TENURE and promotion processes shape career paths, confer power and prestige, and establish institutional norms and expectations. Yet there is a disconnect between what institutions say they want (i.e., engaged faculty) and institutionalized practices of faculty reward [1], such that researchers who practice engagement and co-production with community partners are disadvantaged compared to peers who do more traditional research and publication types. Scholars urging change point out that these policies inhibit engagement-oriented university research [2]. Shifts in academic policy are required to align rewards and funding structures with institutional missions of public service and community engagement [3–7].

FIRST THINGS FIRST: INSTITUTIONAL READINESS

Reforming tenure and promotion policies alone cannot create a culture of engaged and co-produced scholarship, but should be viewed as one among many efforts toward building an engaged campus [8–11] (see Chapter 1: Building an Engaged Campus).

Coupled with mentorship, administrative support, funding, and hiring and retention practices, promotion and tenure policies play a key role in encouraging, supporting, and rewarding scholarly impact and engagement. Many of these are long-standing practices, however, and an institution must be prepared to undertake change in any of these areas. See the Spotlight on VCU (page 57) for an example of laying the groundwork by creating “institutional readiness” in order to maximize the impact of tenure and promotion reform.

A true “template for reform” [12] includes embedding engaged scholarship in the institution’s mission, identifying criteria for assessing engaged scholarship, making the peer review process more inclusive of non-academic experts, and valuing local impact and practice-
orientated funding sources. A comprehensive approach to such multifaceted reforms should include a review of best practices for faculty recruitment, hiring, mentorship, dossier preparation, and evaluation [13].

“Creating a culture of reward requires consistency, alignment, and comprehensiveness at all stages and levels of evaluation, from defining expectations in the initial [faculty] appointment to preparing individual candidates’ [promotion] dossiers to incorporating appropriate criteria.”

DRS. JULIE THOMPSON KLEIN AND HOLLY FALK-KRZESINSKI, 2017 [8]

We have compiled sets of questions relevant to the revision of tenure and promotion processes to reward interdisciplinary and engaged scholarship [8–10, 13, 14] (see glossary for definitions). The best practices included alongside each question may serve as a reference guide for leadership, review committees, and faculty undertaking the change. “No” answers indicate areas in need of further attention.

INQUIRIES TO GUIDE P&T REFORM THROUGH BEST PRACTICES

Questions for university leadership:

Do tenure and promotion policies reflect departmental and institutional priorities?

Include engaged scholarship and diversity in institutional and departmental mission statements and strategic plans. State the mission statement at the beginning of tenure and promotion policy documents and clearly tie indicators used to assess candidates to that mission statement. For example, the University of Minnesota guidelines for tenure and promotion require inclusion of departmental mission statements and suggest ways to align values of diversity, equity, and inclusion with departmental academic missions and the mission of the University [15].

Are engaged scholars rewarded for their work?

Frame scholarship as a continuum, with traditional, basic research on one end and engaged and co-produced research on the other. Allow individuals to identify where their scholarship lands on that spectrum and assess that work accordingly [16]. A strong message from university leadership that normalizes and validates engaged scholarship can resolve mixed messages about whether engaged scholars have done the “right” kind of work to earn promotion and tenure as they approach periodic review [16]. Any standards of excellence for assessing scholarly work adopted at the institutional level should apply across disciplines and across the continuum of engagement. For example, Mary Taylor Huber’s Six Attributes of
Scholarly Excellence, which measure a research product on the basis of clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, effective presentation, and reflective critique can be applied to engaged or basic scholarship [17].

Is the tenure process transparent to applicants, new hires, and the general public?

From initial contract negotiations to rationales for non-appointment, understanding the details of an institution’s tenure process can help engaged scholars (in fact, it is key to all scholars’ institutional success). A comprehensive review of policies and the ways they are communicated also allows assessment of fit between those policies and the institution’s public mission statements. Steps as simple as posting tenure and promotion policies on a public web page can improve transparency. In-depth efforts, like policy audits, can assess how well official policies explain tenure and promotion approvals and denials in practice; a mismatch indicates a need for policies or practices—or both—to be amended.

Are ambiguous terms clearly and publicly defined?

