

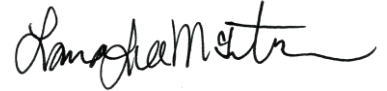
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Fall 2025

MEMORANDUM

TO: Academic Specialists, Deans, School Directors, and Chairpersons, Units
Reporting to the Office of the Provost
Units within the Vice President for Research and Innovation

FROM: Laura Lee McIntyre, Ph.D., Provost and Executive
Vice President for Academic Affairs



SUBJECT: Guiding Policies on Academic Specialist Reappointment,
Promotion, and Continuing (RPC)

As we begin the 2025-26 academic review cycle, I am writing to provide and affirm the guiding principles and expectations for the reappointment, promotion, and award of continuing status (RPC) processes for Academic Specialists. These principles, rooted in Michigan State University's (MSU's) institutional values and policies, are designed to ensure that reviews are equitable, consistent, and grounded in the academic mission of our land-grant university.

Purpose

This memo serves to provide comprehensive, university-level guidance for the 2025-2026 RPC process. Specifically, this memo aims to:

- Affirm the critical role of Academic Specialists in advancing MSU's mission through teaching, advising, service/outreach, research, and curriculum development;
- Provide clarity and consistency in expectations, particularly in light of current external challenges;
- Ensure alignment with MSU's core values of collaboration, excellence, equity, integrity, and respect in all aspects of the process;
- Establish the core criteria and domains of evaluation;
- Guide unit and college-level processes and timelines; and
- Reinforce shared accountability among individuals, units, and leadership for fostering an inclusive and high-performing academic environment.

Core Values and Institutional Alignment

Academic Specialists are essential to advancing MSU's mission. Through their work in teaching, advising, curriculum development, service/outreach (public service), and research, they make distinct and meaningful contributions to the academic experience. As such, the processes for RPC must reflect the same care, transparency, and academic rigor that underpin the tenure-system review process.

At MSU, our academic community includes a dynamic group of educators, scholars, researchers, advisors, and practitioners both within and beyond the tenure system. Academic Specialists are members of the academic community who bring deep expertise across multiple domains, including student success, engaged scholarship, community partnerships, teaching, and pedagogical innovation. Their contributions are integral to the university's mission of discovery, learning, and engagement.



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RPC reviews should be grounded in the core institutional values of collaboration, excellence, equity, integrity, and respect. These values must inform not only the review process itself, but also how we define and assess scholarly and professional contributions. Evaluations must be aligned with each Academic Specialist's assigned duties, as outlined in their official Academic Specialist position description and their [Form on Progress and Excellence](#), ensuring that assessment is fair, relevant, and role-specific.

While roles and titles may vary, the academic workforce at MSU shares a common purpose: to create and apply knowledge, inspire and support students, and build meaningful connections between scholarship and real-world impact. Academic Specialists are not only valued for what they do, but for who they are as collaborators, innovators, and community members within a constantly evolving academic environment. Academic Specialists are a vital part of what makes MSU a great university.

Core Criteria for Evaluation

Evaluation of Academic Specialists for reappointment, continuing status, and promotion should reflect the multi-faceted nature of academic excellence and be grounded in fair, rigorous, and context-aware review. Academic Specialist contributions are assessed across assigned functional areas—each integral to the university's mission—and the process should recognize multi-faceted expressions of excellence, including collaboration, leadership, innovation, and contributions to an inclusive academic community. The criteria below provide guiding principles for evaluating performance across roles and career stages, serving as the foundation for unit- and, where applicable, college-level expectations.

Domains of Evaluation

This section guides evaluators on how to assess performance across the five functional areas. Assess the domains below in proportion to the Academic Specialist's assigned duties. Evidence should be concrete, verifiable, and aligned with unit goals.

- **Teaching.** Assess course design quality, alignment of assessments with learning outcomes, inclusive pedagogy, and effective delivery appropriate to level and modality. Evidence should include syllabi, assignments, rubrics, samples of feedback to students, multiple measures of effectiveness (peer reviews, trends in student input, and learning evidence), and records of curricular improvement or adoption of evidence-based practices. The sole use of student evaluations of teaching is inappropriate as a means for assessing teaching effectiveness.
- **Advising.** Evaluate the accuracy and clarity of guidance, the quality of proactive outreach and case management, and the Academic Specialist's contribution to student progression and timely degree completion. Look for well-kept advising notes, manageable caseload practices, timely responses, evidence of resolved holds and effective referrals, and patterns in student feedback rather than anecdotes.
- **Curriculum Development.** Consider leadership or substantive contributions to program and course (re)design aligned to stated outcomes and accreditation needs. Seek approved proposals, mapped learning outcomes, assessment plans and results used for improvement, reusable materials (modules, guides), and integration of accessibility/UDL, as well as on-time coordination through governance cycles.
- **Service/Outreach (Public Service).** Evaluate the design and delivery of non-credit programs, partnerships, and applied products that address stakeholder needs. Look for documented needs assessments, program plans, participant outcomes, evaluation data used for improvement, applied outputs (toolkits, briefs, extension bulletins) with evidence of adoption, related grants/contracts, and leadership in professional or community bodies.

