Frequently asked questions about tenure

The questions and answers below have been compiled and anonymized from frequent questions received over several years from tenure candidates, department chairs, members of DTCs and UTCs and from external evaluators. Numbers in the answers refer sections in the Regulations Relating to the Employment of Tenure Track and Tenured Academic Staff.

Year of tenure consideration

Q. I was hired as an Assistant Professor on Aug. 1, 2009. How can I determine my year of mandatory tenure consideration?

A. Assistant Professors must be considered for tenure not later than their 6th year. Years are calculated from June 1st of the calendar year of your original appointment to tenure track (see Regulations, section 7.2). This means that your year of mandatory tenure consideration is 2014-15. The following tenure timeline may be useful http://www.mcgill.ca/apo/academic-staff/procedures/tenure-cohort/.

Q. I am an Associate Professor appointed on tenure track. Is my year of tenure consideration the same as for an Assistant Professor appointed in the same year?

A. No, Associate Professors must be considered for tenure not later than their 5th year. Full professors on tenure track must go up for tenure consideration in their 4th year.

Q. I first came to McGill in 2010 as an Assistant Professor (Special Category). After obtaining my PhD, I was appointed as a tenure track Assistant Professor in January 2011. What is my year of mandatory tenure consideration?

A. The time served as Assistant Professor (Special Category) does not count towards the 6 years. In other words, you should calculate from 2011, not 2010. This means that your year of tenure consideration is 2016-17.

Q. I can’t find anything in the regulations on how accumulated experience counts towards the tenure clock.

A. Experience accumulated else where does not affect the timing of mandatory tenure consideration at McGill but may affect the decision as to whether to apply for early tenure consideration – see next section.

Early tenure consideration

Q. Could you please clarify whether an Assistant Professor may apply for early tenure consideration as they enter their 3rd year or only after they complete their 3rd year?

A. Assistant Professors can apply to be considered for early tenure during their third year (or subsequently) (Regulations, section 7.6). So they would actually have to indicate
their intention to make this application towards the end of their 2\textsuperscript{nd} year. The department can recommend tenure consideration in any year, provided the candidate agrees.

Q. If one makes an unsuccessful application for early tenure, can one apply again in the following year?

A. No, unless it happens to be your mandatory year. Early tenure attempts are permitted only once (Regulations, section 7.6). If someone goes up for early tenure consideration and tenure is refused, they go up again in the year of mandatory tenure consideration (and the DTC and UTC do not have any information about the previous attempt).

Q. What options are available for a professor who has applied for early tenure consideration and then wishes to withdraw his or her candidacy?

A. Early tenure applications can be withdrawn at any time, without penalty. The candidate should inform the Secretariat. If the DTC and/or UTC have already begun to meet, the candidate should inform the chairs of these committees as well.

Q. Is it only performance at McGill that counts in tenure consideration?

A. In general, performance at McGill is what counts when dealing with mandatory tenure consideration. However, in the case of early tenure consideration, prior performance (in research, teaching and service) can be included and assessed as well; this is particularly advisable for those being considered for very early tenure (within a year or two of arriving at McGill).

This has been the practice at McGill for many years but is not specifically mentioned in the Regulations or elsewhere. Most DTCs and UTCs are well aware of this practice. Your covering statement can explain why you are including material relating to an appointment prior to McGill.

(Sometimes people ask how far back they should go in such cases. An informal rule of thumb is to go back sufficiently far that the dossier includes 5 years prior to the year of tenure consideration, since 5 years is what we normally look at.)

Q. This is a question about the need for a reappointment recommendation and a reappointment dossier if a professor opts to go up for early tenure.

A. If a professor asks to be considered for early tenure in the same year that reappointment consideration is due (i.e. the 3\textsuperscript{rd} year of the initial appointment), it does not make sense for a candidate to prepare two dossiers, one for reappointment and one for tenure. Discuss with your chair the possibility of having the DTC make a recommendation regarding reappointment based on your tenure dossier, at the same time - or prior to – making a recommendation concerning tenure.
Delays in setting up a lab can affect tenure consideration.

Q. There have been significant delays in setting up my lab. Can I request a delay of tenure consideration?

A. A delay in lab set-up or renovation is not one of the limited circumstances in which tenure consideration can be delayed. Instead, you are encouraged to make factual information on such delays available to the DTC and UTC to aid their evaluation of your tenure dossier. This can be included in your personal statement (and supported by a letter from your department chair or supervisor, as appropriate).