Terms used in official documents can be vague. “Service,” for example, can refer to on-campus service, community outreach, or both, easily leading to confusion among tenure candidates and review committee members [7]. Giving examples of terms used in official documents, and explaining how candidates will be evaluated against them, can put engaged scholars on equal footing with their more traditional colleagues at review time.

Are committees allowed representation from multiple disciplines and departments?

Intentionally diversifying review committees can help minimize epistemological and racial or cultural biases against engaged work. Adding more perspectives to the committee better ensures all aspects of the research will be understood by reviewers [18].

Are joint appointments handled fairly?

Engaged scholars often have dual appointments across departments. To set expectations, require split-appointment faculty to undergo only one set of annual review processes and tenure and promotion reviews, and include representatives of both departments on such review committees [18]. Appointment percentages and the details of each department’s expectations should be documented, at the point of hiring and co-developed with the candidate [13, 18, 19] (see Chapter 7: Diversity, Equity, & Engagement).

Is it standard practice to include non-academic partners in the review process?

When engaged scholars are up for review, consider inviting letters of support from community partners, outside collaborators, and non-academic leaders in engaged scholarship [12]. Discuss with academic leadership, faculty, and tenure and promotion committees how external evaluations will be solicited and should be interpreted in the promotion process.
Questions for review committees and departmental leadership:

Have expectations been clear to the candidate from the point of hiring onward?

In traditional departments, review criteria should be tailored to the individual engaged scholar. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or Letter of Approval (LOA) created jointly by the researcher and their department(s) can outline expectations at the point of hiring [13]. Additionally, these can be individualized and made explicit by encouraging researchers to develop professional development plans, revised periodically to track the candidate’s progress and flag any changes to original expectations. Professional development plans may also guide the determination of appropriate evaluation metrics for that candidate’s tenure or promotion review. Any modifications to the original MOU/LOA/plan should be documented in the candidate’s personnel file [13] and provided, along with any other feedback, to the candidate in detailed, written form [18].

Do timelines and appointment percentages reflect faculty members’ realistic workloads?

Between the 1980s and 2000s, university departments began expecting faculty to excel in research, teaching, and service [20]. Scholarly publication took prominence as a performance metric, though most faculty time is, in practice, spent on teaching activities [20, 21]. That has meant the implicit penalization of engaged scholars via standard tenure timelines, because relationship-building is both time-consuming and necessary to their work. To address this problem, Carnegie Mellon University has lengthened its tenure clock to nine years for interdisciplinary researchers [9], while Arizona State University’s School of Arts, Media, and Engineering chose to explicitly reward interdisciplinary network-building in its tenure and promotion criteria [22] (see Spotlight on page 56).

Is the review committee thinking beyond research, teaching, and on-campus service?

Engaged scholarship is often shunted into the broad evaluation category of “service” [4, 23], which is traditionally undervalued in tenure and promotion decisions [3, 7, 24]. Instead, create flexible criteria that can be tailored to both engaged and traditional researchers. For example, at the University College Cork, researchers choose from a list of indicators within each criteria category (e.g., teaching, research/innovation, engagement) that best represent their work [25]. The Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development at Utrecht University [26], created the “MERIT” promotion system (Management, Education, Research, Impact, and Team Spirit), in which no researcher is expected to excel in all criteria. The Institute has also chosen to assess impact through effects on and narratives from community partners. For its part, Virginia Commonwealth University has determined that engaged work should be embedded in all tenure criteria, renaming these engaged scholarship, engaged teaching, and engaged service [27] (see Spotlight on page 57).

Guidance on incorporating engaged scholarship into review processes, consultation, and training are all available through the National Review Board for the Scholarship of Engagement [28]. The University of Minnesota’s Office of Public Engagement also offers a list of indicators that departments can use to incorporate public engagement into tenure and promotion policies [29].
Do standards for assessing impact apply fairly to engaged scholars?