- **Research, Scholarly, and Creative Activity (as assigned).** An evaluation based on rigor, relevance, and appropriate dissemination for the role (PI/co-PI, practitioner scholarship, creative work). Review outputs and their reach/quality, funded proposals or awards, impact narratives showing use or influence, mentoring of students/staff, and adherence to research compliance. Simple venue counts that do not establish quality, contribution, or role are not an appropriate measure for assessing research, scholarly, and creative activity.

Contextual Considerations for 2025-26

Given the current external climate, notably the changes in the broader higher education landscape, Academic Specialists across the university may have encountered disruptions to their respective work. These disruptions have taken various forms, including stop-work orders, cancellations of federal grants, restricted access to datasets or databases maintained by federal agencies, and limitations on travel to present scholarly work at conferences typically supported by federal funds, as well as other hurdles around international travel. Community-engaged scholarship, teaching, advising, service/outreach, and curriculum development may have been interrupted due to reductions in programmatic funding and operational changes across public and private sector partners. Additionally, Academic Specialists whose work addresses topics that may now be subject to heightened scrutiny may find themselves navigating an increasingly complex environment in advancing or presenting their work.

Moving forward, evaluation processes should focus on allowing Academic Specialists to describe their activities through specific, substantive descriptions rather than categorical labels. This approach allows units to continue recognizing each Academic Specialist's contributions that align with and demonstrate commitment to the university's land-grant mission and strategic priorities while using language that focuses on measurable outcomes and concrete activities. The university remains steadfast in supporting all Academic Specialists in their efforts to create effective and inclusive academic communities.

The [Office for Faculty and Academic Staff Affairs](#) recognizes the challenges that many Academic Specialists are currently facing. These difficulties are being taken seriously, and we are actively engaged in conversations about how to best support Academic Specialists and ensure a fair and thoughtful approach to the RPC process. While the core criteria of RPC remain unchanged, the university affirms that Academic Specialists should be evaluated based on their assigned duties, the quality of their contributions, and the circumstances in which their work was conducted.

For the 2025-2026 RPC cohort, Academic Specialists preparing dossiers will present accomplishments achieved during the review period that may include work impacted by federal developments since January 2025. To inform both internal and external reviewers, Academic Specialists are encouraged to create a work interruption impact statement to include in their RPC dossiers as a standalone document during the review period. In such statements, Academic Specialists may create a record of interruptions and challenges to the areas for which they are appointed. Candidates should also include a plan to address the challenges they have faced and whether mentor support would be helpful in their efforts. Inclusion of a work-interruption impact statement is optional; however, external reviewers (where applicable) are expected to give due consideration to the interruptions noted in the impact statement and seek guidance from unit administrators if they have questions.¹

¹ If the impacts have significantly slowed progress, candidates can consider requesting an extension.

Philosophy on Reappointment and Promotion of Academic Specialists

Academic Specialists undertake vital responsibilities in a range of important academic areas that advance the mission of the land-grant institution, including teaching, academic advising, curriculum development, research, and service/outreach. MSU's policies and procedures related to appointment, review, and promotion of Academic Specialists are described in the [Academic Specialist Handbook](#). Academic Specialists may be appointed on a fixed-term basis or in the continuing system.

Reappointment, award of continuing status, and promotion are not endpoints, but milestones in an ongoing academic journey. Our approach requires regular review of the expectations and criteria that shape these decisions, ensuring that assessments are equitable, transparent, and aligned with institutional values. While we celebrate accomplishments that enhance the effectiveness, climate, and culture of the unit, college, university, and discipline, we also recognize that persistent or serious behaviors inconsistent with these values warrant institutional intervention. Conduct is a core element of all review and appointment decisions. Appointments—including, but not limited to, entry into the continuing system—must never be used to shield behavior that undermines our shared mission; they should reflect both individual merit and the integrity of the academic environment in which they are earned.

This framework reinforces two core institutional responsibilities. First, the institution must clearly articulate its values and ensure that those values are reflected in its policies. If we claim to value excellence, inclusion, accountability, and integrity, then our systems for assessing those values must be equally robust. Decisions about reappointment and promotion should be grounded in these principles and applied consistently across the core functions of academic work.

Second, MSU must ensure that all members of the academic community are meaningfully involved in mentoring, evaluating, and supporting one another. This includes a responsibility to carefully review evidence presented for reappointment, award of continuing status, and promotion, and to do so with a mindset that encourages success, especially when emerging scholarship, pedagogies, or creative work pushes boundaries.

