The Path to Promotion

Session 2: Questions and Answers

Hover over the question and click the triangle at the left to expand or collapse each answer. Open the Navigation Pane and use the headings at the left to jump to the section or question you are interested in.

# Criteria and Evidence

## Where would we find the information on what the unit or dean is looking for in a promotion application? My role is very unique so there is no umbrella document detailing expectations for promotion.

Unique positions, and therefore unique promotion criteria, are not uncommon in the specialist system. Look for the expectations for promotion in your hiring documents. Those should have been drafted in a way that supports you meeting both your unit’s expectations and the college’s expectations. If this was not provided, or you cannot find yours, be sure to bring this up with your supervisor, soon, as well during your annual review each year. In general, for promotion the university is looking for sustained excellence in the position. The dean is obligated to use that standard and apply it to the field/discipline and type of work your college does, taking into account the specific duties of your position.

4.3.3.5 Promotion to the Rank of Senior Academic 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 FTE at the university).

This long-term, high performance in the position is demonstrated by assigned duties and recognition by peers and colleagues both within the University and regionally, nationally, or internationally based on what is appropriate for the specific position. Such recognition is to be based on external peer review involving evaluation of performance of the specialist according to their Specialist Position Description in one or more of their assigned functional areas: teaching, advising, curriculum development, research/creative activity, and/or public service/outreach.

A promotion recommendation requires a robust review of the specialist’s ability to demonstrate (1) long-term, high performance in their position, (2) endorsement by the unit review committee, academic unit administrator, intermediate administrators/head of MAU, and the Provost that merits the award of promotion to the rank of Senior Specialist.

## The impact of my work (specifically DEI related contribution) is not directly available or provided to me (my supervisor or others use the work for their reporting). How to document the impact?

This is an important conversation to have with your supervisor, where you can consider the expectations for representing diversity, equity and inclusion efforts in promotion cases in your department/unit and college/MAU. If you do not have the data to support your individual efforts, data about the group’s progress along with a description of your contributions to that progress could be provided.

Colleges/MAUs vary in the way they implement the charge from the provost. Several colleges have produced guidelines for documenting DEI effort. As an example, the College of Arts and Letters provides this information for writing a DEI Statement: <https://cal.msu.edu/documents/cal-guidelines-for-the-writing-of-diversity-statements/>

And this information on evaluating DEI Statements: <https://cal.msu.edu/documents/cal-guidelines-for-evaluation-of-diversity-statements/>

In the College of Human Medicine, having evidence of impact is desirable, but not required: <https://humanmedicine.msu.edu/faculty-staff/faculty-affairs/file/DEI_Guidance_from_the_CHM_RPT_Committee_Spring_2022_FINAL.pdf>

If there is no similar guidance document in your college/MAU, these and other examples from colleges across MSU may be helpful to you and your supervisor as you map out a strategy for representing your contributions, individually and as part of the work in your unit.

## My position does not have a leadership capacity nor does the regular work around my position allow me to "lead" other colleagues. How to demonstrate "leadership" work then?

Demonstrations of leadership can come in many ways. Service on unit, college, or university committees can constitute leadership. Mentoring of junior colleagues is an excellent form of leadership. Service for professional organizations can also count. Don’t be afraid to think broadly about the term.

# Finding Support

## Is there a pathway of central support (financial) for non-credit-bearing professional development?

Some of the centrally provided professional development opportunities have support built into them, e.g., the [Lilly Teaching Fellows](https://ofasd.msu.edu/teaching-learning/lilly-fellowship/) and [Adams Academy Fellows](https://ofasd.msu.edu/teaching-learning/adams-academy/). It is worth also asking within your unit/college, as support for professional development is supposed to be available there too. If you are running into barriers, please contact FASD and they will try to help you find resources.

## Does university HR have a copy of my offer letter and attachments?

No, your college or department HR should have copies of these.

## I am a new specialist and I am confused as to how my initial salary was determined. Who would I ask about that? Is there a list of starting salaries for specialists?

An annual memo from the provost details minimum salaries for academic appointments at MSU, including for specialists. See <https://hr.msu.edu/ua/recognition/faculty-academic-staff/documents/FAS-Salary-Adjustment-Guidelines.pdf> for the July 2023 memo. Salaries for specific positions are determined in the unit.

# Benefits of Promotion or Continuing Status

## I am fixed term with Designation B. Is it worthwhile to switch to the continuing system when it means that you lose Designation B?

Designation B is a provision of the UNTF contract, and therefore is for specific teaching faculty only. Consult the contract to learn more about who qualifies for UNTF membership: <https://hr.msu.edu/contracts/index.html>.

There are details from MSU HR about Designation B here:

<https://hr.msu.edu/ua/hiring/faculty-academic-staff/DesignationB_FAQ.html>

The UNTF describes Designation B here: <https://untf.org/contract/designation-b/>

It is key to know that according to the UNTF contract the Designation B status ONLY applies to the teaching portion of your assignment. If you are 100% teaching that works out great. If you are 40% teaching, it is possible that only the 40% is included in the rolling five-year appointment. Some units have agreed to cover the entire appointment. You need to look at your college and unit guidelines to see if yours does.