A. Your year of mandatory tenure consideration currently is 2014-15. However, because of your maternity leave, you are entitled to elect to defer tenure consideration to 2015-16. It is important that you let APO know, not later than June 1st of 2014 (Regulations, 7.5.1), otherwise you will be deemed to be in the 2014-15 cohort.

Note that the regulations allow for a maximum of 2 extensions of the year of tenure consideration (including any extensions that may have been granted for reappointment consideration).

Q. I will be on leave during my year of tenure consideration. Am I entitled to elect to defer tenure consideration?

A. No. The fact that you will be on leave during the year of tenure consideration is irrelevant, since the DTC or the UTC will be assessing your performance during the 5 years prior to your year of tenure consideration (Regulations, 7.5).

Q. I recently suffered a medical emergency that may impact my work abilities for some time (longer than 3 months). I am wondering if it is possible to defer tenure consideration without taking an official medical leave?

A. Tenure consideration cannot be deferred unless you have taken an official medical leave of 3 months or more.

Q. I am currently on a reduced load appointment. Does this allow me to request an extension of mandatory tenure consideration?

A. Such cases are considered on a case-by-case basis, depending on the length of time of the reduced load and also the proportion of the reduction (50% or lower).
**Withdrawing from the tenure process**

Q. If a professor does not submit his or her tenure dossier by Sept. 1st of the year of mandatory tenure consideration, what are the consequences?

A. The professor’s tenure track position at McGill will terminate at the end of their current contract.

Q. If a professor wishes to withdraw from tenure consideration after Sept. 1st of the year of mandatory tenure consideration, what is the procedure?

A. A letter should be sent to the Secretariat and to APO, copied to the Dean and Chair, stating that the candidate is withdrawing from tenure track immediately and resigning from McGill effective the last day of their current contract.

Q. Up until what point in time can someone withdraw from tenure consideration?

A. A candidate has until May of the year of mandatory tenure consideration to withdraw and resign. In other words, the candidate must do so BEFORE the Provost (on behalf of the Principal) renders his final decision.

Q. If a professor withdraws from tenure consideration before the process is complete, does it go on his or her record that tenure has been denied?

A. No, denial of tenure occurs at the end of the process, so if someone withdraws before the process is complete, denial of tenure has not yet happened.

**Dossier**

Q. I have been asked by one of the tenure candidates in my Department what the "personal statement" in the tenure dossier should consist of. Is this a general presentation of her/himself, without duplicating too much of the information in the research, teaching, and service statements?

A. Yes, you can think of it as a reasonably detailed covering statement, summarizing the candidate’s employment history and providing a general overview of the candidate’s performance in the three areas of academic duties, highlighting the most significant aspects, as developed in the rest of the dossier. The personal statement provides the candidate with the opportunity to show where they have excelled, where their performance has improved and developed over time, and to explain any special circumstances. There are no specific requirements as to length of the personal statement.

Q. To what extent should teaching be addressed in the cover letter for the external dossier? Should it be taken out completely? Any guidance about how to address teaching in the EXTERNAL cover letter would be appreciated.

A. There is no need to write a different covering statement for the externals. In other
words, leave in whatever you say about teaching. Just make sure that your teaching dossier (and any appendices relating to teaching) is not included. The externals are told that they are not being asked to comment on teaching.

Q. In reviewing tenure dossiers of several of my colleagues who have recently gone through the process, I noticed that there was a large range in the number of pages within the research dossier. I wondered if you have any sense of what the norm is and if there is an upper page limit.

A. There is no set number of pages, nor a page limit, nor even a recommended number of pages, since there is considerable variation from case to case, and from discipline to discipline. The research section should address the nature of your research, what makes it significant, how your research program has developed since you have been at McGill, etc., etc. Write whatever you need, without padding and also without under-representing yourself. You should refer to (some of) your publications and show how these fit your research program (include these in an appendix, as pdfs), provide information about your research grants, etc. Do NOT include unnecessary letters, such as statements from funding councils informing you that a grant has been awarded.

