



## FACULTY AND PERSONNEL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

### RESPONSE TO CHARGE S-2502

#### “Guidelines for Promotions to Tenure Track During Uncertain Conditions of Federal Funding”

Submitted to Executive Committee:

#### DESCRIPTION OF CHARGE

Consider developing guidance for promotion and tenure committees within schools and colleges related to supporting faculty in disciplines where federal funding is traditionally expected during the course of the pretenure period as a key marker for advancement. Chairs, deans, and others involved in supporting pretenure faculty on their pathway to tenure can make use of this guidance when advising junior faculty in those disciplines on ways to demonstrate and sustain scholarly excellence in the absence of federal funding for research and related activities.

#### BACKGROUND

In February 2025, the current federal administration began making announcements regarding the continued availability of federal funding for research on topics generally related to the broad umbrella of “diversity, equity, and inclusion” and a number of related issues in scholarship on gender, sexuality, health, racism, education, disability, and more (see, e.g., Lee, 2025, “*These 197 terms may trigger reviews of your NIH, NSF grant proposals*”; <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brucelee/2025/03/15/these-197-terms-may-trigger-reviews-of-your-nih-nsf-grant-proposals/>). Ongoing, funded grants as well as pending proposals were at risk for cuts, cancellations, or rejections based on politically-determined content. Although these actions primarily targeted the social, behavioral, and health sciences, similar actions were taken against funding to arts and humanities projects (Blair, 2025, “*Cultural groups across U.S. told that federal humanities grants are terminated*”; <https://www.npr.org/2025/04/03/nx-s1-5350994/neh-grants-cut-humanities-doge-trump>). The upshot of these changes to federal funding policies and availability was that many scholars across disciplines would simply be unable to compete for funds to support their work. It became clear quickly that the adverse impact of these changes would fall disproportionately on junior, untenured faculty who would lose the opportunity to secure federal grants as a key external marker of the quality and importance of their scholarship. **At Rutgers University, this could mean that untenured assistant professors across multiple schools and departments would be at a significant**

**disadvantage relative to their previously-tenured colleagues with respect to demonstrating readiness for tenure at the close of their probationary periods.**

External challenges to the scholarship of junior faculty have happened before – most recently, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many untenured faculty experienced significant slowdowns or complete stoppages to their work due to social distancing rules, building and lab facility closures, and general lockdowns or activity restrictions. In response, the University in collaboration with the AAUP offered one-year “stop the clock” accommodations to junior faculty who needed more time to prepare their tenure packages on account of these slowdowns and stoppages. “Stopping the clock” yielded a one-year extension to the probationary (pretenure) period. For this charge, we considered what forms or indicators of scholarship could serve as temporary and adequate substitutes for federal grant funding in the case of junior faculty whose primary arenas of inquiry are not viable for federal funding under present political conditions.

**GENERAL EXPECTATIONS AND BALANCE OF EFFORT FOR TENURE-LINE FACULTY**

Although there is some variation by discipline, department, college, or school, tenure-line faculty at Rutgers University generally hold appointments that require them to engage in research, teaching, and service, with research expected to hold the plurality of effort contributed. In practice, this typically means that tenure-line faculty, especially junior (pretenure) faculty, maintain relatively light teaching loads (e.g., 1-2 courses per semester) and service obligations. This distribution of effort means that expectations for scholarship can be quite high: tenure-line faculty are expected to publish a significant volume of peer-reviewed papers, book chapters, books, and/or other discipline-specific scholarly projects (e.g., works of art or literature); present frequently at national or international academic conferences; secure external validation of the quality or importance of their work in the form of awards, prizes, and/or grants; and provide research mentorship of graduate students. All of these activities form the basis of the tenure application, which typically is filed at the end of an assistant professor’s fifth year. Tenure at Rutgers University thus requires a high degree of scholarly output. In some departments, colleges, or schools, federal grants are considered a requisite component of that scholarly output to the extent that a tenure case may not be advanced in the absence of federal grants.