Any unit-level standards for assessing impact must apply fairly to both engaged and traditional work. As mentioned previously, Huber’s Six Attributes of Scholarly Excellence for assessing learning, research, teaching, service, and outreach are appropriate metrics to apply to engaged scholars [17]. Michigan State University’s guidebook, Points of Distinction, recommends another approach, orienting criteria around four dimensions: significance, impact, scholarship, and context [30]. Singh et al. [3] expand the evaluation of engaged activities to seven dimensions: “reach (the size of the audience), rigor (how research-based the engagement is), innovation (novelty of engagement), number (quantity of effort), depth (amount of work behind each effort), prominence (perceived esteem of the effort), and outcomes (changes resulting from the effort).” For institutions creating and revising standards for the assessment of research impact [31], the American Anthropological Association recommends the NSF’s Broader Impact guidelines [32] as a starting point.

Do candidates have the opportunity to present their work in narrative format?

Changfoot et al. [2] argue that the impacts of community-based engaged scholarship are best communicated through contextually rich narratives. These allow candidates to tell stories about their research, including participation with local communities and nuanced or long-term impacts that are difficult to quantify [33] (see Chapter 3: Metrics for Assessing Research Impact). Faculty can also integrate impact statements directly into scholarly articles or include as supplemental materials. For example, Galford et al. [34] included a qualitative assessment of research impact and quotes from end users as part of a peer-reviewed manuscript reporting their research results.

Do candidates receive credit for a wide range of co-authored scholarly products?

Between 1975 and 2005, the number of co-authors per published article increased by 75% [35], indicating a rise in collaborative work. Beyond journal articles, engaged research results come in many other product types, including workshops, software, technical reports, broadcasts, open-source code or datasets, creative performances, exhibits, websites, maps, and policy or planning documents [12]. Research products and co-authorship are often credited differently by different disciplines, and so it is important, at the institutional level, to establish protocols for crediting the work of engaged scholars that apply across disciplines [8, 11]. Review committees can then draw on established protocols to assess co-authorship. One example is the CRediT project, which defines a taxonomy of 14 contributor types [36] and has been adopted by a number of scientific journal publishers [8]. Standards for assessing co-authored products presented in diverse outlets have also been codified into tenure and promotion policies at schools including the University of Southern California [8], the University of North Carolina at Greensboro [12], and the School of Arts, Media and Engineering at Arizona State University [22] (see Spotlight on page 56).

Is local impact recognized?

Engaged scholars are often experts at working collaboratively with community partners to co-develop research projects and address local issues. Local projects are more likely, however,
to be funded by practice-oriented foundations rather than prominent research agencies; their resulting products often score lower on metrics that favor global reach and prestigious funders [12]. Encouraging narratives as part of academic CVs or annual reporting can allow researchers to articulate how their work is contributing to local impact [37]. Communication staff at the departmental or university level are often motivated to promote local impacts of scholarly work. Researchers should be encouraged to work with their communications teams to enhance the visibility of their work in ways that can lead to demonstrable media hits or recognition of locally-relevant impact.
SCHOOL-LEVEL INITIATIVE AT ASU [22]

The School of Arts, Media, and Engineering (AME) at Arizona State University (ASU) was created in 2003 to focus on experiential media, a topic requiring contributions from Computer Science, Engineering, Psychology, Education, and the Arts. Most AME faculty have joint appointments, allowing them to form research teams with students and other faculty across disciplinary concentrations. The AME tenure and promotion criteria were developed by an interdisciplinary panel of faculty and reviewed by all participating departments before submission for approval by Arts and Engineering Deans and the Provost. Since adoption, the criteria have been reviewed and updated every two years.

An evaluation of the first four years of the new procedures showed an increase in interdisciplinary collaboration. AME faculty reported having better clarity regarding expectations and increased trust in a fair evaluation process, while evaluators reported better understanding AME faculty work. Among all participants, the evaluation process became more familiar and easier to use over time.

Practices used in the new evaluation process include:

- **Interdisciplinary evaluation committees.** Every step of evaluation, from the departmental level to the college level and through to the Dean’s recommendation, includes representation from multiple disciplines. Faculty holding joint appointments receive a single evaluation that contains input from each of their departments.

- **Standards of excellence that apply across disciplines.** Criteria to determine the reach and rigor of faculty outputs are documented in a matrix. The matrix’s categories (“major,” “standard,” “minor,” and “supportive”) are flexible enough to be applied to diverse product types, e.g., scientific publication, software, and artistic performance.

