

**A Track to Tenure, Security, Academic Freedom,
and Full Inclusion in Governance for Teaching Faculty at WPI**

September 1, 2021

Overview:

Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) has broken down the major obstacle that contingent faculty encounter in their struggles against the inequitable and discouraging conditions of academic life off the tenure track. In the spring of 2021, WPI formally established a teaching track to tenure and an institutional goal to place fully 40 percent of its current nontenure-track (NTT) teaching faculty on the tenure track within three years beginning in August 2021. In doing so, WPI became the first research university in the U.S. to create a path to tenure for otherwise contingent faculty based entirely on rigorous criteria designed *specifically* for teaching faculty.

As part of a larger change in official University policy, effective in the 2021-22 academic year WPI has also instituted secure longer-term contracts for the remaining full-time NTT teaching faculty, including substantive assurances of reappointment and protections against retaliation, and has extended full inclusion in faculty governance to all secured full-time NTT faculty.

Together, these measures do more than simply improve conditions for all previously at-will NTT teaching faculty at WPI. They also set an example for others in higher education to include fully and fairly teaching faculty in the fabric of academic life. They demonstrate how to balance the concerns of faculty, administration, and trustees to resolve some of the most intractable problems in higher education: the erosion of tenure and academic freedom; the increasingly precarious status of an expanding population of contingent faculty; and the weakening of faculty governance. Our new policies are publicly available and published in our recently [updated WPI Faculty Handbook](#).

Process:

As WPI has expanded in size and complexity over the past 15 years, like most other universities it has responded by increasing its instructional capacity with less costly contingent faculty members. As a first response, between 2009 and 2012, WPI's faculty worked to establish new professional titles and promotional tracks for the NTT faculty. However, a tenure track for teaching faculty was unthinkable at the time. Short-term, at-will contracts for contingent faculty remained unchanged. And without tenure, secure employment contracts, and protections of academic freedom and free expression, the contingent faculty remained outside the faculty governance system.

In September 2018, the outgoing and the incoming Secretaries of the Faculty, our highest-ranking elected faculty representatives, assembled a task force to move our institution forward by reimagining the status of our NTT faculty. Rather than accepting the precarious position of our teaching faculty as an institutional way of life, the task force operated with the mindset and the goal of "equal status for equal value." Comprising equal numbers of TTT and NTT faculty, the task force worked for a year before issuing a preliminary proposal to the faculty that suggested a much more ambitious means of improving security for teaching faculty than longer-term contracts. Instead, recognizing that job security and academic freedom are at the heart of tenure, the task force and the faculty committees that continued its work over the following two years were led inevitably to a solution centered around a tenure path designed for outstanding teachers.

The process for formulating and reformulating our proposals included diverse stakeholders. Initiated by the TTT faculty and driven by both the TTT and NTT faculty, it was a lengthy collaboration between the faculty, the administration, and the Board of Trustees.

Between 2018 and 2019, the task force undertook extensive community outreach, meeting with Deans, Department Heads, and groups of TTT and NTT faculty before reporting to the full faculty in November 2019 with its initial recommendations. Between November 2019 and May 2021, the effort shifted to WPI's faculty governance Committee on Governance and representatives of the NTT faculty who met regularly among themselves and with the Provost to balance three sets of priorities: a proper institutional commitment to the teaching faculty against an appropriate degree of required institutional flexibility; the inclusion in governance of all faculty regardless of their security against the strength of faculty governance; and a respect for the value of teaching against the notion that research is a requirement for tenure. Throughout, the Provost acted as the principal liaison to the President, who in turn secured the endorsement of the Trustees.

