

# English Department Performance Expectations For Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty

Department of English  
Middle Tennessee State University

## RECORD OF CHANGES

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1.0</b>	<b>DOCUMENT PURPOSE AND SCOPE .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Purpose.....	1
1.2	Scope.....	1
1.3	References.....	1
<b>2.0</b>	<b>TEACHING EXPECTATIONS .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>RESEARCH EXPECTATIONS.....</b>	<b>4</b>
3.1	Assistant Professor.....	4
3.2	Tenured Professor Who Holds Active Graduate Faculty Status.....	4
3.3	Tenured Professor Who Does Not Hold Active Graduate Faculty Status .....	5

## **1.0 DOCUMENT PURPOSE AND SCOPE**

### **1.1 Purpose**

This document establishes the expectations for job performance for all Tenured and Tenure-Track (T/TT) faculty in the English Department. They will be used by the English Department Chair when she/he prepares the annual performance evaluation of all faculty that is required by Reference (1).

The document concerns itself only with distinctions between a determination of “meets expectations” and “unsatisfactory.”

### **1.2 Scope**

The expectations set forth in this document apply to all T/TT faculty in the English Department who are reviewed annually by the English Department Chair.

### **1.3 References**

These guidelines have been prepared in accordance with the requirements set forth in the following documents

- (1) *University Policy 810 – Performance Evaluation Reviews*
- (2) *English Department Tenure and Promotion Policies (Version 1.1)*
- (3) *College of Graduate Studies Criteria for Appointment to the Graduate Faculty* (found online at <https://www.mtsu.edu/graduate/faculty/council.php> )
- (4) *English Department Graduate Studies Faculty Membership Guidelines* (approved by Graduate Faculty vote, 5 December 2015)

## 2.0 TEACHING EXPECTATIONS

A faculty member who meets expectations in the area of teaching will

- Prepare adequately for scheduled classes.
- Provide clear and sufficiently detailed syllabi for all courses.
- Per Reference (2), demonstrate currency and continued intellectual development in a field of specialization (See also section 3.3. below.).
- Notify students and appropriate members of the English Department administration in the event that a class must be canceled.
- Provide timely and fair response to student work. (See clarification immediately below.)
- Respond, if warranted, within 24 hours to emails and phone calls from students and university faculty and staff members during the working week.
- Achieve a level of performance on student evaluations – to include both numerical ratings and individual comments – that is commensurate with the performance levels of other faculty members of similar rank and appointment type teaching in similar pedagogical contexts.
- Be available during scheduled office hours and by appointment.
- On one's own initiative or upon consultation with the department chair, show willingness to improve teaching through workshops, seminars, and consultation with peers.
- Treat students with respect and courtesy.
- Supervising in teaching or mentoring of graduate students (applies to Graduate Faculty members)
- Serving as a reader for theses and dissertations (applies to Graduate Faculty members)

Some patterns of faculty negligence that may account for evaluating a faculty member's performance as "unsatisfactory" can be objectively determined, for example:

- Missing an inordinate number of class meetings without sufficient reason
- Not notifying students and department staff of cancellations
- Repeatedly failing to return student work or respond to written concerns.

Other possible indicators of substandard teaching, including allegations of discourteous or disrespectful treatment, are based on student concerns that in each case need to be assessed carefully and presented to the faculty member in question before being admitted as evidence of substandard performance. Whenever possible, the student should be asked to address such concerns first to the teacher of record rather than a division director or the department chair. If the student and faculty member cannot resolve their differences in a satisfactory manner, the faculty member should prepare a brief written account of their meeting for the department administrator who follows up on the student's concerns.

Generally speaking, a two-week interval between the student's submission of an average-length assignment and the return of a marked and graded paper can be considered "timely and fair." Various considerations can cause an understandable delay, such as the length and complexity of

capstone assignments, prolonged investigation of academic misconduct, or submissions that demand substantial, time-intensive remediation and rewriting, at the instructor's discretion, before even meriting complete review.

