

# HEY JANE!- Promotion to Full Professor

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The author of this issue is Wanda Rushing, with input from participants in the Promotion to Full Workshop at the SWS Winter Meetings in St. Petersburg held in 2012. Special thanks to panelists Dana Britton, Shirley A. Jackson, Julia McQuillan, and Jan Thomas.

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HEY JANE!

I am an associate professor wondering when to start thinking about promotion to full. Neither the expectations nor the deadlines for this step on the career ladder are clear, and I am concerned about what appears to be a small number of women who have been promoted to full professor. What advice can you give me?

JANE SAYS:

Promotion to full is a logical and important next step on the career ladder, usually accompanied by a salary increase and associated with greater status within the academy. But the process can be mystifying. A growing body of research across disciplines shows that when it comes to promotion to full professor, women are less likely to be promoted than men, and their promotions take longer. These findings are surprising given that women are earning Ph. Ds., getting hired as assistant professors, and being tenured and promoted at the associate professor level at increasing levels. But research findings, as well as experiences of women who have been promoted, offer valuable information for making decisions, suggesting specific ways of preparing and being confident about taking the next step, and avoiding or minimizing delays.

TIMING

Develop a realistic timeline. Unlike the process of tenure and promotion to associate, there is no clock set for promotion to full, nor is there a requirement that one seek promotion. Nonetheless, some faculty handbooks set the *minimum* time between earning the Ph.D. and seeking promotion to full at ten years, and most research on academic careers sets the norm for promotion to full at 12 to 13 years from first appointment as assistant, or 6 to 7 years after promotion to associate. There is no maximum time setting, but faculty members who have not sought promotion to full after ten or more years as a tenured associate may feel discouraged. Whatever the time frame, each candidate must construct a dossier that documents her achievements and justifies timing.

CLARIFYING EXPECTATIONS

Become informed about the process. Start by reading written departmental guidelines for promotion, and keeping up with evolving expectations at your institution and in the discipline. Understand that

expectations may vary according to the structure of your program; departments that offer a bachelor degree only, award master and bachelor degrees, and programs that award bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees can be very different. Find out if your college or university sponsors annual workshops or information sessions for candidates, and inquire if recent sample dossiers are available for review. Confer with your department chair and full professors in your department. In most universities, each department sends a representative to the college tenure and promotion committee. Your departmental representative should be able to offer helpful advice based on what the committee has viewed favorably or unfavorably in recent decisions. Decide how you want your career to go and how much time you want to spend on funding opportunities, teaching, research, and administrative tasks. Remember that promotion to associate required documentation of accomplishments and potential to contribute, but promotion to full involves more of an assessment of proven accomplishments than potential.

### SERVICE

Avoid what has been described as “the gendered gully of service.” Departmental citizenship matters, but the number, level, and timing of service commitments may significantly affect chances for promotion. Committees will look for evidence that you are contributing to the department and the university in meaningful ways, as well as participating in professional organizations and serving on editorial boards. However, studies show that a large percentage of time spent fulfilling *internal* service obligations, such as directing undergraduate programs and advising students, tends to be associated with delays in promotion, particularly in research intensive universities. These roles may be more highly valued for promotion, however, in smaller colleges focused on undergraduate education. Be cautious about administrative appointments. Associate professors who serve as department chair usually experience delays in promotion. Generally, men are more likely to serve as department chairs than women, but women who chair departments are more likely than men to accept that role as associate professors, and they do so at a cost. Also note that many *external* service roles may increase one’s visibility in the discipline and positively affect promotion, but these roles may involve time commitments that delay promotion. Editorships are a prime example.

### SCHOLARSHIP

Be a productive scholar. Learn the expectations for books, peer-reviewed articles and other scholarly output at your institution. Keep in mind that publishing a book may delay promotion for two reasons. The first concerns possible postponements in getting the book written and shepherded through the review process for publication. The second reason involves waiting for journals to review the book. For some universities, promotion to full requires submitting reviews of the book published in professional journals for documenting how well the publication is being received in the discipline. This requirement differs for promotion to associate professor; assistant professors may be required to provide evidence of the book’s completion and final acceptance for publication, but waiting for reviews in professional journals is not necessary. The number of peer-reviewed journal articles and preferred outlets for publication varies from one institution to another. Either way, books or journal articles, the candidate must demonstrate that her work is having a professional impact.

## TEACHING

Craft a teaching statement and provide evidence of excellence and effectiveness in teaching. Most of us have been writing teaching statements since graduate school. A decade or more later, we have compiled student evaluations, syllabi, evidence of thesis and dissertation committees, and other institutional records to document our claims. Also, the teaching statement should reflect growth and reflection gained from years of experience. A general statement of goals is important, preferably one aligned with institutional priorities, but the dossier should include more specific reflections on techniques, tactics and goals proven to work in formal and informal settings. Promotion to full in research-intensive universities does not involve soliciting letters from students. But smaller colleges focused on undergraduate education may require them. Once again, it is important to learn what is expected at one's own institution.

## REVIEWERS

Be prepared to make recommendations for external reviewers. Most departmental guidelines specify how reviewers are selected and how many are required. Typically, the committee compiles a list of recommended reviewers from those submitted by the candidate, and by members of the T & P committee, before inviting prospective reviewers to participate. Rules may govern whether a co-author may serve as a reviewer. The best way to prepare for making your list is to meet people with common research interests through professional associations and discussions throughout your career. By the time you apply for promotion, your research statement, CV, and other materials should help prospective reviewers decide if they are right for the job.

## References

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