If not, moving to the continuing system and being awarded continuing status would cover your entire appointment, which may be valuable to you. When moving from fixed term to the continuing system, typically you will get a probationary appointment in the continuing system with a review for continuing status to be completed at a future date. If you have already been promoted to the senior specialist rank after a peer-review process at MSU, moving to the continuing system with continuing status does not require a second peer review.

## Does promotion to Senior Specialist come with an automatic raise in pay, or is that up to each unit?

The most recent Faculty and Academic Staff Salary Adjustment Guidelines – 2023-2024 memo has the details: <https://hr.msu.edu/ua/recognition/faculty-academic-staff/documents/FAS-Salary-Adjustment-Guidelines.pdf>

“The university provides centrally funded promotional increases to recognize the achievement of promotion and/or award of tenure or continuing status for faculty and academic staff…”

“Centrally funded” means the money does not come from the unit’s budget, and it means it is not up to the unit to decide whether to provide it.

“Promotion and/or award of continuing status for the following groups (includes non-union fixed-term where applicable): Academic Specialists (non-union): $4,000”

“Union of Non-Tenured Track Faculty Promotional Increases, Senior Academic Specialist: $3000”

## What are the differences between reappointment versus promotion? Can you distinguish the difference briefly?

Reappointment means extending the end date of your appointment; your rank does not change. Promotion is a change in rank, which both recognizes your excellent past work and scholarly achievements and identifies you as a leader and accomplished academic with the responsibilities of a senior member of our community of scholarship.

If you are in the fixed term system, reappointment does not require a multi-level peer review. If you are in a probationary appointment in the continuing system, the multi-level peer review process is required for reappointment. Promotion always requires a multi-level peer review, whether you are in the continuing system or the fixed term system.

Reappointment is about showing merit in your work, such that you should continue in your position. In the continuing system, it is also about showing progress toward meeting the expectations for the award of continuing status. Promotion is about showing sustained excellence as an academic in the work for “several years” – five to seven years is typical.

In the handbook, section 4.3.4 outlines which documents make up the review materials for each type of review:

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| --- |
| **Documentation for Academic Specialist Reappointment and Promotion Process** |
|  | **Continuing Reappointment Review** (1st Probationary Period) | **Reappointment w/ Award of Continuing** (2nd Probationary Period) | **Promotion to Senior Specialist** |
| ***Form on Progress and Excellence***  | Required  | Required  | Required  |
| ***Specialist Position Description Form***  | Required  | Required  | Required  |
| ***Annual Evaluations***  | Required  | Required  | Required  |
| ***External Reviewers***  | Not Required  | Required  | Required  |
| ***Letters of Support***  | Optional  | Optional  | Optional  |

See Session 1 of the Path to Promotion series for additional information on the meanings of words that describe different kinds of specialist appointment features and actions.

# Policies and Procedures

## Is it true that once you have senior specialist status, you can choose to apply to the continuing system without having to go through another review process?

Yes. It does not require an application by the specialist, only an administrative action by the unit. According to the November 2023 memo from the provost to colleges/MAUs that summarizes the 2023-2024 review process (II.E., p. 4):

***II. Academic Specialist – Fixed Term***

E. If there is a Fixed Term Academic Specialist that is being reviewed for promotion and there is a desire to move to the continuing system, do the following:

a. After the review has been completed and approved for promotion to Senior Specialist, the unit is then responsible to submit an Academic Position Request (APR) in EBS to request an “exception to post.” The exception reason will be “*Internal Fill*”.

Additionally, if you are in the continuing system and are promoted to senior specialist, continuing status is automatically granted:

4.2.8.1 Academic Specialist

An academic specialist who has not served previously at the University is appointed initially in the Academic Specialist Appointment System for a probationary period of three years and may be reappointed for an additional probationary period of three years. If an academic specialist is appointed beyond the two probationary periods, continuing appointment status is granted. If at any time during these two probationary periods an academic specialist is promoted to the rank of senior academic specialist, continuing appointment status is granted. Probationary appointment periods are calculated from August 16 of the calendar year in which the appointment is effective.

## Must a fixed term specialist move to the continuing system before applying for senior specialist rank?

No. A continuing system appointment is based on the existence of continued need for and funding for the position at MSU. Continuing status is awarded after evidence of your success in the position through your probationary periods. The Senior Specialist rank is awarded based on your status in your field and is based on your personal academic/scholarly accomplishments. There are instances when both might occur simultaneously, but they are different decisions.

## I've been a fixed term Research Specialist (1-year recurring) for 11 years. Is there ever an argument that can be made from my end to petition that this position be moved to continuous appointment?

There is always an argument that can be made to your unit leadership, but the decision is on the leadership's end. Sometimes the funding sources are the key. If the funding source is based on a single year grant (reapplied for yearly) it may not be possible. If the position is not funded in this way, the fact that the position has persisted and that you have been reappointed in it for eleven years in a row could be part of your argument for moving the position to the continuing system. Another option that could be appealing to both parties is a multi-year (e.g., three-year) fixed term appointment. If your position is funded with grant dollars, it may make sense to align your appointment length with the length of each grant.