Outcomes:

The solution we arrived at is threefold:

First, a teaching track to tenure for “Professors of Teaching,” combined with an institutional goal to place 40 percent of WPI’s teaching faculty on the tenure track by August 2023 beginning this summer: Just as the expectations for teaching faculty are distinct from expectations for traditional tenure-track faculty, the new tenure criteria reflect these differences (see Appendix 1). Accordingly, the proposed tenure criteria for Professors of Teaching are based on “teaching practice” focusing on the quality and impact of one’s direct interactions with students, and on “professional growth and currency” as it is primarily related to teaching and teaching innovation. “Professional growth” refers to developing knowledge, acquiring skills, and/or accumulating experiences that enhance the institution’s educational mission and visibility. “Currency” refers to making intellectual contributions, including teaching innovations, and remaining active in professional communities. Tenure candidates must demonstrate a commitment

(through their activities) and significant impact (through demonstrable outcomes of their work) in both. In this way, the criteria allow for a broad array of activities that are appropriate for the professional growth of our teaching faculty. Additionally, we have adopted guidance for documenting and assessing activities toward tenure (see Appendix 2). Both the criteria and guidance are now publicly available to other campuses considering a similar expansion of tenure in our [updated Faculty Handbook](#).

The tenure criteria are *realistic*, based on current teaching-related expectations for teaching faculty with heavier teaching loads than TTT faculty, rather than on unfair new expectations. They are also *rigorous*, reflecting clearer and more exacting standards for teaching excellence in practice and in professional growth. And finally, they are *aspirational*, driving teaching faculty to reach higher than they might have done without the expectation and support of an ongoing peer-review process and a community of peers.

As a guarantee of institutional support, immediate implementation, and ongoing sustainability, the faculty, the administration and the Board of Trustees formally adopted an institutional goal to see that 40 percent of the full-time teaching faculty would be tenured or placed on the tenure-track by fall 2023, with a stated openness to further increase the fraction of tenured or tenure-track teaching faculty in the years that immediately follow (see Appendix 3). Based on an implementation process involving individual self-assessment by NTT faculty members, discussions with their Department Heads, reviews by their Deans, and final consideration by the Provost, the first cohort of 15 Professors of Teaching were identified and placed in tenure-track positions in August 2021 and given modest professional development funds, and other resources to help them become strong candidates for tenure. Anyone not chosen will be eligible to reapply in a year, and no one will lose their job if they are not chosen.

Second, secured contracts for the remaining full-time NTT teaching faculty: Our provisions also include secure contracts for all faculty who cannot or choose not to pursue tenure. These are our Instructors, Teaching Professors, and Professors of Practice. Security has been established by the expectation of reappointment between contracts, guarantees within the terms of each contract, and fair procedures for performance reviews throughout. Taken together, these provisions ensure this security by offering protection from retaliation, in general, and because of participation in faculty governance, in particular.

Third, all secured-contract faculty now join TTT faculty in full participation in faculty governance and the right to academic freedom. (See Appendix 4.) Signifying the cultural shift that had taken place, the tenure motions were approved by 90 percent of the voting faculty in January 2021; the motion approving full participation in governance was approved by 98 percent of the voting faculty in May. Finally, following a joint presentation on May 14 by the Provost and faculty representatives, the Board of Trustees approved all the motions put forth by the faculty.

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APPENDIX 1

Tenure Criteria for Professors of Teaching

WPI Faculty Handbook, Part Two, Section 1.A
Approved by the WPI Faculty, January 28, 2021
Approved by the WPI Board of Trustees, May 14, 2021

Preamble:

The mission and distinctiveness of WPI depends on the essential contributions of teaching-intensive faculty who continuously innovate and improve upon our student-centered educational programs and practices. In part, WPI recognizes the long-term value of these faculty members through a category of tenured and tenure-track teaching-intensive Professors of Teaching, thus providing these faculty members with the highest level of academic freedom and institutional commitment. These positions are part of WPI's broader commitment to inclusive excellence and development and retention of faculty talent aligned with WPI's institutional mission.

Criteria:

Assistant, Associate, and Full Professors of Teaching are expected primarily to contribute to the *teaching mission*¹ of WPI. Therefore the tenure criteria for these faculty members are focused on the quality of their teaching, their broader contributions to WPI's overall teaching mission, and their demonstrated and potential contributions to a broader community of educators, practitioners, and/or scholars within or beyond WPI, especially when it clearly enhances the effectiveness of the candidate's teaching and/or furthers a general understanding of effective teaching practices. Consideration is also given to each candidate's level of active engagement with and service to WPI and/or the broader professional communities. The candidate's activities should demonstrate the capacity for continued excellent performance.

