

## University of California Peer Review System and Post-tenure Evaluation

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**ABSTRACT:** The peer review system at all campuses of the University of California is a long standing program of pre- and post-tenure evaluation. All faculty are reviewed on a schedule of 2 to 4 years by department colleagues, the dean, and a campus faculty committee which normally results in a merit increase. This system of pre- and post-tenure review throughout a faculty members' career poses a substantial workload for faculty, departments, and the campus; but it is regarded by faculty and campus administrators as crucial to maintaining a faculty of very high quality. This article describes the well-established review process, which may provide ideas for those institutions planning on enhancing their approaches to peer review .

The University of California has nine campuses with a tenth campus in Merced under development. There are eight general campuses (Berkeley, Davis, Irvine, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Diego, Santa Barbara, and Santa Cruz), and a health science campus at San Francisco; five Schools of Medicine; three Law Schools; five Business Schools: two Dental Schools; two Schools of Public Health; a School of Pharmacy, Optometry, and Veterinary Medicine; and other professional schools. There are 165,000 students and 14,000 faculty, including, 7,200 ladder rank faculty. With the exception of the field of education, aggregating all other fields together, the University of California produces over 8% of all Ph.D. recipients nationally.

The University of California developed a peer review system in the 1920's. It was at that time that the then President of the University and the faculty developed a formal system of shared governance, which has evolved over time into the current University system for faculty advancement. Peer review remains a major feature of shared governance today, as it has been for many years. This paper will highlight the major features of the peer review system, especially as it applies to post-tenure evaluation. This system is similar to those used at many

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universities for promotions. However the University of California carries on formal reviews throughout a faculty member's career, not just at the points of promotion.

### Salary Scales

Table 1 shows the published faculty salary scale for the regular academic year faculty. The salary scale shows the usual ranks of Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Professor as well as steps for each rank. At UC, tenure is conferred on all Associate Professors and Professors. There are a few other special salary scales for faculty on fiscal year appointments in agriculture and medicine, faculty in law, and those in business and engineering. About 2/3 of UC faculty are actually paid the published rates on these scales, and another 600 of the most senior and

**Table 1**  
**Faculty—Ladder Ranks—Professor**  
**Series Academic Year**

Rank	Step	Years at Step	Salary Scale 10/1/98 Annual Rate
Instructor	—	—	\$37,400
Assistant Professor	I	2	43,100
	II	2	45,500
	III	2	48,000
	IV	2	50,700
	V	2	53,500
	VI	2	56,500
Associate Professor	I	2	53,600
	II	2	56,600
	III	2	59,800
	IV	3	63,500
	V	3	68,200
Professor	I	3	63,600
	II	3	68,300
	III	3	74,000
	IV	3	80,300
	V	—	87,100
	VI	—	94,500
	VII	—	102,600
	VIII	—	111,100

distinguished are paid above the top of the scale. Some faculty are paid at salary rates which are between steps and are called "off-scale."

Faculty may be paid off-scale because of special market conditions that require higher salaries than those published on the scale for their rank and step. For example, a professor who has been awarded a major prize in her field may be advanced by more than a single step from an on-scale salary at Professor, Step II at \$68,300 to Professor III off-scale with a salary that is mid-point between steps III and IV at \$77,000. At the next merit increase this Professor may be moved an entire step to IV off-scale at \$83,500, or she may receive another step and a half to take her to Step V at \$87,100. Most faculty who have off-scale salaries are paid less than the salary of the full step above their actual step and may be moved back onto the scale in a future merit increase. However, faculty members with substantial off-scale salaries are unlikely ever to return to scale. Those faculty have salary and step forever decoupled.

Another reason that a faculty member may be moved to a salary that is off-scale is to provide a small salary increase for someone who is not sufficiently meritorious for a full step advancement, but who may have some accomplishments that warrant a smaller increase.

