

MEMORANDUM

Date: October 26, 2021
To: Assistant Professors
Members of Reappointments and Promotions Committees
From: Committee on Faculty Appointments (CFA), 2021-22
Re: Annual Letter from the CFA

Each fall for the past decade, with the exception of fall 2020, the CFA has sent an annual letter to assistant professors. Over that span of years, the committee has tended to modify or lightly edit a fundamentally unchanging message. The members of this year's committee have decided to write a letter that departs from that pattern in two respects. First, this is a shorter letter focused on a small number of issues that are of pressing concern to faculty now. Second, rather than addressing ourselves to assistant professors and copying R&P members, we are addressing this letter to both groups equally. That reflects our view that R&Ps have an active role to play in discussing these issues with their assistant professors and offering advice specific to individual circumstances and fields. We'd like to preface this letter with an assurance that [the previous annual letter \(2019-20\)](#) remains a reliable guide to the committee's thinking: everything that the 2019-20 letter said about the general operations of the CFA, the committee's handling of SEQs, and our general approach to assessment of teaching, research and service still applies.

COVID

As we are all too well aware, the pandemic continues to interfere with many research-related and professional activities and adds new layers of complication to teaching and service responsibilities. With the passage of time, it becomes ever clearer that the impacts of the pandemic will be long-lasting. The committee and the provost's office will continue to consult with TTAC and with the faculty at large about these impacts and will consider additional adjustments, if they are called for. We encourage R&Ps to support colleagues by ensuring that they are taking advantage of all available resources, including the special 2021-22 and 2022-23 funding from the provost's office, and by offering advice, as requested, about the option of taking an additional COVID year.

Over the past 18 months, the CFA has taken a number of steps to adjust our appointments system to account for the exceptional disruptions of this pandemic. We have invited all candidates coming before the committee to submit COVID statements, and our experience has been that approximately two-thirds of candidates have chosen to do so. We have offered an extra year on the tenure clock, pre- or post-reappointment, with as much flexibility as possible in the timing of a decision to elect this additional COVID year. In spring 2021 we recommended an additional (developmental and not evaluative) R&P conversation with all assistant professors, so that R&Ps could offer timely support and mentoring and assistant professors and R&Ps could jointly document COVID-related challenges both at the individual level and within professional fields. We have informed and will continue to inform external tenure evaluators of the effects of COVID at Wellesley, including our temporary move to a term system and widespread use of virtual instruction.

As our committee evaluates faculty dossiers and R&P recommendations coming before us this year, we will be intentional about considering evidence of COVID's impact on trajectories of teaching, research and service. We will make careful use of candidates' COVID statements and will look to R&Ps to provide appropriate context about the pandemic's impact on specific fields. While it is never possible for one CFA to constrain its successors, we are confident that future committees will be similarly intentional, for as long as they are evaluating assistant professors whose careers at Wellesley have coincided with COVID.

Contributions to Inclusive Excellence

The Wellesley faculty has embraced diversity, equity and inclusion as foundational values of our academic community. The CFA views individual contributions to realizing these values as an important element of a strong faculty record. The associated educational goal of inclusive excellence does not constitute a fourth review criterion, distinct from teaching, research and service. Rather, the committee recognizes it as a contribution that may augment any, or all, of the three areas that we review.

The CFA acknowledges the many different ways that faculty might incorporate diversity, inclusion, or antiracism into their research and scholarly work. Such endeavors might include mentoring a diverse group of students in research projects, exploring research questions relating to equity or diversity, or critiquing the practices and dynamics in their larger professional communities. With respect to teaching, the committee interprets the College's standard of "teaching effectiveness" to entail a sustained effort to create an inclusive learning environment in which students from diverse backgrounds can thrive. We encourage candidates and R&Ps to engage in active reflection on the practices of their disciplines, while honoring the academic freedom of faculty to choose their own research agendas and pedagogical approaches.

The committee is also aware of the concern that contributions to inclusive excellence may be invisible to R&Ps or the CFA. In part to allay that concern, we are editing the activities sheet this fall. For example, we will make student mentoring/advising contributions more consistently visible, and we encourage candidates to reflect on their inclusive excellence contributions in their personal statements as well.

Strategic Plan

The strategic plan approved by the Board of Trustees at the end of last year lays out multi-year goals and priorities for the College, several of which may ultimately involve changes to the structure of our academic departments and to the content and structure of our curriculum. We hope that assistant professors will draw inspiration from the ideas contained in the plan and take up the invitation to participate in its implementation. But we would also like to combine that invitation with a note of reassurance. The CFA recognizes that when the College appoints an assistant professor, it is making a long-term commitment to that person's future at Wellesley, with the hope that this colleague will be tenured. When a tenure or reappointment case comes before the CFA, we evaluate all candidates on the merits of their research record, the quality of their teaching, and their service contributions. The CFA will continue this practice regardless of any changes to the curriculum or to the structure of departments. We share the College

community's commitment to the breadth of a liberal arts experience, and appreciate the contribution of all our assistant professors to that essential aspect of Wellesley's mission.

Members of the 2021-22 Committee on Faculty Appointments:

Paula Johnson, President
Andrew Shennan, Provost and Dean of the College (Chair)
Megan Núñez, Dean of Faculty Affairs
Bryan Burns, Classical Studies
Angela Carpenter, Cognitive and Linguistic Sciences
Phyllis McGibbon, Art
Mala Radhakrishnan, Chemistry
Smitha Radhakrishnan, Sociology
Marc Tetel, Neuroscience
Adam Van Arsdale, Anthropology