Professors of Teaching are expected to contribute in three categories: teaching practice; continuing professional growth and currency; and service. These categories are defined below.

Teaching Practice: Excellent undergraduate and/or graduate teaching - whether it is delivered in the classroom, through project advising, or via online or blended courses - is a necessary but not sufficient requirement for obtaining tenure as a Professor of Teaching at WPI. Teaching practice is excellent when it is of *high quality* and has *significant impact* on WPI students and curriculum.

In any teaching setting, faculty members must communicate in compelling ways that demonstrably enhance the educational growth of their students. Effective teachers develop students as creative thinkers, life-long learners, and effective communicators able to use evidence with logic, clarity, and persuasion. Effective teachers draw on many skills to support student learning that may include but are not limited to the following (as needed):

¹ *The WPI teaching mission is distinguished by inquiry-based learning, open-ended problem solving, and integrative and interdisciplinary thinking. A WPI education balances personal responsibility with cooperation, collaboration, and mutual respect, and encourages critical reflection, sound decision making, and personal growth. WPI prepares its graduate broadly to lead fulfilling lives as responsible professionals, informed community members, and ethical citizens.*

- Expertise in and enthusiasm for the subjects taught and projects advised;
- Clear and effective communication of concepts and material taught;
- Awareness of the strengths, weaknesses, and educational needs of their students;
- Development of general strategies for the successful educational advancement of all students;
- Ability to make suitable adjustments to content, organization, and pacing of course and project work to support student learning and engagement;
- Development of inclusive strategies that ensure the success of a more diverse student population;
- Devotion to personalized professional mentorship of students and/or advisees, including as Insight and academic advisors.

Continuing Professional Growth and Currency: Continuing professional growth and currency is a necessary but not sufficient requirement for obtaining tenure as a Teaching Professor at WPI. Professional growth refers to developing knowledge, acquiring skills, and/or accumulating experiences that enhance WPI's educational mission and visibility. Currency refers to making intellectual contributions to and remaining active in professional communities both within and beyond WPI.²

Professors of Teaching are *committed* to meaningful professional growth and currency that has *significant impact* on teaching and learning networks and support systems, on approaches to and understanding of teaching and learning, and/or on one's own scholarly discipline and/or scholarly communities.

Professors of Teaching seek opportunities for ongoing professional growth and currency, especially in ways that inform their own teaching experiments and innovations and disseminate this knowledge to others within and outside of WPI. Professional growth and currency for these purposes takes on many forms that may include but are not limited to the following (as appropriate):

- Assessing and improving courses, projects, curricula, and pedagogy, and sharing their own pedagogical and scholarly discoveries as these emerge;
- Questioning existing teaching boundaries and experimenting with ideas that overcome the constraints of current teaching practice;
- Remaining active as scholars through the scholarship of discovery, teaching and learning, integration, application and practice, or engagement;
- Continuing to learn about developments in the field of education to enhance their practice of teaching and educating others of their innovations within and/or outside of WPI;
- Remaining current in their disciplines and incorporating recent developments in the field into their course teaching and project advising;
- Understanding student learning and developing creative new approaches to teaching when needed to improve student learning;

² Currency is not defined by any product or artifact, including peer reviewed journal articles or extramural funding.

Service: Service is a necessary but not sufficient requirement for obtaining tenure as a Professor of Teaching at WPI. The institution flourishes when faculty are fully engaged not only in their classrooms and project advising but also in the lives of the institution, the local community, and professional organizations. Effective faculty members exploit opportunities to contribute to these various communities.

APPENDIX 2
Guidance for Documenting and Assessing Activities Toward Tenure
for Professors of Teaching

WPI Faculty Handbook, Part Two, Section 1.A
Approved by the WPI Faculty, January 28, 2021
Approved by the WPI Board of Trustees, May 14, 2021

For Documentation and Assessment of Teaching Practice: When reviewed for tenure, each candidate is expected to submit a teaching portfolio that best demonstrates excellent teaching as measured by the *quality* and *impact* of their teaching skills and activities. The teaching portfolio typically includes a thoughtful statement about the candidate's teaching practices, accomplishments, and approach, as well as sample materials that demonstrates teaching quality and impact.