The scales themselves are increased each year across the board in a general range adjustment. Last year, that increase was a fairly generous 5%; annual increases have varied over time from 0% to over 10%. All faculty received this across-the-board increase. Then, in addition, faculty move up this ladder from one step to another based solely on merit. They may receive anywhere from a 5.5% to 8.5% increase as they move from one step to another in a merit increase every two to four years. In 1998 there was about \$65 million available for salary increases for all academic personnel. About 38% of that went for merit increases to about 1/3 of the faculty and the other 62% was distributed across the board. In 1999 a 2-3% across-the-board increase is forecast. A larger percent will go to merit increases, which are awarded to about 1/3 of the faculty each year.

### **Years at Step**

The salary scale also shows the "Years at Step." Faculty are reviewed at regular intervals throughout their careers. The review cycle for most faculty follows the years at step listed on the salary scale. In a typical faculty career, a young Assistant Professor, age 30, who is hired at Step II following a postdoc and who makes normal progress can expect

to be reviewed every two years as an Assistant and Associate Professor, including a tenure review as one of the reviews, and might be age 42 on promotion to Professor. This Professor would then expect a formal review every three years until Professor, Step V, at which point the salary scale no longer indicates normal years at step; and there is no longer any expectation of regular progress. However, that doesn't mean that the review cycles stop. On the contrary, faculty continue to be reviewed on a regular cycle every three years or so, whether or not they advance, throughout their entire faculty career at the University of California.

Salary rates for the top of the Assistant Professor rank Steps V and VI (\$53,500 and \$56,500) overlap with the two bottom steps of the Associate Professor rank Steps I and II (\$53,600 and \$56,600), and the top steps of the Associate Professor rank Steps IV and V (\$63,500 and \$68,200) overlap with Professor rank Steps I and II (\$63,600 and \$68,300). These overlapping steps provide opportunity for advancement without a promotion. For example, Assistant Professors who may be hired initially at Step III to acknowledge previous faculty experience could be moved to Assistant Professor VI as an advancement opportunity until they are ready for promotion to Associate Professor. Using the overlapping steps, this Assistant Professor VI would normally be promoted to Associate Professor II after 2 years, rather than to Associate Professor I.

The salary scale has no years at step listed for faculty at Professor, Step V or above, and Step V is considered a "barrier" step. As described below, advancement from Step V to Step VI is considered a promotion and requires supplemental criteria. Without achievements in the areas of the supplemental criteria, there is no expectation of normal advancement beyond Step V. Indeed, there is an uneven distribution of faculty along the scale for the Professor rank because there are faculty who do not advance beyond Step V in the normal review period of three years, but who may be advanced in a subsequent review (See Table 2). In fact, most faculty do advance beyond Step V, but may take longer than their previous advancement rate. All Professors, Step V, VI and VII, continue to be reviewed; and most are advanced every three years.

Faculty who reach Professor Step VIII are normally reviewed after four years. As described below, advancement beyond Step VIII requires additional supplemental criteria; and there is no expectation of advancement beyond Step VIII. About 600 faculty have advanced beyond Step VIII into above-scale status. The normal review cycle for these most distinguished University faculty is four years; and further merit advancement above scale also occurs, with salary rates set individually.

**Table 2**  
**Headcount and Percent of Ladder Rank**  
**Faculty, By Rank, By Step, Total Campuses**  
**As of October 1998 Payroll**

Rank	Step	Headcount	Percent
Assistant Professor	Step I	12	1.1%
	Step II	177	16.1%
	Step III	327	29.7%
	Step IV	416	37.8%
	Step V	126	11.4%
	Step VI	43	3.9%
Subtotal		1,101	100.0%
Associate Professor	Step I	217	14.5%
	Step II	403	26.8%
	Step III	560	37.3%
	Step IV	224	14.9%
	Step V	97	6.5%
Subtotal		1,501	100.0%
Professor	Step I	413	8.4%
	Step II	475	9.6%
	Step III	522	10.6%
	Step IV	536	10.8%
	Step V	839	17.0%
	Step VI	482	9.7%
	Step VII	496	10.0%
	Step VIII	570	11.5%
	Above-Scale	612 (1997-98)	12.4%
Subtotal		4,945	100.0%
Total		7,547	

### Review and Promotion

There are several possible outcomes of a merit review. These are approval of the merit increase and advancement to the next step, an accelerated advancement of more than one step, and denial of the merit increase. Accelerated advancement could reward unusual accomplishments and would typically move a professor up the ladder by 1½ steps to an off-scale salary. For example, a professor who wins the campus teaching award may receive an accelerated merit increase to an off-scale salary of 1½ steps.

