



Office of the
Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs
The Pennsylvania State University

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Considerations for non-tenure-line promotions in the time of COVID-19

What is the best way to indicate on Activity Insight/the Dossier how COVID-19 impacted our teaching, research, and service activities?

If your dossier is accompanied by a narrative, you may use your narrative statement to document how COVID-19 may have hindered or impacted your activities. More information is available in the [“Guidance for Promotion and Tenure Narratives.”](#) You can also use the comment section to indicate, for example, that a presentation/paper was accepted but not delivered due to COVID-19.

Has guidance been issued to administrators and members of promotion and tenure committee members about how to approach promotion decisions given the events of calendar years 2020 and 2021?

Yes. Please see [Guidance for Administrators and members for Promotion and Tenure committees for 2020/21.](#)

May I list conference presentations that I was scheduled to deliver at meetings that were canceled due to COVID-19?

You may list your unattended conference presentations along with a comment that the presentation was “accepted but unable to be presented because of COVID-19.”

During the COVID-19 crisis, teaching has been greatly influenced. If submitting a promotion package on time, how much will that influence the promotion decision?

Guidance on the assessment of teaching effectiveness, including options for alternate assessment methods, is available [here](#).

For which semesters may I include SRTE results in my dossier?

For spring 2020 courses, only courses taught will be automatically added to a faculty member’s Activity Insight record. SRTEs will not be included in Activity Insight for any faculty member. Some faculty may want to include their spring 2020 SRTEs in their promotion dossiers. However, the inclusion of spring 2020 SRTEs by some, but not others, compromises the spirit of equity and fairness because questions likely will be raised about why other faculty choose to omit them. As a result, it is recommended that only in the rarest of circumstances should a faculty member include them, such as if there is a specific need to demonstrate achievement in response to specific guidance for improvement.

For fall 2020, short-form SRTEs may be included in dossiers at the discretion of the faculty member. For spring/summer/fall 2021 courses, short-form SRTEs will be included in dossiers for all courses taught. Complete information about the use of SRTEs and alternative assessments of teaching effectiveness is available [here](#).

How are peer teaching observations documented for spring 2020 and beyond?

Tenure-line and non-tenure-line faculty routinely undergo peer review of teaching and contribute to peer review of teaching committees. In acknowledgement of the COVID-19 crisis and its extraordinary



impacts on our faculty, and our collective shift to a remote learning environment, Penn State suspended peer review of teaching, as of March 16, for spring semester 2020. Candidates who do not include any documentation of teaching effectiveness as an alternative to peer review for the spring 2020 semester cannot be penalized for doing so. A faculty member who believed the absence of spring 2020 semester peer observation(s) would create a significant gap in their dossier may have proceeded with having a peer assess their spring 2020 course materials, consistent with the unit guidelines outlined for peer teaching review, but this was not required.

Peer teaching review is expected to have occurred in fall semester 2020 and beyond. Peer review can consist of wide range of activities that may (or may not) include class visitation. Members of the department/division/school/campus non-tenure-line promotion committee, in consultation with the department head/director of academic affairs/chief academic officer/school director/division head, are expected to review whether existing guidelines for peer teaching review should be modified in light of the pandemic. Issues committees may wish to address include whether to modify 1) how peer teaching reviews are conducted, including whether review of course materials or a teaching portfolio may replace a teaching observation given remote learning delivery; and 2) the total number of peer reviews required for the formal review given the suspension of peer teaching reviews in spring 2020. Some useful information about how to conduct peer reviews of face-to-face and hybrid teaching can be found [here](#).

Unit executives are expected to ask the appropriate unit with jurisdiction over peer teaching review to consider modification to peer review guidelines for non-tenure-line faculty to reflect the suspension of peer teaching review in spring of 2020. Further, the unit is expected to review whether existing guidelines for peer teaching review should be modified in light of the pandemic, addressing the issues outlined above and informing candidates as necessary of changes in expectations.

How should the charge to non-tenure-line promotion committees be modified to address the pandemic?

Below are the key items to be covered in all charges to non-tenure-line promotion committees, to be augmented by discussion of academic unit expectations.

- All committee members are expected to be familiar with academic unit guidelines.
- The following items are standard topics that should be addressed in charges to all committees:
 - Confidentiality of the promotion process is to be respected forever, not just during that particular year of review. Members of promotion committees participate with the understanding that all matters related to their deliberations remain confidential.
 - Discussions of candidates should not occur via email or in locations that do not maintain the privacy of candidates.
 - Personal notes must be securely destroyed beyond recovery immediately after the committee has reached a decision or concluded the promotion process.
 - Please consider whether there are any meaningful conflicts of interest that must be attended to given the candidates under review. If you are concerned that you cannot

form an unbiased opinion, disclose the possible conflict of interest to your unit head and seek consultation about how to best move forward.

- COVID Items:
 - Every non-tenure-line promotion committee must decide at the outset whether all meetings will occur in-person or virtually (see below for details).
 - Give some consideration to how COVID may have impacted the record.
 - Promotion committees must evaluate peer review teaching criteria and determine whether modifications to existing unit guidelines must be made; candidates must be provided with guidance about how to proceed with regard to peer review.
 - Candidates who do not include any of the alternative documentation of teaching effectiveness for the spring 2020 semester cannot be penalized for not including them. To be clear, candidates are not required to provide SRTE data for spring and summer 2020, nor may they be penalized for doing so.

Can Non-Tenure-Line Promotion committees meet virtually?

During the 2020-2021 academic year, non-tenure-line promotion committees may wish to meet virtually rather than in person. Prior to the committee's first meeting, committee members must formulate a plan for meetings and decide upon one meeting mode (in-person or virtual) for all of the committee's meetings. Promotion committees may not meet via a hybrid approach (i.e., with some members in person and some virtual).

Committees that decide to meet virtually must attend to security considerations to ensure confidentiality of discussions and voting. The committee chair should discuss the virtual process prior to the first meeting (how entry and exit are managed, how voting will proceed, and confidentiality considerations). Below are some "best practices" and considerations regarding how these meetings should be conducted.

Confidentiality

- Consistent with the need for meetings to be confidential, committees should meet via Zoom; consult with IT staff regarding security implications if you wish to use another platform.
- It is not permitted to record meetings.

Attendance

- Meetings should have a waiting room; the committee chair should check attendees into the meeting.
- All participants should authenticate their identity, either by enabling their video or providing the phone number from which they will be calling in advance of the meeting.
- Participants should attend the meeting from a location where others are not present.
- Prepare for unlikely scenarios such as Zoom crashing, chair or participants losing connection, etc.

Discussion and Voting

- In cases of conflicts of interest, attendees must be checked out of meeting and checked back in.
- Ensure that documents are available in a secure platform such as OneDrive.



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- For committees that vote by secret ballot, construct a method to collect votes for each case under consideration. Qualtrics and Zoom may be two ways to do this.
- No discussion about candidates may occur via email.