Teaching activities may include but are not limited to the following:

- Courses delivered, designed, and/or redesigned in any format for undergraduate, graduate, or continuing education students;
- Major Qualifying Projects, Interactive Qualifying Projects, and HUA Inquiry Seminars and Practicums advised or co-advised;
- Dissertations, theses, and research projects advised and co-advised;
- Independent studies supervised;
- Project centers developed, directed, or co-directed;
- Students and research trainees advised or mentored.

The *quality* of each candidate's teaching activities will be assessed for supporting evidence such as - but not limited to - the following:

- Course and project goals that are clear and appropriately challenging, and content that is appropriate to the goals;
- Course activities that are well planned and reflect an effective approach to helping students learn;
- Experiments with new pedagogical techniques;
- Modifications to existing courses based on well-grounded rationale;
- Efforts to support the success of diverse students and students with a range of learning styles;
- Statements and self-reflections demonstrating how one's learning design is grounded in current educational research;
- Use of feedback from students and faculty peers;
- Leadership demonstrated at project centers.

The *impact* of each candidate's teaching activities on students, on curriculum, and on teaching practice (through one's own teaching practices and/or those of their WPI colleagues or their department) will be assessed for supporting evidence such as – but not limited to - the following:

- Student learning outcomes assessment, student engagement, program outcomes, student well-being, and other measures of student success;
- Changes in program curriculum;
- Assessments demonstrating that course, project or program improvements have led to gains

- in student learning in the short term and/or over time;
- Influence on faculty peers (evidenced in the form of letters and/or rubrics, including from project co-advisors);
- Student reflections on their experiences in MQPs, IQPs, and HUA Inquiry Seminars and Practicums;
- Student reflections on their experiences in dissertation, thesis, or research projects;
- Feedback from project sponsors;
- Relevant awards, honors, or positive media coverage;
- Evaluations by students (through student course evaluations and surveys of former students).

For Documentation and Assessment of Continuing Professional Growth and Currency: When reviewed for tenure, each candidate is expected to submit materials that best demonstrate their *commitment* to and the *impact* of their continuing professional growth and currency, including how it enhances the effectiveness of the candidate's teaching and/or furthers a general understanding of effective teaching practices.

Commitment to continuing professional growth and currency can be documented in a combination of many ways that may include but are not limited to engaging in the following activities:

- Leadership by example, through continued innovation in approach and enhancement of one's own teaching methods;
- Teaching collaborations with other faculty, particularly in new approaches, areas, or pedagogies;
- Development of methods of assessment that better measure educational outcomes;
- Record of active scholarship (of Discovery, Teaching and Learning, Integration, Application and Practice, or Engagement);
- Research collaborations with other faculty, including those regarding teaching practices, theories, or outcomes;
- Involvement in professional and academic creative output, inclusive of performance, visual, and written art forms;
- Organizing and/or participating in teaching institutes, professional workshops, or professional conferences;
- Proposals submitted and grants awarded for funding related to teaching improvements or experiments, scholarship, or fellowships;
- Participation as a mentor in programs within or outside of WPI;
- Participation in competitive external professional development programs;
- Service as a reviewer on national, regional, or local grants panels;
- Completion of professional short courses;
- Earned professional certifications.

The *impact* of professional growth and currency may be on approaches to and understanding of teaching and learning, on teaching and learning networks and support systems (through delivery of workshops, seminars, mentorship, training; involvement in communities of practice, etc.); or on one's own scholarly discipline and/or scholarly communities. Such impact can be documented in a combination of many ways that may include but are not limited to the following:

