cannot demonstrate clear, reliable, and consistent evidence of excellence in teaching should be promoted to Professor. Excellence in teaching should be the *sine qua non* of promotion to Professor.” Thus it is made clear that the demonstration of teaching excellence must bear scrutiny and be truly compelling.

It is this dean’s recommendation that a portfolio submitted for promotion to full professor be organized with the same guidance given above, with regard to its overall organization, its clarity and ease of use, its systematic addressing of the stated criteria, and, in sum, its ability to *make the case* for the candidate. This reviewer also suggests that it is most important for the candidate for full professor to provide thorough and detailed documentation on activity since promotion to the Associate rank; the “telescoping” principle of selectivity already cited should apply with regard to earlier material. It may be important and useful to include some pre-continuing appointment evidence, but most of it can be summarized and abbreviated; focus instead on the timespan since that benchmark. Finally, the use of personal reflection to *make the case* is as important in an application for promotion to full professor as any other situation, and is strongly encouraged with reference to teaching (where it can help meet the strong language in the criteria as noted above) as well as other areas of review.