



Office of the Provost

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*Vice Provost for Faculty*

## MEMORANDUM

To: Penn Faculty, Deans, and Department Chairs  
From: Wendell Pritchett, Provost; Anita L. Allen, Vice Provost for Faculty  
Date: April 2, 2020  
Subject: Responses to COVID-19

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Understandably, many members of the Penn faculty are feeling stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Penn faculty are sheltered in our homes; some are caring for children, partners or parents; and many of our clinical faculty colleagues are on the front lines heroically tending to very sick patients. We must all adjust to drastic changes in the ways we live, work and communicate.

We are writing, as an update to the Provost's message of March 23, to set your minds at ease about several faculty affairs matters that we know are at the forefront of concern for many junior faculty members and their mentors: (1) 2019-20 mandatory reviews, (2) probationary period extensions, and (3) teaching evaluations.

### **2019-2020 MANDATORY REVIEWS**

Pending 2019-20 Promotion and Tenure Cases Will Proceed. The Deans' offices and Provost's Office are working together to ensure that promotion and tenure cases move forward. Those few dozen faculty members whose mandatory reviews or promotions are in progress can expect that they will be reviewed on or close to schedule this spring and summer. New appointments, reappointments, and promotions to full professor will be handled as quickly as possible through the normal Provost's Staff Conference (PSC) and Provost's Staff Conference Subcommittee (PSCS) processes. PSC and PSCS are the committees of Deans, Vice Provosts, School deputy deans, and senior faculty who formally meet and advise the Provost on faculty actions.

### **PROBATIONARY PERIOD EXTENSIONS**

One-Year COVID-19 Probationary Period Extensions Will be Offered. Many junior faculty members (i.e., tenure track, CE track, and research track Assistant Professors and Associate Professors without tenure) have asked if Penn will grant probationary period extensions on account of the COVID-19 pandemic. The answer is yes. This is a global public health crisis with implications for faculty members' personal and professional lives that are clearly catastrophic.

Fortuitously, last fall, Penn revised its probationary period extension policies to allow faculty, as a matter of right, to elect up to three one-year extensions for grounds that include illness, caregiving, and, of special relevance today, major personal as well as professional catastrophe. See <https://catalog.upenn.edu/faculty-handbook/ii/ii-e/>.

A “major personal or professional catastrophe” is currently affecting us all. If you would like an extension, fill out the [very simple request form](#) and forward it as instructed to your chair or dean. The Schools may require faculty to submit a statement explaining the specific basis of a request for an extension. A COVID-19-related extension will not count against the three probationary period extensions afforded by our rules. Regardless of how many extensions you may have already received, you are welcome to request an extension based on the impact of the current pandemic. The Provost is asking that the Schools expedite all faculty requests.

**For faculty members scheduled for mandatory tenure or promotion review in academic year 2020-2021, a request for extension must be filed before the end of this academic year, on or before June 30, 2020.** Note that extensions cannot be granted to faculty already in their mandatory year. As noted above, academic year 2019-20 mandatory reviews are on or close to schedule at this time. Faculty members who are approved for a COVID-19-related extension of their tenure or promotion probationary period will be able to opt out of the extension at a later date, if their Schools agree that they have a strong case to advance at an earlier date.

Some universities have granted an automatic opt-out one-year extension for all junior faculty members. Penn has decided to adhere to its proven opt-in approach for three reasons. First, our opt-in approach takes advantage of the pre-existing policies Penn adopted last fall, liberalizing the grounds for extension to include extensions for “personal” as well as “professional” catastrophes. Our policies have long allowed extensions for research catastrophes. Second, the substance of Penn’s opt-in approach is equally or more generous. It offers our faculty the same amount of additional time on their promotion and tenure clocks (one year) that faculty elsewhere are being offered. Third, at a time of disruption, the Penn opt-in approach will enable more seamless implementation. Opting-in preserves an established form and procedure.

Some faculty members have raised a concern that choosing to obtain an extension will be held against junior faculty members who opt-in. This is a common concern about extensions, not at all unique to the current situation. All of the mentoring and faculty development programs of the University supported by the Provost’s Office in the last decade have urged faculty to take advantage of extensions called for by their circumstances. Extensions have gained wide acceptance. Moreover, such opposition, even in the best of times, hurts faculty who have or want children, who struggle with illness and disability, and who care for parents and partners. In the Provost’s Office, we have seen no cause for concern about taking extensions in the tenor of outside letters, personnel committee letters, deans’ letters, or Provost’s Staff Conference review. We therefore urge all faculty, chairs, and deans to join forces to eliminate the vestiges of stigma or fear attached to taking the extensions provided for in our policies and to help us at this stressful time to continue to promote an inclusive, family-friendly community.

## TEACHING EVALUATIONS

We recognize that there are a great many questions about how teaching will be reviewed given the impressive but abrupt movement of all courses to online and remote teaching for the remainder of this semester. All faculty should be assured that, while we currently plan to launch course evaluations as usual, such reviews will be considered in context during upcoming tenure/promotion and reappointment reviews. Faculty should continue with their good faith and professional approaches to online and remote instruction and should not worry if such efforts are not reflected in student evaluations. We are asking a lot of both our teachers and students this term and want to reassure instructors that evaluations during this pandemic will not adversely affect their chances at reappointment, promotion, or tenure.

Please feel free to reach out to Vice Provost for Faculty Anita Allen by email with questions or concerns. Anita's email address is [anita.allen@upenn.edu](mailto:anita.allen@upenn.edu).