**DEMONSTRATING SCHOLARLY EXCELLENCE WITHOUT FEDERAL FUNDING**

This committee recognizes that the current political environment for federal funding will not impact the scholarship of faculty in some disciplines. However, it will have substantially negative impact on the scholarship of faculty in others. In departments, colleges, or schools where current political conditions pose significant barriers to pretenure faculty securing federal grant funding, we propose the following considerations for department chairs, deans, and directors to consider when evaluating tenure cases:

1. If a pretenure faculty member believes that their scholarship has been adversely affected by federal grant funding conditions, they should assert and describe this explicitly in the Personal Statements submitted with their tenure package. This description should include specific reference to particular grant mechanisms that have become less viable for their work, and how

exactly those grant mechanisms have become difficult or impossible for them to access. Pretenure faculty also should continue to explore other, non-federal funding opportunities for their research (e.g., state, local, private, and other sources).

2. Pretenure faculty members should still be encouraged, when feasible and appropriate, to prepare and submit federal funding proposals. These documents often represent significant pieces of scholarship in their own right, and the proposal review process could lead to external evaluations that are highly probative and positive. In the same vein, we suggest that pretenure faculty could include federal grant review documents (e.g., NIH summary statements) in their tenure packages especially as these documents often include specific evaluations of the quality and competence and reputation of the investigator (i.e., the tenure candidate).

3. Pretenure faculty should be encouraged throughout their probationary period to strive for peer-reviewed publications in high-impact outlets within their discipline. Additionally, pretenure faculty should consider including with their tenure package selected peer manuscript reviews that include specific praise for the scope, quality, or importance of their scholarship.

4. Pretenure faculty should consider incorporating online citation metrics in their tenure package, with respect to their overall scholarly profile (e.g., H-index) as well as individual products (e.g., number of citations, impact factor of journal).

5. Department chairs or program directors leading the tenure process for their junior faculty have the responsibility of soliciting external review letters from expert scholars in the field that will be incorporated into the tenure package. These solicitations should make specific reference to the current challenges of the federal funding environment and how it has impacted the pretenure scholarship of candidates, and include a direct request of external reviewers not to over-emphasize federal funding or the lack thereof in their assessments.

6. Pretenure faculty in many disciplines and especially the sciences typically begin their appointments at Rutgers with some degree of “start-up” or overhead funding package that allows for the purchase of, for example, computers, lab supplies, or incentives for human subjects research pilot studies. In some departments, these packages come with expiration dates – pretenure faculty must “use it or lose it” in some period of time – whereas in others, the packages remain as overhead accounts from which faculty may draw throughout their careers. At this time, we propose a university-wide policy that removes any expiration conditions from faculty start-up packages. This will ensure that faculty can continue to produce scholarship under conditions of political limitations to federal funding.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

We are in a political moment in the United States where certain arenas of scholarship (e.g., diversity, racism, health disparities) that typically have been supported by federal grant funding are not viable for that kind of external support. Although scholars working in those arenas can still apply for federal grants, the likelihood of awards being made has dropped substantially. This may have significantly negative impacts on junior (pretenure) faculty with respect to meeting

traditional expectations for tenure at Rutgers University. To support pretenure faculty at this point in time, we recommend the following:

1. The specific considerations outlined above should be shared with deans, program directors, chairs, and other administrators in positions of authority or support in the tenure process. Those individuals should integrate this guidance into any ongoing or upcoming tenure processes for their junior (pretenure) faculty.
2. The Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs (EVPAA) with support from the Senior Vice President for Research (SVPR) should be directed to monitor federal research funding priorities and trends and provide occasional (at least once per semester) advice to deans, program directors, and chairs regarding the viability of federal funding streams across disciplines in light of the current political environment. This information should be incorporated as needed into any ongoing or upcoming tenure processes for pretenure faculty.
3. The university-wide Promotion and Review Committee (PRC) should be apprised of these recommendations to ensure that these concerns are properly addressed and acknowledged when relevant to any ongoing tenure review cases.
4. The university should adopt a university-wide policy that removes any expiration conditions from faculty start-up packages to ensure that faculty can continue to produce scholarship under conditions of political limitations to federal funding.