Preparing a Tenure Dossier

Eric de Sturler  
Professor and Head of Mathematics  
Professor of Computational Modeling and Data Analytics  
Virginia Tech  
sturler@vt.edu  
https://personal.math.vt.edu/sturler/

CRA 2022 Career Mentoring Workshop
Overview

- How to start – what is required for tenure?
  - Sources and mentors
- What goes into the dossier?
- How to get good letters?
- Plan your research, teaching, service & outreach
  - Be efficient, time is short, be careful with prestigious but heavy service commitments (editorships, conference chair, …)
- Conclusions
How to start?

- Start when you start as Assistant Professor
- Make sure you understand requirements for tenure
- Expectations documents, information about the dossier (Provost’s Office), and how outside letter writers are selected and instructed
- Workshops or meetings from College/Department
- Information from Department Head/Chair
- Information from mentor(s)
- Dossiers from recently promoted colleagues
  - Preferably same/similar area
What goes into the dossier?

- Executive Summary
- Recommendations (dept comm, dept head, college comm, dean, ...)
- Outside letters (more later) – very important
- Statement: Research (most), Teaching, Service – mostly for outside department/non-experts
  - Separate statement for reviewers (for experts)
- Basic data (lot of details), awards, publications, grants, invitations, presentations, service (university and professional)
- Teaching observations, student evaluation information
Candidate Statement (Dossier)

- For non-experts
- Keep in mind what committees want to see: significance of research, impact, developing international leadership, …
- Provide tangible info (details elsewhere), connect the dots: paper led to plenary lecture/prestigious invitation, early research led to successful proposal and funding, follow-up on your work by others
- Provide similar (more detailed) information in Research Statement for external reviewers – more likely their letter confirm your impact, etc.
Virginia Tech is a land-grant university with a strong commitment to research. Candidates for tenure are expected to have **internationally recognized** research programs. The Faculty Handbook states that “the award of tenure is based on the **achievement of distinction** in an area of learning and the prediction of eminence throughout the individual’s professional career.” I am most interested in receiving your comments on the **significance and impact** of Dr. X’s research.

Dr. X's **research statement, CV, five selected papers, list of grants, and citation analysis of five papers, and a summary of service and teaching** are available in the attached file, *Review_Materials.zip*
How to get good letters? (1)

- Who do you want for letter writers? Who will be asked?
  - Top/very good (senior) people, but they need to have time
    - Selection from candidate list and department list
  - Make sure they know you and your work
    - Must be important, innovative, well-written
    - Networking, collaborations, visibility, professional service
  - You can ask people, but give them easy way out (if don’t have the time, don’t know my work well enough, …)
  - Help your reviewers write the letter you want – make it easy
    - Based on research statement (for experts), selection of a few important papers, CV, ...
    - Know the reviewer instructions (available)
How to get good letters? (2)

What are reviewers asked to write about?

- Quality, significance, impact of your research, developing international leadership (prediction of eminence)
- Comment on (your) selection of your best papers, most important papers
- Could be well cited, deep results, new directions of research, ...
- Tangible examples are better than claims, so connect the dots or help reviewers to do so
- Point out paper(s) led to funding, follow-up by others, invitations to meetings, plenaries, universities
Plan your research, teaching, and service

Plan your research well – aligns with proposal writing

- Think at least 5 years ahead; what is important to have solved by then (and promise it in 3, for a proposal)

Focus on important problems, not your next paper

- Provides impact, citations, invitations, grants
- Sometime still needs to be sold to the community
- Need this for good letters
- You don’t need many, one may be enough

Solving a big problem takes time; intermediate steps

- Keep an eye on your timeline

Write multiple proposals and recycle if not
Plan your research, teaching, and service

- **Good teaching is important; try to stick to a few classes (efficiency). Invest (right away) and reuse**
- **Show you can work effectively with (grad) students**
  - Grad students can be time sink, be careful
  - Know dept requirements (need to graduate PhD?)
- **Undergraduate research becoming more important**
- **Be selective with service; know requirements**
  - Usually modest service requirements pretenure
  - But easy to find (important) service to do, be selective
  - Have your mentor/dept head fight for you if needed
  - Be careful with prestigious but time-consuming service
Conclusions

- Being a Professor is supposed to be fun
  - Keep that in mind
- Take all the help/advice you can get
- Take care of your family and yourself