Q. What guidance can I give tenure candidates about how many books and articles to include in their tenure dossiers? Some candidates seem to be including everything they have ever authored. Would it be preferable to ask them to include a sampling?

A. Candidates should NOT include ALL their publications, only a representative sample, especially those that relate to the research that they describe in the research section of the dossier, as well as work that has had a particular impact and/or has appeared in major international journals. The actual number will vary from case to case, since different disciplines and sub-disciplines have different expectations.

Q. I was going to include all my teaching evaluations and comments for the courses I taught at McGill into my teaching portfolio. I also wanted to include the syllabus of a new course I developed. Any advice on how to proceed?

A. The teaching portfolio is not intended to include as much detail as you suggest. Numerical ratings for all the courses you have taught should be included in a table and the full set of student comments should be provided for only one course. A course syllabus should only be included if it sheds light on teaching effectiveness. (For details, see Appendix A of the Regulations.)

Q. Is it OK if I solicit letters from my students to include in my teaching portfolio?

A. No it is better not to solicit letters, as students may feel under pressure to provide something positive. Unsolicited letters can be included, as can comments received via a department’s graduate or undergraduate student representatives.

Q. Can the dossier be bilingual (meaning that some sections, such as the CV, would be in
French and others in English).

A. In principle, a dossier can be in English or French, particularly if the dossier relates to a discipline that is conducted in French, or it could be bilingual. A problem that could potentially arise is that we do not know if all members of the DTC and UTC or the external evaluators are bilingual. For this reason, it will normally be preferable for as much of the dossier as possible to be in English, particularly the candidate's personal statement covering performance in the 3 areas of academic duties. There is no problem in having the CV in French. Any publications that appeared in French (or other languages) do not have to be translated.

Adding material to the dossier

Q. Our DTC is about to start discussions on a tenure application. A question has arisen about the appropriateness of the Chair going back to the candidate at this time to ask for clarification and to request that the CV be reworked, also for clarification. Would requesting clarification or reworking a document constitute ‘additional material’ added to the file after the November 15th deadline?

A. The DTC or the UTC can request this kind of clarification, in writing; documents involving clarification can be added to the dossier after the Nov. 15th deadline, at the request of the DTC or UTC (Regulations, section 7.15.1). Note that such clarification can also be requested before Nov. 15. In other words, the DTC does not have to wait till Nov. 15.

Q. Our DTC met today to discuss a tenure dossier. We all felt that we required more information from the candidate to clarify his contribution on joint papers, as well as provide an update on the status of papers that were under review at the time he submitted his dossier. I understand that we can request this additional information from the candidate. But what is the proper channel for this request? Should I, as DTC Chair, send a formal memo requesting the information from the candidate? Should the request go through the Secretariat? Am I allowed to discuss the details of the request with the candidate?

A. A formal request to the candidate, copied to the Secretariat, would be fine (email is OK). You are allowed to discuss the request with the candidate, to ensure that what gets added is in fact what the DTC is looking for.

Q. Can members of the DTC look at past recommendations for reappointment of candidates who are being considered for tenure?

A. Yes, this is material that the Chair of the DTC could add to the dossier before Nov. 15th, in which case the candidate must be given a copy (Regulations, section 7.14). The candidate is allowed to prepare a written response on any material that has been added to the dossier.
Q. There was a letter attached to Prof. X’s letter of reappointment which favourably discussed his teaching abilities. Can the DTC Chair mention the letter in the DTC report, even if it is not shared with the rest of the DTC members?

A. No, the report of the DTC must not refer to material which DTC members have not seen. The Chair can add the letter to the dossier before Nov. 15th.

Q. I have received confirmation that an article that was at the Revise and Resubmit stage during the DTC deliberations is now accepted for publication. Is this information that I can transmit to the UTC?

A. A candidate cannot add material to the dossier at this point. However, the Chair of the DTC could do so. Or you could forward the information to the chair of the UTC (who will normally be the Dean). The UTC can then decide whether or not to include the information in their deliberations.

Q. What are the procedures for adding material to the dossier after Sept. 1st?

A. It is crucial that any additional material is made available in the candidate’s official dossier in the Secretariat. Therefore, any material added by the candidate must be submitted to the Secretariat (Regulations, 7.15.2). The same applies to any material added by the Chair of the DTC; the Chair must ensure that a copy is given to the Secretariat (7.14.1).

