

New 2020 Duke School of Medicine Appointments, Promotions, and Tenure (APT) Guidelines

Over the past several years, the Duke University School of Medicine (SoM) has developed a new set of guidelines by which faculty are evaluated for academic promotion and the awarding of tenure. One of the main purposes of these changes is to better reflect the breadth of scholarly activity in which our faculty are involved. The new APT Guidelines were designed to expand the scope of “promotable” activities that fundamentally support Duke’s educational, clinical, and research missions.

The main change involves the creation of two tracks, a Faculty Tenure Track and a Faculty Career Track, to replace the previous system of five different tracks, three of which were designated as tenure and two designated as non-tenure. In addition, the new criteria define scholarship more broadly and identify more explicitly other contributions (e.g., administration, practice innovation) that support the academic mission and can lead to promotion.

The new APT Guidelines are also intended to reflect the changes in the composition of faculty in the SoM that have occurred since the last major revision. At present, most SoM faculty are primarily engaged in clinical practice, performing the important work of caring for our patients and their families. Duke is also an academic institution, and all faculty should therefore be actively engaged as educators and innovators in their respective fields. The new APT Guidelines recognize that most faculty will most closely align with the Faculty Career Track to guide their promotions process.

The new APT Guidelines also offer a unified Faculty Tenure Track for the smaller group of our faculty who lead academic programs with exceptional scholarly impact, usually defined by publication of original scholarly research in peer-reviewed journals. The conduct of such research in general requires dedicated effort, focus, and extramural funding.

The meaning of tenure for faculty in the clinical sciences of Duke as well as other academic medical centers has long been imprecise, leading to possible confusion as to what tenure entails. Historically, tenure has been intended to assure academic freedom for university faculty to express ideas that advance thinking that might challenge the status quo. Practically speaking, tenure has also been associated with job security. But the need to assure academic freedom is much less relevant in the SoM where your clinical, education, research, and service-based activities are considered each year through periodic and annual review with department and / or division leadership, and activities are highly regulated. Finally, tenure is not meant to be an honorific title granted for past accomplishments; rather, tenure is awarded based on academic accomplishment and represents the commitment of the institution to support an anticipated trajectory of continued scholarly excellence.

In reviewing the new APT Guidelines, in which the 5 career tracks have been simplified into 2, there is likely little benefit for most faculty members to opt into staying with the older APT Guidelines. Conversely, there is also no compelling reason for most faculty who are currently in the promotions process to change to the new system.

What changes are involved in the new faculty promotions tracks?

Faculty Tenure Track. In the new APT guidelines, tenure decisions will remain a very rigorous process of discerning the “impact” of a faculty member’s scholarship using traditional measures of scholarly activity. These “tenurable” activities will likely continue to include publication records and external grant funding. For clinical investigators, this might involve initiating, leading, and securing funding for large, multi-center clinical trials. For laboratory-based researchers, this will involve publication of manuscripts in high-impact journals and demonstration of sustained and substantial external grant funding. For education scholars, tenure decisions will require studying and publishing on educational methods and assessments, in addition to demonstrating outstanding individual teaching skills. All faculty in the Tenure Track will be expected to gain national or international prominence in their field. Faculty who receive tenure will also demonstrate outstanding accomplishment in their area of academic focus, including clinical innovation, research, institutional service, and education.

Faculty Career Track. The new APT guidelines encourage a wide breadth of academic activities to be considered during the promotions process. Faculty in the Career Track will be expected to demonstrate excellence in at least two areas of academic focus, including clinical innovation, research, institutional service, and education. As a community, we will need to better acknowledge less traditional metrics of academic impact for Faculty Career tracks, including detailed educational portfolios, impactful social media presence, and documentation of regional/institutional clinical referral patterns.

For each faculty member, there are three important elements to effective promotion and tenure decisions: (1) an informed faculty member, (2) engaged departmental and divisional leadership, and (3) an active mentor team, especially for junior faculty. We encourage each of you to learn about the APT process and to discuss these issues with mentors and colleagues. We also encourage each of you to maintain your APT CV and Intellectual Development Statement as living documents that will help to clearly tell your academic stories to promotions committees. In view of the new criteria, it is very important to keep a detailed account of all of your academic activities. Specifically, the Scholars@Duke system (<https://scholars.duke.edu>) has been crafted to provide a repository to document your professional career, and all faculty are encouraged to maintain your Scholars@Duke records. Finally, we encourage our faculty to engage in continual conversations about the APT process at each Annual Faculty Review with division leadership.

Questions to address prior to your next Annual Faculty Review to help clarify APT decisions:

- 1) How do I define myself academically? Are you a clinical trialist, lab-based researcher, clinical educator, education scholar, and/or practicing clinician?
- 2) How do I spend my time at work? This will help inform the extent of your academic activity.
- 3) Where does my salary come from? Am I supported by external funding, clinical revenue, education, and/or administration?

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