- **Group authoring principles.** For research products and creative works that do not follow a traditional author listing format, researchers have the option of grouping co-authors as “primary,” “secondary,” and “supporting” and including narratives describing the contributions of each author.

- **Rewards for networking.** Collaboration, or “connectivity,” is explicitly rewarded by AME criteria, which uses the following weights: research 40%, teaching 30%, connectivity 20%, and service 10%. Evaluators review multiple aspects of faculty networks: number of collaborators (based on a list of research products and advisees), strength of network connections (based on the number of products produced jointly by the same pair of collaborators), the disciplinary makeup of collaborations, and the number of authors per research product.
Guidelines for interdisciplinary and disciplinary work components. AME criteria are transparent and specific as to the disciplinary and interdisciplinary expectations for faculty with joint appointments in traditional departments.

UNIVERSITY-LEVEL INITIATIVE AT VCU [27]

Between 2011 and 2013, Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) revised its tenure and promotion policies to include community-engaged language and criteria. Units across campus followed with their own revisions to align unit-level policies with the new University policy. This process formally began when the University’s President formed a 19-member ad hoc committee to review and revise the institutional-level promotion and tenure policies, but the stage was set earlier through intentional preparatory actions:

- **Institutional readiness.** The Division of Community Engagement (DCE) played an integral role in laying groundwork for and implementing the revision process. The DCE, established in 1978, was well staffed (20 full-time workers), administered from the Provost’s Office, and highly active in supporting and coordinating community-engaged work across all campus units. VCU also had a history of championing community-engaged faculty work, having gained a Carnegie Foundation distinction as a community-engaged institution in both 2006 and 2015. In 2011, language and criteria for assessing engagement and impact were included in the University’s strategic plan.

- **Shared definitions.** In 2011, following a realization that units and individuals across campus were using terms pertaining to engaged scholarship differently, DCE staff and a Council for Community Engagement developed a list of standardized definitions for key terms. The approved definitions were entered into a campus-wide glossary and posted to the University’s public website.

- **High-level champions.** VCU’s Provost and its Vice President for Research were outspoken supporters of engaged work and cross-disciplinary research. Researchers with experience in community-engaged scholarship were recruited for leadership positions on the ad hoc tenure and promotion revision committee.

The committee ensured the revised policy language included the shared definitions of community engagement terms, and followed the themes of the University’s strategic plan. Prior to revision, VCU’s policies reflected the three traditional bins for assessing faculty work: teaching, research, and service. Rather than create a new category for engaged scholarship, the committee decided to incorporate engagement into all existing criteria, resulting in a
scheme measuring community-engaged scholarship, community-engaged teaching, and community-engaged service. A campus education effort accompanied the revision process, and campus and public feedback was collected via open discussion forums and a web survey.

Commenting on the finalized policy revisions, organizational scholars Pelco and Howard [27] write, “We urge other institutions to recognize promotion and tenure revision as just one step along the road to developing a campus climate that supports faculty for undertaking community engaged teaching, scholarship, and service rather than as the successful endpoint. The impact of community-engaged language in an institution’s faculty reward structure ultimately depends on the quality and quantity of supports that the institution provides to its members for deeply embracing that language.”
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Institutionalizing engagement among faculty and researchers requires reforms to the systems of recognition and reward. Improving transparency in the criteria of promotion and tenure, both internally and externally, sets appropriate expectations for incoming scholars, review committees, and public stakeholders. Engaged research differs from traditional scholarship in that it requires additional time and resources and produces knowledge products aimed at societal impact. Promotion criteria can be adapted to the evaluation of engaged scholarship without sacrificing rigor. Existing standards of scholarly excellence can be applied to engaged research and reviewers can be trained in the evaluation of engaged and interdisciplinary research.

Excellence in engagement can also be evaluated with respect to teaching and service, activities that are often overlooked in traditional promotion and tenure criteria. A more holistic, inclusive, and tailored approach to evaluation allows for a diversity of scholars to thrive in the academy and can better align institutional missions with the incentive structures that shape faculty investments in research, teaching, and service. Policy reform should be coupled with mentorship, administrative support, funding, and reforms to hiring and retention practices in order to create a culture that rewards and sustains engagement.

REFERENCES