Should the faculty member have reason to find any set of the university's numerical course evaluations insufficiently representative, underreported, or otherwise unreliable, a number of alternative sources in support of teaching quality deserve to be granted more than the customary weight assigned to them [See Reference (2)] in the annual evaluation. The faculty member may prepare and present evidence of quality teaching via customized written course evaluations and student surveys, documented responses to student concerns, peer observations of the faculty member's classes, adjustments to teaching methods and course delivery, consultation with LT&ITC, etc. If persistent concerns about numerical evaluation arise, the faculty member should be prepared to submit a thorough record of such alternative evidence.

Although direction of Honors theses, supervision of other student writing projects, production of scholarship on teaching, pedagogical grant-writing, leadership of teaching workshops, and other such initiatives typically contribute to an evaluation of "exceeds expectations" in the area of teaching performance and thus fall outside the purview of this document, they should not be excluded from any determination of a "meets expectations" evaluation.

Maintaining a set of numerical ratings that is "commensurate with the performance levels of other faculty members of similar rank and appointment type teaching in similar pedagogical contexts" is a generally agreed-upon norm. At the same time, the chair's evaluation should also recognize that recent, ongoing, and forthcoming initiatives on campus, including comprehensive plans for departmental self-study, will encourage substantial course redesign, experimental approaches, and rethinking of conventionally established pedagogical expectations. Significant disruption of student expectations may be warranted in order to extend the base for major and minor program recruitment, as well as raise retention and graduation rates. While it is the faculty member's role to foster student acceptance and understanding of unfamiliar expectations and grading standards, the effect of such large-scale transitions could justifiably unsettle routine habits and predictable student judgments so as to force reconsideration of commonly accepted numerical "performance levels" as a benchmark of teaching quality.

### **3.0 RESEARCH EXPECTATIONS**

#### **3.1 Assistant Professor**

In order to satisfy annual research expectations, a tenure-track Assistant Professor will demonstrate an active research agenda that will be sufficiently productive to have met, by the beginning of the sixth year after initial appointment, the minimum requirements for promotion to Associate Professor and the award of tenure as delineated in Section III of Reference (2).

Because of specific circumstances (e.g. health issues, delays from publishers), it is certainly possible that during any given 12-month period a non-tenured faculty member who “meets expectations” in research may actually produce very little (if anything) in terms of research-related deliverables (e.g., peer-reviewed essays, article reviews, conference presentations). As long as the overall trajectory of the faculty member’s research agenda remains on target, such a lull is acceptable. In order for the chair to recognize this trajectory, the faculty member should provide an explanation of how the research activity pursued over one year sustains ongoing research accomplishments and supports forthcoming goals. However, multiple years of non-production – especially if they are consecutive – likely indicate a problem and may be addressed through consultation with the Department Chair.

To demonstrate ongoing, productive, and purposeful activity for an annual review period, tenure-track faculty should keep detailed records documenting all correspondence with editors at peer-reviewed journals and at presses regarding dates and circumstances under which essay or book manuscripts were submitted for consideration of publication if the peer-review process is not completed by the venue’s editors or readers in a timely manner.

Tenure-track faculty who are engaged in contractually-obligated, multi-year editorial research projects (such as in-process, multi-volume collected editions of a writer’s works or a special issue of a peer-reviewed journal) should also keep detailed documentation of their participation in such extended projects, including letters of invitation and actual contracts.

#### **3.2 Tenured Professor Who Holds Active Graduate Faculty Status**

A tenured member of the English Department who is an active member of the Graduate Faculty meets expectations in the field of research by actively pursuing an annual research agenda that will be sufficiently productive to retain Graduate Faculty status – see Reference (3).

The benchmarks for retaining Graduate Faculty status are consistent with similar re-appointment requirements at most universities with higher research classifications than MTSU’s. Given the typical demands of the graduate faculty’s teaching loads, graduate exam writing and assessment duties, and directorship of (or participation in) thesis and dissertation committees, this standard is certainly more than sufficiently rigorous. Moreover, since re-appointment is determined by a university-wide Council of graduate faculty, the standard is being applied as equitably as possible, considering inherent differences across disciplines in measuring research productivity.