Individual Academic Specialists also carry responsibilities within this process. Chief among these is a commitment to the highest standards of professional behavior. Each Academic Specialist must foster a climate of respect, inclusion, and integrity, and take ownership of their actions. Collegiality is not just a professional courtesy—it is a foundation for trust. Academic Specialists must be willing to receive feedback, reflect critically, and support colleagues, particularly in addressing behaviors that undermine individual dignity or the academic environment. This shared responsibility—to hold ourselves and one another accountable—is essential to the health and future of the academy.

What follows is the annual framework sent to Academic Specialists, deans, school directors, department chairs, vice provosts, and the Vice President for Research and Innovation. It is intended to support a culture of transparency and fairness in reappointment and promotion decisions. Because these decisions are among the most consequential in the academic enterprise, clarity in expectations and procedures is essential.

Going forward, each RPC cycle year, colleges and relevant units in the Office of the Provost and the Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation are asked to review this university-level guidance to ensure alignment with their own processes and policies. This document is also shared with the Academic Specialist Advisory Committee (ASAC), which is invited to suggest revisions that reflect our evolving understanding of excellence and our shared commitment to advancing the academic mission of MSU.

Guiding Policies

Important note for 2025-26: In general, Academic Specialists submitting RPC materials using guidance in place before significant changes to compliance frameworks should be evaluated in accordance with the original guidance. Similarly, annual reviews should be conducted based on guidance in place for the evaluation period. Units should continue to recognize Academic Specialist contributions that align with and demonstrate commitment to the university's land-grant mission, institutional values, and strategic priorities while using language that focuses on measurable outcomes and concrete activities.

While diversity, equity, and inclusion statements will not be submitted going forward, individuals will be expected to describe their full range of work within their appointment categories, which includes activities that further the university's mission, values, and strategic priorities through a broad range of efforts. This may include but is not limited to advancements in inclusive pedagogy, performing cutting-edge scholarship in under-researched topics and subject groups, expanding access and opportunity for all, reviewing and revising practices to assure fairness for all, enhancing respectful dialogue to increase understanding across differences, creating spaces and programs that affirm and uplift often unheard voices, etc.

Career Milestone Reviews

Separate and distinct from the annual review process, there are three milestone review types under the Academic Specialist Appointment System:

1. **Reappointment to a Second Probationary Appointment:** Occurs near the conclusion of the first probationary appointment to determine renewal to a second probationary appointment. Each reappointment recommendation should be based on clear evidence of outstanding performance and consistent professional improvement and effectiveness at MSU sufficient to demonstrate the promise of continued professional achievement and growth for the remainder of the individual's career as an Academic Specialist.
2. **Reappointment with Award of Continuing Status:** Typically, Academic Specialists in the Continuing Appointment System are considered for reappointment with continuing status in the sixth year, with the formal review process beginning in year five. Continuing status reflects long-term institutional commitment and carries protections similar to tenure, though not equivalent. Each recommendation of reappointment with continuing status is predicated on the exemplary performance of assigned duties, professional development, excellence in scholarly activity, leadership, and contributions to the institution.
3. **Promotion to Senior Academic Specialist:** Evaluates advancement from Academic Specialist to Senior Specialist. As an Academic Specialist, promotion to senior status should be based on long-term, high-level performance, not merely time in rank (for a minimum of 60 full-time equivalency service months at the university). A recommendation for promotion to Senior Specialist must be based on several years of sustained, outstanding achievements in the assigned functional duties. There must be a firm basis in performance to permit endorsement of the individual through demonstration of intellectual leadership with major contributions made to the unit and field within the university and/or as an expert or artist of national stature, with the expectation of continuous, long-term, high-quality professional achievement.
4. **Reflective Essay:** Each candidate for reappointment, award of continuing status, and/or promotion must include a maximum five-page reflective essay about accomplishments over the reporting period as part of the dossier. This essay should

highlight how accomplishments in their respective functional area(s) are significant and impactful and have contributed to the mission of MSU. The reflective essay should not be a narrative of the individual's CV, but rather provide information on how previous and current activities and accomplishments have impacted their growth and represent excellence.

Section 2: Focus of the Office of the Provost's Review

The Office of the Provost's review of each recommendation concentrates primarily on the evidence of the individual's effectiveness in the performance of academic duties. Within this context, Academic Specialists must demonstrate substantive and sustainable achievement in the areas identified in their appointment assignments. Assessment should consider the quality and quantity of outcomes; it should also acknowledge the creativity of Academic Specialists' effort and its impact on students, on others the university serves, and on the area(s) in which the Academic Specialist works. It is expected that multiple methods for assessing performance be used.