DTC

Q. I am in the early stages of preparing my tenure dossier, and have some questions regarding the tenure process. In particular, I would like to know more about the process by which the DTC is composed.

A. The DTC must consist of at least 4 tenured faculty members plus a chair, usually the chair of the department) (Regulations 7.19, 7.20). Units vary as to how they determine which tenured faculty members will serve; you should ask your department chair how this is done in your department.

Q. I would just like to confirm that going short one DTC member is fine. I ask because one member didn’t show up at a meeting, so the DTC was then composed of the Chair plus 3 members instead of 4. Deliberations had already commenced.

A. Yes, if deliberations on the merits have already begun, the DTC should continue with reduced membership, rather than adding one of the alternates (Regulations, section 7.20.7).

Q. Can an Associate Dean serve on a DTC?

A. This is permitted in faculties with departments but not in faculties without departments (7.20.1).
Q. Can faculty members on leave (sabbatical, parental, leave of absence, etc.) serve on a DTC?

A. Academic staff on leave cannot be obliged to serve on a DTC. However, they may choose to do so, provided that their department is in agreement. They would have to commit to being present for all meetings.

Q. Can graduate students or postdocs sit in on the deliberations of the DTC, in order to gain experience as to how universities operate in this regard?

A. DTC members must be tenured faculty members. No one else may attend DTC meetings, unless they are invited by the DTC to provide information. There are at least 3 dangers with letting in ‘observers’: (i) confidentiality - this is particularly problematic if the observers were in support of a candidate that the DTC had doubts about; (ii) the DTC may feel unable to voice its real opinion, especially in negative or borderline cases, because of the presence of observers; (iii) if you had a case where tenure is denied and this went to appeal, the person could win on procedural grounds, the DTC having violated University procedures.

Q. According to my understanding, we will see the external evaluators’ letters sometime after 25 November. Is it appropriate to meet before these letters have been received, to discuss other aspects of the dossiers?

A. It is OK to hold a meeting (or meetings) before the external letters have been received but the DTC’s final recommendation should not be made until after the letters have been taken into consideration.

DTC reports

Q. I have a tenure candidate who would like to forward a written response to the DTC Report. Is this permitted?

A. If the DTC report makes a positive recommendation, a response to the report is not permitted. If the report makes a negative recommendation, the candidate will already have been offered the opportunity of making a response to the DTC.

Q. I have a question related to the DTC report. The report mentions “written comments received from two senior members of Professor X’s area”. I have not received a copy of these comments.

A. The intention is that candidates should receive copies of anything that is added to the tenure dossier by the DTC or UTC at any time, so these comments should have been made available to you. You can contact the Secretariat and ask that the comments be made available to you.

Q. I am chair of a DTC. What kind of information should be included in the DTC report?
A. The DTC report (and also the UTC report) should provide the DTC’s assessment of the candidate’s performance in each of the areas of academic duties, as well as reasons for the decision (instructions are on the form for the report). For candidates where the DTC is making a negative recommendation, it is important to include enough detail, so that the UTC and the Principal, as well as the candidate, can understand the basis for the recommendation. It is important not to mention any of the external reviewers by name.

Q. When should the DTC report be written?

A. Reports are due not later than Jan. 25th but a DTC can submit earlier than this. If the DTC is tending to the negative, the report should only be written after a meeting with the candidate, since the point of the meeting is to allow the candidate to convince the committee that it should not give a negative recommendation.

Q. Can a UTC begin their evaluation of a candidate before the DTC report deadline of Jan 25th?

A. The UTC can begin their evaluation as soon as they have the DTC report. So if the DTC submits its report in advance of the deadline, the UTC can proceed.

Q. If a member of a DTC or UTC disagrees with the majority decision in favour of tenure and decides to write a minority report arguing against tenure, can this report be anonymous?

A. No, all reports submitted by the DTC and UTC, including minority reports, must be signed.

**Tending to the negative**

Q. What information should be included in letters informing candidates that a committee is tending towards the negative?

A. The letter should specify what it is that the DTC or UTC has problems with. This needs to be specific enough for the candidate to be able to address the concerns in a meeting with the DTC/UTC and/or by providing additional documentation. The letter should also specify whether there are some academic duties which the DTC/UTC has no problems with, so that the candidate does not waste time preparing a presentation on something that the committee has already decided is acceptable.