Faculty members who believe that their individual case merits special consideration (e.g., devoting a five-year period to authoring or editing one substantial section of a book that also contains the work of other editors or commentators) are not precluded by any standing policy

from providing alternative evidence for reappointment either to the Graduate Council or the English Department Graduate Committee. If the status of reappointment is undetermined at the time of the department chair's annual review, the basis for special consideration still warrants recognition.

As with tenure-track faculty, tenured associate faculty planning to apply for promotion to full professor (as well as full professors whose graduate faculty status has lapsed but who intend to reapply at some point) are encouraged to maintain detailed documentation of their research efforts, including records of conference presentations and correspondence pertaining to essay and book manuscript submissions. Just as tenure-track faculty may experience periods of dormancy due to health issues or to the natural lull in documentable research productivity in the period immediately following completion and publication of a substantial project, so faculty at the associate level may well be subject to the same normal "waxing and waning" in their research program. As with pre-tenured faculty, the chair's principal criterion for assessment of associate tenured faculty performance should consider "the overall trajectory" of the faculty member's research agenda that immediately precedes and extends to the interval under review. In all cases, the goal of detailed documentation is to provide a complete account of how the faculty member's one-year interval of productivity responds and contributes to the broader five-year arc of expectations for Graduate Faculty membership.

### **3.3 Tenured Professor Who Does Not Hold Active Graduate Faculty Status**

A tenured member of the English Department who is not an active member of the Graduate Faculty meets expectations in research related to teaching, scholarship, and other professional obligations by undertaking the level of activities required to demonstrate "currency and continued intellectual development in the [faculty member's] field of specialization" as required by Reference (2).

A faculty member can "demonstrate currency and continued intellectual development" by any of the following means, including but not limited to (1) presenting a paper at a conference; (2) publishing a book review in a peer-reviewed journal or otherwise assessing the quality of newly-published texts in a field of specialization, as in (3) refereeing an article or book manuscript for a publisher in the field; or (4) furnishing the chair with a brief written description of the faculty member's ongoing reading regimen or other efforts to maintain currency and expertise in the field.

Alternatively, the faculty member could confirm sustained intellectual engagement by briefly describing current or projected avenues of professional reading and research that evince "the life of the mind" indispensable to a university teacher.



## **4.0 SERVICE EXPECTATIONS**

### **4.1 All Department T/TT Faculty**

A faculty member who meets expectations in the area of service will

- Be an active participant in or leader on – as appropriate to the member’s current rank – departmental, college, and university committees. Faculty are strongly encouraged to take such committee assignments seriously, attend committee meetings regularly, and accept their share of the work generated by committee responsibilities, since this will be seen as a part of any minimum standard for meeting expectations in the area of service.
- Attend one commencement ceremony per academic year and participate in other student-related activities and ceremonies at the department, college, and university level as the faculty member sees fit, such as convocation.
- When such involvement clearly contributes to research, teaching, or other service opportunities, be an active participant in and member of professional organizations related to the faculty member’s field and area of expertise.
- When appropriate, contribute time and expertise for the purpose of civic engagement or learning.
- Update professional files and *c.v.* as required by the department, college, and university.
- If the faculty member deems their requests appropriate, support students by writing letters of recommendation, offering counsel, and serving as a professional reference.
- Regularly attend and participate in departmental, college, and university meetings.
- Keep a record of time spent on service-related activities should any questions arise pertaining to the faculty member’s perceived participation in this area.

### **4.2 Graduate Faculty**

In addition to those expectations listed above, graduate faculty (as noted in Reference [4]) should be routinely prepared to write and evaluate qualifying and preliminary examinations. They should also demonstrate ongoing service to the graduate program by being involved in some of the following tasks:

- Committee service pertaining specifically to the program (e.g. serving on the Graduate Committee or the Graduate Admissions Committee)
- Support of EGSO or other extracurricular graduate initiatives
- Graduate curriculum development
- Judging the William Wolfe Graduate Writing Award