Faculty who are not deemed meritorious may be advised to resubmit their file in the following year to provide time to complete a book or

to demonstrate improved teaching. Or faculty may simply wait until their next normal review two, three, or four years later. Denial of a merit increase is always accompanied by feedback, normally through the department chair, to identify areas in need of improvement.

Advancement from one rank to another is a promotion. Advancement from Professor Step V to Step VI and from Professor Step VIII to above scale status are also treated as promotions. These four promotion steps generally occur at the normal review period although, in the case of a promotion, the entire history of accomplishments is considered. With a normal merit increase, only the accomplishments since the last merit increase are evaluated.

### Review Criteria

The review criteria for teaching, research and service are similar to those of other universities.<sup>1</sup> The published criteria are fairly detailed and permit some balancing of different criteria. For example, faculty who have been released from teaching for extensive University service as a chair of a large department or a dean may receive a merit increase even with smaller than normal teaching accomplishments. Or a faculty member who has taken on substantial responsibilities for curriculum revision may demonstrate lower than normal research or creative productivity but still receive a merit increase of one step. In some cases, scholarship in pedagogy may be acknowledged in place of scholarship in the discipline.

There are additional criteria for advancement beyond the Professor Step V, which require excellent teaching plus great distinction, recognized nationally or internally, in scholarly achievement or in teaching. Above-scale status is reserved for scholars and teachers of the highest distinction whose work has been internationally recognized and acclaimed and whose teaching performance is excellent. Table 2 shows that 12.7% of Professors are above-scale (A/S). Many of those are paid at salaries of \$100 above the top of the scale. However, some are at substantially higher salaries. Faculty who hold above-scale status are the University's most senior distinguished faculty.

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<sup>1</sup>From the University of California, *Academic Personnel Manual*. See <http://www.ucop.edu/acadadv/acadpers/apm>, section 210-1d. See also the *Faculty Handbook* for a precis of the review process at <http://www.ucop.edu/acadadv/acadpers/handbook>.

## Review Process

The review process for merit increases proceeds in many ways like a tenure review. The call for review typically is made in the spring to notify departments of faculty who are to be reviewed in the next year, based on years at step. This also alerts faculty to their impending review. In the early fall, the faculty member assembles a file of work since the last review: courses taught, theses supervised, papers published, committee service. The faculty member often includes a letter outlining these accomplishments with a discussion of works in progress and plans for the future. In a large department, a personnel committee will review the file and make a recommendation to the department. In a small department, all faculty will review the file. The faculty discuss the file and vote on the merit advancement. The chair then documents the department discussion and the vote. The chair may also add a personal letter to the file. The dean reviews the entire file, which then goes to a campus-wide Committee on Academic Personnel (CAP). This committee reviews all files from all departments across the campus. The CAP adds its recommendation, and the file is forwarded to the Chancellor's office for a decision. Some University of California campuses have delegated routine lower level merit increases to the Dean, but on most campuses each decision goes through this complete process. When it's a promotion rather than a merit increase, the same sequence occurs although the file documents the entire history of accomplishments. In addition, the department gathers letters from outside reviewers to include in the file; and there is an ad hoc committee (typically of five faculty), who are appointed by the Provost on recommendation of the CAP. This committee then informs the CAP recommendation.