Q. How long should the DTC or UTC give a candidate to prepare for a meeting where the tending-to-negative recommendation will be discussed?

A. Two weeks is a reasonable time frame to give the candidate enough time to prepare a rebuttal, and find an advisor if so desired.

Q. When informing a candidate that it is tending towards the negative, is the DTC
allowed to cite a few passages from externals’ letters to clarify the issues of concern?

A. Yes, this permitted, **provided that the passages are anonymous**. Furthermore, if a DTC or UTC is tending toward a negative recommendation, the candidate is entitled to receive from the Secretariat a copy of the external letters with nominative information removed.

Q. Is the DTC allowed to invite witnesses to the meeting with the candidate?

A. DTC and UTC committees are not expected to make use of witnesses in tending-to-negative meetings. In the event of an appeal, witnesses are permitted.

Q. The DTC met yesterday with Dr. Y to discuss the fact that it was tending to the negative. Dr. Y. presented additional information, after which the DTC decided that a positive recommendation will in fact be made. My question is this: Does Dr. Y’s additional information/documentation go into his tenure dossier? If so, who submits it (Dr. Y. or the DTC Chair) and to whom?

A. Yes, any presentations by tenure candidates to the DTC, UTC or the Provost form part of the tenure dossier. The candidate should ensure that he/she provides the Secretariat with a copy of this material (Regulations 7.15.2).

Q. I received a copy of my DTC report which includes a negative recommendation about my tenure. How can I appeal this decision?

A. The DTC makes a recommendation to the UTC, which in turn makes a recommendation to the Provost (acting for the Principal). It is possible that the UTC and/or the Provost will overturn a negative recommendation. You cannot appeal negative recommendations by the DTC or UTC. If the Provost decides to deny tenure, at that point the appeal mechanisms come into play.

Q. As an advisor to a tenure candidate who is preparing a response to a DTC or UTC ‘tending to a negative’ decision, am I permitted to solicit letters from people to clarify certain points raised in the DTC report? These individuals would obviously NOT be people who would have been on the list of external evaluators.

A. Letters solicited by the candidate (or the candidate’s advisor) from external people that speak to quality/quantity of research (and other duties) are in violation of sections 7.17.4 and 7.17.5 of the Regulations. As such people are not drawn from the agreed upon list of external evaluators, there is no guarantee that they would be at arms’ length from the candidate or that they are of sufficient standing in their field.

Letters from colleagues explaining the nature of collaborations, letters from journal editors or editors of books explaining the standing of the publications in question and letters from students attesting to teaching abilities are permissible forms of clarification.
Externals

Q. I am preparing my list of 8 external evaluators for my tenure review. Would you be able to share any information on how these are selected (e.g., do they start at the top of the list and go down until three people, who were deemed to be at arm’s length, have accepted)?

A. The UTC considers the list submitted by the candidate and determines who is to be invited. Rather than just going down the list, the UTC ranks the names according to a variety of criteria, such as the person's reputation and the reputation of the institution they come from. The Secretariat then approaches the externals, using the ranking determined by the UTC.

Q. Can I be asked to supply additional names of external evaluators?

A. Yes. There are several situations in which a candidate might be asked for additional names: (i) the UTC is not satisfied as to the suitability of the suggested names; (ii) there is deemed to be a conflict of interest between the external and the candidate (identified by the UTC or by the external); (iii) several of the externals on the list have indicated that they are unavailable.

Q. Is it OK to include emeritus professors as externals?

A. Yes, emeritus professors are appropriate as external evaluators.

Q. Can untenured people be nominated as externals?

A. Only people who have tenure (or equivalent) can serve as external evaluators. This means that Assistant Professors should never be included in your list of names.

Q. Can I receive a copy of the external evaluations once the tenure process has been completed?

A. The tenure regulations state that the candidate shall be given a copy of the external evaluations if the DTC, UTC or Provost is tending towards a negative. In the event of positive recommendations, we do not provide copies of the evaluations.

Conflicts of interest

Q. I have a query regarding the membership of the DTC. One of the tenure candidates this year is a member of a research group that includes one of the professors on the DTC. Does that constitute a conflict of interest?

