

Date: May 13, 2025

To: WPI Faculty

From: Committee on Governance (Prof. Troy, Chair) and Committee on Appointments and Promotions (Prof. Zhou, Chair)

Re: Motion to update the Faculty Handbook re: eligibility to participate in COAP

Motion: The Committee on Governance (COG) and the Committee on Appointments and Promotions (COAP) recommend, and I move, that the language describing the eligibility to participate in appointment and promotion procedures, including membership on COAP and the nomination and review processes for promotions, be modified as described below.

Description of the Motion:

The goal of this motion is to explicitly confirm that all tenured faculty – both dual-mission and teaching-mission – who hold the rank of (full) Professor or (full) Professor of Teaching are eligible to serve on COAP, nominate candidates for promotion, and participate in JPCs, ensuring equitable representation and participation in the appointment and promotion review processes.

This motion requires modifications to two sections of the handbook. Text to be added is highlighted in yellow. Text to be removed is in ~~red strikethrough~~.

Chapter 1, Bylaw Three, Section III. The Committee on Appointments and Promotions (COAP)

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Membership:

COAP consists of seven elected tenured faculty members holding the rank and title of (full) Professor **or (full) Professor of Teaching**, with no more than one representative from any one academic department. The term of office for this committee is three years, and no member may serve successive terms. Department Heads, **Associate Department Heads**, Deans, and the Provost are not eligible to serve on COAP.

Chapter 4, Section 3. PROMOTION PROCEDURES: to (full) Professor; to (full) Professor of Teaching; to (full) Teaching Professor; and to Associate Teaching Professor

a. Process

i. Nomination

All candidates for promotion to (full) Professor, (full) Professor of Teaching, (full) Teaching Professor, and Associate Teaching Professor must be nominated for promotion. The Nominator is normally the Department Head or a tenured ~~full-professor~~ **faculty member holding the rank of (full) Professor or (full) Professor of Teaching** at WPI. For promotion to (full) Teaching Professor or to Associate Teaching Professor, the nominator must be the Department Head and/or Program Director (with input from department and/or program faculty members).

iii. Formation of Joint Promotion Committees, Recusals, and COAP Member Participation

Joint Promotion Committees: For the purpose of considering each promotion case, a Joint Promotion Committee is formed, consisting of six voting members of COAP, inclusive of faculty holding the rank of (full) Professor or (full) Professor of Teaching, with representation, where possible, from the same tenure path (i.e., teaching-mission, dual-mission) as the candidate, and a non-voting Nominator and a non-voting Advocate. The Joint Promotion Committee is chaired by the Chair of COAP.

Rationale:

The current Faculty Handbook language states that all tenured faculty holding the rank and title of (full) Professor are eligible to serve on the Committee on Appointments and Promotions (COAP) and that promotion processes involve nomination by a Department Head or tenured full professor, followed by review by Joint Promotion Committees (JPCs). However, when this language was written, WPI recognized only one set of criteria for tenure (the dual-mission path), whereas there are now two distinct paths: the traditional dual-mission path and the teaching-mission path, leading to ranks such as (full) Professor, (full) Professor of Teaching, (full) Teaching Professor, and Associate Teaching Professor.

This issue was discussed during the past COAP meetings and is being brought to the WPI faculty meeting on May 13, 2025, for additional input.

Two perspectives emerged during these discussions. On one hand, some argued that only faculty who achieved tenure under a specific path (dual-mission or teaching-mission) are fully equipped to nominate and evaluate candidates for promotions under that same path, given the distinct criteria involved for ranks such as (full) Professor or (full) Professor of Teaching. On the other hand, several compelling reasons supported a more inclusive approach:

1. The COAP and JPC review processes already require members to evaluate candidates across diverse disciplines and ranks, often involving scholarship or teaching contributions that differ significantly from their own. The variation between dual-mission and teaching-mission criteria is arguably less significant than the disciplinary differences nominators and committee members routinely navigate.
2. Creating distinctions between dual-mission and teaching-mission faculty risks fostering unnecessary divisions among tenured faculty, undermining the collegial spirit of the institution.
3. Logistically, restricting COAP membership, nomination, or JPC participation to faculty tenured under the same path as the candidate under review would be impractical, particularly given the smaller number of teaching-mission tenured faculty (e.g., (full) Professors of Teaching), which could limit the pool of eligible participants and hinder committee formation.

To balance these considerations, this motion ensures that all tenured faculty holding the rank of (full) Professor or (full) Professor of Teaching—regardless of tenure path—are eligible to serve on COAP, nominate candidates, and participate in JPCs, while encouraging, where feasible, the inclusion of faculty familiar with the candidate’s tenure path during JPC deliberations for promotions to (full) Professor, (full) Professor of Teaching, (full) Teaching Professor, or Associate Teaching Professor. This approach maintains flexibility, fairness, and broad representation in the appointment and promotion processes.