- New courses, curricula and/or academic programs based on emerging new fields, topics of contemporary relevance and/or interdisciplinary connections between emerging and/or existing areas (including data on enrollments and students positively affected);
- Significant revisions to existing curricula and/or academic programs based on the changing content of a disciplinary field, the emergence of a new field, and/or interdisciplinary connections between emerging and/or existing areas that had not previously been available to WPI students (including data on enrollments and students positively affected);
- Demonstrably effective new or improved techniques or strategies to engage students in the classroom, via online delivery, or project advising;
- Dissemination of new or improved teaching approaches, techniques and strategies to colleagues at WPI and beyond;
- Adaptation of approaches, techniques, and strategies by other faculty, programs, and institutions;
- Feedback on teaching innovations from faculty peers.
- Feedback on scholarship from peers in the scholarly community and/or beneficiaries of the scholarly work.
- Invited keynotes and other invitations to speak or share teaching materials or scholarly work personally or in a public venue, conference, or workshop;
- Relevant awards, honors, or positive media coverage.

For Documentation and Assessment of Service: Commitment to service can be documented in many ways, including but not limited to engagement in some of the following activities:

- Service to WPI (faculty governance and ad-hoc committees, assistance to administrative offices);
- Service to the candidate's department (curriculum committees, MQP area coordinators, faculty recruitment, seminar series participation and coordination);
- Service to the local community (board and committee membership in social service and cultural institutions, local government participation);
- Service to the profession (participation in national and international committees and panels, in local chapters of professional societies, in conference organization).

APPENDIX 3
THE ROLES AND BALANCE OF THE FACULTY IN CARRYING OUT WPI'S
MISSION

(Excerpted from Faculty Motions January 28, 2021)
WPI Faculty Handbook, Part One, Appendix D
Approved by the WPI Faculty, January 28, 2021
Approved by the WPI Board of Trustees, May 14, 2021

WPI's mission to create, discover, and convey knowledge at the frontiers of technological academic inquiry requires a faculty that conducts both research and teaching at the highest levels.

Consistent with this mission, the University is committed to maintaining an appropriate balance of faculty members who combine both research and teaching, and faculty members who primarily serve the educational mission as teachers and experts in pedagogy, course design, and course delivery. WPI meets this commitment by aiming to balance its faculty as follows: 70 percent tenured and tenure-track (TTT) dual mission teaching-research faculty³ and 30 percent teaching mission faculty⁴.

WPI's initial three-year goal is to balance its teaching mission faculty (by fall 2023) as follows: 40 percent tenured or tenure-track and 60 percent non-tenure-track, with an openness to further increasing the fraction of tenured or tenure-track teaching mission faculty in the years that immediately follow.

These appropriate balances are and will be based on WPI's teaching and research mission, its priorities and aspirations, and its institutional resources and strategy.

The University is committed to maintaining a faculty of sufficient size and balance to allow faculty members the time required to develop professionally and to carry out their responsibilities at the highest level. WPI meets this commitment by ensuring that the number of faculty members at WPI increase in their proper balance at a rate that is commensurate with the University's growth and strategic needs.

The University should periodically revisit these commitments and goals through campus-wide discussions that either affirm their soundness or develop an understanding and a consensus concerning changes in mission, priorities, resources, or strategy that would require them to change. While the goals are described quantitatively to provide clarity, there is flexibility in the understanding that they are not exact and can be reconsidered when necessary.

Early each fall, the Provost will provide a report to the Committee on Governance detailing the numbers of faculty in each category across the institution and within each department, division, and school. In collaboration with the Provost, the Committee on Governance will disseminate a final report to the Faculty and present the results for open discussion at a Faculty meeting during the same year.

³ The TTT dual-mission teaching-research faculty consists of Assistant, Associate, and Full Professors.

⁴ The teaching-mission faculty consist of the following: tenured and tenure-track (TTT) Assistant, Associate, and Full Professors of Teaching; and non-tenure track (NTT) Assistant Teaching Professors, Associate Teaching Professors, Full Teaching Professors, Professors of Practice, Instructors/Lecturers, and Senior Instructors/Lecturers.

APPENDIX 4

Extension of Full Participation in Faculty Governance and Academic Freedom to all Nontenure-track Faculty Members Holding Secured Appointments

GOVERNANCE OF THE FACULTY¹

WPI Faculty Handbook, Part One, Section One

Approved by the WPI Faculty, May 6, 2021

Approved by the Board of Trustees, May 14, 2021

The governance of the Faculty is carried out under the provisions of this Constitution, under the Bylaws adopted pursuant thereto, and consistent with the procedures and policies contained throughout this Faculty Handbook.