A. This is not uncommon. It would not count as a conflict of interest unless they have actually published, presented or conducted research together. If in doubt, the DTC member should recuse himself/herself from discussing that file, or at least the
research component of that file.

Q. One of the professors on the UTC has mentioned that he is a co-investigator on several grants with professors who are now coming up for tenure. He is wondering whether this would pose a conflict of interest.

A. Yes, it does. When these tenure files are being considered, this professor should recuse himself.

Q. Prof. X and I have previously co-taught a course and been on a doctoral committee advisory committee for the same student. I presume it would be a conflict of interest if Prof. X was a member of my UTC.

A. Yes, at the UTC level that is the case. At the DTC level, this kind of overlap is almost inevitable and should not rule a person out from serving on the DTC.

Q. I was wondering if it would be considered a conflict of interest to include an external reviewer that I met in a past conference but with whom I have had no further contact.

A. This is not a conflict and is quite a common situation.

Q. Am I able to select a referee who was a teacher/lecturer of mine when I was at University? I do not have a personal or professional relationship with him; we have not written papers or collaborated on any projects.

A. This is not usually a problem, though it might depend on the extent of the interaction at that time and how many years ago this was. (It would be a problem to list your thesis supervisor.)

Q. My department sometimes hosts manuscript workshops for its professors, especially those publishing their first book. Typically, these workshops involve invitations to external discussants, who comment on different parts of the manuscript. Could someone who has been my discussant in a manuscript workshop serve as an external evaluator?

A. This sounds like a conflict, since the person in question would have given you detailed commentary on work which will presumably form an important part of your dossier.

Q. I am currently preparing a list of potential external evaluators. I was wondering if it would be considered problematic to include contributors to a book that I am currently co-editing. I have in fact had no contact with these contributors since they were invited by my co-editor and she is dealing with all editorial matters relating to them.

A. Normally, contributors to a volume that you are editing should be excluded. However, the situation that you describe is probably OK. You MUST explain this relationship on the nomination form (and if necessary your co-editor could presumably confirm that you have had no dealings with these contributors).
Q. I have already submitted my list of 8 potential external evaluators. Since submitting that list, I have been asked to write a commentary with one of the people I recommended as a reviewer. This disqualifies her from being a reviewer of my file. I assume I should let someone know (and possibly even submit an additional name). To whom would I submit that information?

A. Please inform the chair of your UTC, with a copy to the Secretariat and the Chair of your DTC. The UTC or the Secretariat will let you know whether additional names are required.

Q. I have a specific question regarding external evaluators. I've been treasurer of the Canadian Society for XYZ for three years. I'd like to nominate somebody who, like me, is on the executive council of that Society. The society meets once a year but we've never actually met at these meetings and we have had only sporadic contact via email. Would you think that it is admissible to nominate her as an external evaluator?

A. This person sounds sufficiently at arms’ length. But you do need to outline your relationship with her on the nomination form.

Q. I am the editor of a journal. Prof. B will be guest-editing a special issue to be published later this year. I will have no involvement with that issue. Is it acceptable for me to serve as an external evaluator of Prof. B?

A. This sounds sufficiently at arms' length.

**Other examples of conflicts**

- We are co-authors of a journal article which appeared in a 2005 publication.
- I need to disclose that we recently collaborated on a manuscript that was presented at a conference last year. This has been my only professional collaboration with Dr. X.
- I should disclose that Professor A is the author of a book chapter that I am currently editing for inclusion in a book to be published early next year.
- Prof. D and I collaborated on a project last year. This did not involve any publications or conference presentations.

**Other examples of non-conflicts**

- Prof. Z and I were classmates in graduate school many years ago. We were friendly at that time but have had little or no subsequent contact.
- I served as a co-organizer of a recently held conference along with colleagues, including Prof. X’s former PhD supervisor. Professor X had organized one of the preconference workshops.
- Prof. C and I have both served on a committee of the ZYX Society. In that capacity we did not work together directly, beyond attending the same meetings.
- I am familiar with Prof. A given that her research interests, and those of her supervisor, are in the general area of my research focus. We have never collaborated
or worked directly together and have never had a formal professional relationship.

Other

Q. Do tenure track Associate Professors/Librarians who are granted tenure also get promotion to Full Professor/Librarian at the same time?

A. No. Promotion to Full Professor is a separate process (Regulations, section 8).