


MEMORANDUM

To: Academic Deans

Office of the Provost

From: C.L. Max Nikias 

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Executive Vice President
and Provost

Date: May 25, 2010

Malcolm R. Currie Chair
in Technology and
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Subject: Guidelines of the Committee on Probationary Deadlines

For your convenience, I want to share the guidelines explaining how the committee and I deal with requests to change any individual's mandatory tenure decision date. This memo updates my September 15, 2008 memo, to clarify our existing practice and to answer frequently asked questions. The basic principle for extending the probationary period is that the faculty member has experienced unusual circumstances that interfere with the opportunity to do expected research and publication to an extent that threatens to undercut what otherwise would have been a meritorious tenure dossier.

1. Committee.

The Committee on Probationary Deadlines reviews requests to exclude time from the probationary period (sometimes called extending the probationary period or revising the tenure decision date or "tenure clock.") When a meeting is impractical, the committee may meet by phone or by an exchange of email. It makes a recommendation to me. Only the provost, on the president's behalf, has authority to change the tenure decision date.

The Committee is jointly selected by the Provost and the President of the Faculty and includes deans or associate deans as well as other faculty.

2. Process.

The request is made by a memo sent from the faculty member through his or her department chair and dean, and forwarded to the vice provost for faculty affairs. The request should include:

- Faculty member's explanation of the special circumstances.
- Copy of the offer letter showing the original tenure decision date (salary figures can be redacted.)
- Documentation. (*Extensions requested by the birth mother of a child require only the birth certificate, not the next two items.*)
- Current CV.

- Memo from the dean, commenting on (1) the unusual circumstances and (2) whether those circumstances are thought likely to make the difference between a meritorious or non-meritorious tenure dossier.

3. Prior Service.

- Setting the Original Tenure Decision Date. This is done by the dean in the original offer letter. The rules for counting prior probationary service at another institution are set out in the Faculty Handbook section 4-D(1), paragraph 4¹. The Handbook provides that unresolved questions concerning what prior service must or must not be counted shall be directed to the Committee on Probationary Deadlines. It is highly preferable that this be done before there is an accepted offer and so the request can be submitted without a copy of an offer letter.
- Amending the Original Date. The tenure decision date specified in an accepted offer should not be altered later by the school. In unusual cases, if a mistake is discovered late, the individual and dean can request the provost to amend the date after advice of the committee.
- Mid-year Appointment. If an appointment starts on or after December 1, that academic (or fiscal) year is not counted toward the tenure clock. By analogy problems that lasted less than three-and-one half months' generally are disregarded, and those that last longer can be considered for one-year exclusion.
- Unusual Prior Tenure-Track Service. The committee has flexibility in calculating the number of years of prior service counted toward tenure in cases where a new faculty member comes from a tenure-track job, but the prior institution was one in which research was not stressed or teaching responsibilities were quite heavy; or the candidate has switched field; or there was a significant gap in service.
- Prior Non-Tenure-Track Service. No "switching" or "promotion" from a non-tenure-track position to a tenure track appointment is allowed, because non-tenure-track faculty are not eligible for tenure. They may, however, apply for open tenure-track positions on a competitive basis. If an individual is appointed to the tenure-track, prior non-tenure-track service does not count toward the tenure clock.

¹ Prior probationary service at another institution [of higher education] shall count towards the faculty member's ... maximum probationary period. With one year of prior probationary service, the maximum probationary period shall be one year shorter; with two years of prior probationary service, the maximum probationary period shall be two years shorter; with three or more years of prior probationary service, the maximum probationary period shall be three years shorter - even though, thereby, the faculty member's total probationary period [considering both USC and the prior institution] is extended beyond the ... maximum.

- Prior Visiting Service. When a visiting appointment at USC (a so-called “lookover visit”) is immediately followed by a tenure-track appointment, the period of the visiting is counted as part of the probationary period. (This has been the University’s long practice even though a visiting appointment is classified, for other purposes, as non-tenure track).

4. Common Reasons for Case-by-Case Approvals.

- Leave of Absence. To approve an extension of the tenure decision date, the candidate’s request and dean’s memo would have to demonstrate that the activities carried out during the leave did not permit the continuation of research and publishing projects. Leaves that in effect give the candidate additional research and writing time (such as fellowship leaves) should not be used as a basis for an extension request.
- Family Responsibilities. Up to one year’s extension can be given for responsibilities such as caring for a child or children or an aged or ill relative, as provided in Faculty Handbook section 9-D (3). (But see the paragraph below on Children.)
- Medical Leave, Other Personal Illness, Bereavement.
- Inadequate Research Facilities. For example, laboratory facilities promised in the letter of offer were not ready until a substantial time after the faculty member arrived.

5. Provost’s Approvals.

Some situations are handled by the provost without going through the Probationary Deadlines Committee:

- Children. The primary care giver or birth mother of a child is entitled to an exclusion from the probationary period as described in Section 9 of the Faculty Handbook. The provost may request documentation that the faculty member has greater childcare responsibilities than the other parent. Someone who gives birth to a child and also is the primary care giver is entitled to two years. There would be no further extension for multiple childbirths or additional children.
- Terminal Degree. If the faculty member was still working on completion of the dissertation for the terminal degree at the time of the individual’s faculty appointment, the probationary period is usually calculated from the date of completion of all requirements for the degree.
- Military Duty. Non-research periods do not count towards the tenure clock.
- UCAPT Cases. It is also possible, though very rare, for the provost to extend a tenure decision date on the basis of consideration by the University Committee on Appointments, Promotions and Tenure.

6. Timing.

- Triggering Events. Requests connected with a leave should be made either prior to the leave or within six months after returning to regular activities. Otherwise, the extension request should be made within 12 months of the triggering event. A birth must be at least 12 months before the tenure decision date (May 15 for an academic year faculty member, June 30 for a fiscal year appointee) to qualify for an extension, as provided in Faculty Handbook section 9-D(1).
- Deadline. Any request for an extension should be submitted, at the latest, by early in the fall semester in the academic year that ends in the original tenure decision date.
- Maximum Extension. As provided in Section 9-D(5) of the Faculty Handbook, there shall not be more than a total of two years exclusion from the probationary period (extension of the tenure decision date) for any reason or combination of reasons, absent special approval by the provost.²
- Early Tenure Decisions. These guidelines deal with extensions. No permission is needed for a tenure dossier to be put forward earlier than the tenure decision date. (Please note that a negative decision by the provost on an early tenure case will still result in issuing a terminal year letter.)

²Also, as provided in Faculty Handbook 4-D(1), the total extension – including the result of excluding prior service at another institution – shall not be more than four years.