The university expects all members of the academic community to uphold the highest standards of behavior, foster a culture of respect for all individuals, and take personal responsibility for their behavior and the resulting climate within their units and the university as a whole. Consistent with this philosophy, the provost may use information regarding behavioral matters that are otherwise maintained in confidence in rendering final determinations.

Section 3: Expectations of Department Chairpersons, School Directors, and Deans²

The first responsibility for chairpersons, school directors, or unit administrators is to ensure the development of a set of fair standards and evaluative criteria for use in making reappointment and promotion recommendations. These standards must take into consideration peer evaluations that have established an equitable set of questions regarding contributions to the field, contributions to the values of the institution, and other supporting information. As a rule, in making assessments, no single indicator should be used as the sole measure of excellence and/or productivity; rather, the goal should be that multiple elements be used in assessing excellence for each area of an Academic Specialist's assignment.

Chairpersons, school directors, or unit administrators are responsible for ensuring that the process for soliciting and managing external review letters is conducted fairly. Unit administrators are also responsible as individuals for the recommendations made to the dean or Major Administrative Unit (MAU) administrator. Deans/MAU administrators independently review each recommendation for reappointment and promotion, and in each case, they will focus primarily on how effectively the individual performs academic duties. They support or reject the recommendations of chairperson/directors and college review committees and independently make a recommendation to the provost, considering unit, college, and university criteria. Bearing in mind the university's continuing objective of supporting an excellent, diverse group of faculty and academic staff, the unit and college must ensure well-grounded, well-justified recommendations of reappointment and/or promotion.

² For those colleges that are not organized into departments and schools, the dean, as unit administrator, holds the responsibilities that are required of chairpersons and school directors in other colleges. Additionally, because some Academic Specialists are in units reporting to the Office of the Provost and the Vice President for Research and Innovation (VPRI), unit leaders and the Provost/VPRI have the responsibilities described for chairpersons, school directors, and deans.

Section 4: Expectations of Unit and College Review Committees

Peer review is fundamental to the reappointment and promotion process. Each unit is required to establish procedures so that its faculty and Academic Specialists can provide advice regarding recommendations for reappointment and promotion to the chairperson/school director or unit administrator. Members of review committees are expected to make recommendations to the unit leader or dean based on full and frank discussions about candidates that are confidential, respectful, and evidence-based. All share the responsibility of building a unit characterized by inclusive excellence.

There should be some minimal level of uniformity in how review committees function. Thus, in addition to the dossier (Form on Progress and Excellence, CV, reflective essay) for each candidate, each case should include:

- College/Unit reappointment and promotion bylaws and/or policies (where applicable)
- Specialist Position Description form (SPD)³
- Information concerning the expectations for the Academic Specialist, e.g., appointment letter for reappointment cases, annual review letters since last reappointment or promotion action, unit administrator's developmental letter at time of reappointment (if applicable), letter explaining why a promotion case was previously denied (if applicable).
- Written reports from all unit peer review committees
- External review letters⁴
- Unit-level reappointment and promotion votes

Section 5: The Process and Timeline

Unit peer review committees make recommendations to the chairperson or school director. The Academic Specialist under review must be provided with an opportunity to confer with the review committee before it provides advice to the next-level administrator regarding reappointment, award of continuing, and/or promotion. Chairpersons and school directors then make unit-level recommendations⁵ to the dean/MAU administrator. Deans or MAU administrators make the recommendation to the provost on or around May 1 each year. Only the Academic Specialist can stop a reappointment or promotion case from moving forward to the next higher level of review. A negative recommendation by the chairperson, director, or dean does not eliminate the review at the provost level. Recommendations are to be based on explicit unit and college criteria and quality evaluations that are consistent with unit, college, and university policies and goals. The unit administrator must provide the Academic Specialist with a summary of the recommendation to the provost and with feedback after the recommendation is forwarded. This should occur no later than 15 days after the submission of the documents to the provost for review.

The Office of the Provost reviews occur each year from May through June. Academic Specialists are to be notified of the recommendations from their chairperson, director or unit administrator and dean (or VPRI) when those recommendations are forwarded to the next level for review. Academic Specialists will be notified of the final recommendation for reappointment and promotion, and the award of continuing actions. You can refer to the [Academic Specialist timeline](#) on the Human Resources website.

³ SPD should be reviewed annually to ensure that at the time of review, appointment assignment(s) reflect areas for evaluation.

⁴ For Academic Specialists, external review letters might include letters from individuals external to the unit but employed by MSU. External review letters are required for reappointment with the award of continuing and promotion to Senior Academic Specialist.

⁵ College-level peer review committees are not required but strongly recommended.

Conclusion

Our Academic Specialists are deeply committed professionals whose expertise enriches every corner of the university. I ask each of you to approach the RPC process with the same care and seriousness as we apply to our tenure system reviews. In doing so, we honor our institutional values and continue to foster a culture where all academic staff can thrive.

Thank you for your continued leadership.