Governance of the Faculty, including voting at Faculty meetings and membership on committees as described in this Faculty Handbook, is the responsibility given specifically to all full-time faculty members who are tenured, are on the tenure-track, or hold non-temporary secured nontenure-track teaching appointments that are made with provisions for a long-term institutional commitment from WPI.²

Secured nontenure-track teaching appointments are those that establish conditions of employment (including for contract renewals) that guarantee that faculty members can act without reprisals in all that they do for the university and its governance. Such appointments are guaranteed by the provisions and protections described in Part Two, Section 8, Subsections A and B of the Faculty Handbook, and approved by those faculty members responsible for the governance of the Faculty.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

WPI Faculty Handbook, Part One, Section Two.V

Approved by the WPI Faculty, May 6, 2021

Approved by the Board of Trustees, May 14, 2021

- A. Faculty Members are entitled to full freedom in research and in the publication of the results, subject to the adequate performance of other academic duties; but research for pecuniary return should be in accordance with established WPI policy.
- B. Faculty Members are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subjects and evaluating their students, but they should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter which has no relation to their subjects.
- C. College and university faculty members are citizens, members of learned professions, and officers of an educational institution. When they speak or write as citizens, they should be free from institutional censorship or discipline, but their special position in the community imposes

¹ Throughout this Handbook, whenever “faculty,” “the faculty,” “faculty member,” or “member of the faculty” is used in the context of voting, service on committees, and the responsibilities of governing the faculty, these terms indicate tenured, tenure-track, or secured faculty members –those responsible for the governance of the faculty.

² Former tenured members of the Faculty who are in phased retirement (with fifty percent appointments or greater) retain their privileges to vote on all Faculty governance matters and to serve on all governance committees.

special obligations. As persons of learning and as educational officers, they should remember that the public may judge their profession and institution by their utterances. Hence, they should at all times be accurate, should exercise appropriate restraint, should show respect for the opinions of others, and should make every effort to indicate that they are not institutional spokespersons.

- D. All members of the WPI Faculty, whether they are tenured, are on the tenure track during their probationary period, or hold secured or short-term nontenure-track appointments, have academic freedom as defined in this Constitution. As members of the WPI Faculty, they are guaranteed non-retaliation with respect to appointment decisions and other conditions of employment for exercising the full range of academic freedom in all their contributions to the University including participation in its governance. Their right to express their views without reprisal is secured by access to all procedures described in this Faculty Handbook.

Elaboration:

Excerpted from the motions to the Faculty, May 6, 2021

Under “Governance of the Faculty,” secured nontenure-track faculty members are defined as those hired by WPI with expectation that they will have significant and continuing academic responsibilities at WPI focused on their teaching, and with provisions for a long-term institutional commitment from WPI guaranteed by the provisions and protections of those appointments described in the Section 8.A of the Faculty Handbook. This security and commitment is essential for full participation in faculty governance.

In addition, the responsibilities for the governance of the Faculty are extended beyond the current tenured and tenure-track faculty to tenured and tenure-track Professors of Teaching, Associate Professors of Teaching, and Assistant Professors of Teaching, and all secured nontenure-track faculty members.

For clarity, under “Academic Freedom” (part D, the updated Faculty Handbook explicitly identifies all faculty members entitled to academic freedom and to access to all procedures, including those for grievances, contained in the Faculty Handbook.

In sum, the changes to the Faculty Handbook described here explicitly extend to all tenured, tenure-track, and secured full-time faculty the rights and responsibilities for the governance of the faculty, which have long been held exclusively by the tenured and tenure-track faculty for reasons having to do with the contrast between the secure nature of their appointments and the tenuous nature of all other faculty appointments.

These changes include formal inclusion among the faculty as well as shared responsibility, for the first time, for governance, including voting and service on elected committees. They also include explicit rights that have been implicitly but ambiguously and irregularly applied, such as the right to academic freedom (implicitly given but currently without any necessary formal protections).