Some faculty members prefer not to submit their files for review. Some have little scholarly work to include in their file either because they haven't made any research progress in the review period or because they're still writing a major piece of work (although a complex work in progress may still justify a merit increase). Sometimes faculty are uncomfortable about showing off their accomplishments to all of their department colleagues who then review and discuss the individual's accomplishments. These are some of the reasons that faculty may request that their review be deferred. Deferrals may be granted if there is good reason, usually for only one year. Prior to 1991 there was a small number of faculty who routinely requested deferments and who rarely came up for review. Often there was mutual agreement between the

professor and the department to avoid a review. In 1991, the University instituted a new policy to require that all faculty must undergo review at least every five years. That immediately resulted in the advancement of some professors who had not been reviewed for some years. It also resulted in identification of a few faculty whose work was substandard. Several of these professors retired, and the rest were encouraged to become more active.

The University of California relies on scholars around the country and the world to write peer review letters for all advancements that are considered promotions. These are advancements from one rank to another; also from Professor, Step V to Step VI; and for advancement from Professor, Step VIII to above-scale status. Outside letters may also be gathered at other advancement points as well, for example if the scholarship is written in a foreign language or if it is sufficiently technical or narrow that department colleagues do not feel qualified to judge it. All of this amounts to many requests to scholars around the country and the world for outside letters, more requests for outside letters of evaluation than is common for colleagues at other universities. Since a faculty member could well be promoted from Assistant to Associate Professor and then to Professor over a period of six years, colleagues may be asked again for letters of evaluation for this professor after only six years. In addition, most universities do not request outside letters for faculty who have already been promoted to the Professor rank. However, faculty at the University of California face two more advancement steps that are treated like promotions, one at Professor Step V, and again at Professor Step VIII going to above scale status for which outside letters are requested.

In cases of promotion, a special ad hoc committee is formed. The ad hoc committee studies only one promotion file, reads the research, and advises the CAP. In some cases faculty from other campuses are invited to sit on the ad hoc committee, but typically the members are from the home campus. Most, but not all, are in related fields.

### **Review Workload**

Each year about 1/3 of the faculty are reviewed. The review is initiated in the fall and should be complete by late spring when the professor is notified of the outcome. There is a tremendous workload of files to be assembled. Large departments may have several colleagues eligible for merit or promotion the same year. This creates a huge workload for



department staff and for department faculty colleagues as well as for the deans and faculty Committees on Academic Personnel. In addition, departments may be hiring new faculty who must also be reviewed. In the case of new appointments to tenure, the campus initiates a process similar to a promotion and gathers outside letters. This must often be expedited to meet hiring deadlines. For non-tenured Assistant Professors, the dean may approve the new appointment without the CAP review on some campuses. However, on most campuses, the entire CAP review is required.

The Committee on Academic Personnel on each UC campus has between seven and fourteen members who are selected by campus faculty. On each campus the CAPs meet every week almost all year. On the larger campuses each CAP reviews 600 or more cases each year. This review includes not just ladder faculty who are appointed or advanced, but also Lecturers, Adjunct and Clinical faculty, and Cooperative Extension Specialists and Professional Researchers as well.

Virtually all faculty find themselves involved in this review process at some level every year, certainly at the department level reviewing colleagues, and often on ad hoc committees as well. It's a tremendous commitment of time and effort. Is it worth it? Both faculty and administrators believe that the system of continuous review by faculty colleagues to be worth every minute of time they spend. UC faculty are very protective of this review process. The CAPs on many campuses resist all attempts to streamline the process, to simplify it, or to delegate to deans even the most routine merit actions.

## Conclusion

Intense scrutiny of colleagues is a crucial factor in maintaining the excellence of the University's faculty. If faculty members know that their colleagues are going to be reviewing their files and discussing their accomplishments next year, they make very certain that there's something in their files to be reviewed.

A system of reviews which occurs regularly both before tenure is awarded and throughout the career of every faculty member is unusual in higher education. The faculty of the University of California operate under such a system. The focus of the reviews, both pre- and post-tenure, is to acknowledge excellence and to reward it. Reviews provide detailed information to colleagues, chairs, and deans on faculty performance; and they provide detailed feedback to faculty on their

strengths and weaknesses. This elaborate system was not created to document poor performance. It is a system created by the faculty and run largely by the faculty with enthusiastic faculty support. All faculty are regularly reviewed, and every year all faculty participate to varying degrees in the review of colleagues. This faculty review is truly peer process.