

Research Expectations for Regular-Title Assistant Professors  
School of Journalism and Telecommunications  
University of Kentucky  
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## I. Introduction

Regular-title assistant professors in the School of Journalism and Telecommunications typically work under a distribution of effort allocating 45 percent of their time to scholarship, 45 percent of their time to teaching and advising, and 10 percent of their time to service. Teaching and advising responsibilities include teaching two courses each semester, office hours availability to students enrolled in those courses, and additional advising responsibilities for between 20 and 40 upper-division undergraduate students. As an ACEJMC-accredited program, expectations for student advising are high, and undergraduate advising typically takes up more of the school faculty member's time than may be the case in the college's other units.

Assistant professors in the regular-title series are expected to have an energetic research program that leads to promotion and tenure. Faculty members in the School undertake a variety of research activities that utilize an array of methods, and the School recognizes that research projects will vary depending on the discipline in which the faculty member is working and the interests of that faculty member. Although this document will identify goals to which a regular-title faculty member should aspire, it is not a checklist of requirements that must be met for a faculty member to be considered for promotion and tenure.

No single document can cover all of the potential research endeavors and publication or distribution outlets that might appeal to a faculty member. Instead, with this document, the School is demonstrating its commitment to encouraging high-quality research, while recognizing the wide range of interests that faculty members might pursue.

One point should be made at the outset: Although this document recommends a minimum level of research output that a regular-title faculty member should have before being considered for promotion and tenure, it is the *quality* of the research and the prestige of the outlets where it is published or otherwise distributed that are the most important factors.

## II. Research Output

It is expected that an assistant professor will have produced the equivalent of 1.5 articles in refereed journals or other peer-reviewed outlets for each year of probation, or about 8-9 articles over the 5.5 years between the time of the appointment and the time when the promotion and tenure review is well under way.

Below is a list of publication activities and outlets. The list is generally hierarchical, meaning that the higher the item is on the list, the more value it should be given. This list does not cover everything, and some research activities that make a special contribution to the field, although listed further down, may be of more value than a modest effort with an activity higher on the list.

The School recognizes that faculty members participate in collaborative research projects. Not only can such efforts enhance the scope and potential value of the research, there are times when projects can only be completed through collaboration.

Although research activities are separated into “single-authored works” and “multi-authored works” in this document, individual circumstances will determine the extent to which research endeavors involving more than one scholar will be valued as compared with those of a single author. There may be times, for example, when an individual faculty member’s work in a multi-authored project is assigned more value than a single-authored work.

A key factor will be the nature and extent of the contribution of each author. Generally, the author listed first in a multi-authored work will be considered to have contributed the most to the project. Regardless of where their name appears in the list of authors, any faculty member involved in collaborative research will have the opportunity to submit a statement describing his or her involvement in the work. That faculty member can assert in such a statement that the usual assumption about name order should not apply.

#### *Single-authored works*

- A single-authored book published by a university or commercial press\*
- A single-authored article in one of the discipline’s most prestigious refereed journals\*\*
- A single-authored book chapter
- A single-authored article in a less prestigious refereed journal
- A single-authored article in a non-refereed journal or periodical
- A single-authored conference paper
- A single-authored commentary in a newspaper or magazine
- A single-authored article in a refereed journal conference proceeding

\*A book written by an assistant professor will carry substantial weight when it comes to assessing that faculty member's research program. Although the quality of the scholarship, as described in Section IV of this document, is the most important factor, the number of chapters and length of the book will be considered when determining the equivalent number of refereed journal articles. Each book chapter that involves substantial research, analysis, and writing will be counted as the equivalent of a refereed journal article.

Books published by a university press will not automatically be considered of higher value than those published by a commercial press. Many commercial presses publish books in prestigious series or are known for offering books with first-rate research.

\*\*This will apply whether the journal is printed or is only available online. Law review articles are part of this category. (See discussion below about law reviews).

*Multi-authored works*

- A multi-authored book published by a university or commercial press
- A multi-authored article in one of the discipline's most prestigious refereed journals
- A multi-authored book chapter
- A multi-authored article in a less prestigious refereed journal
- A multi-authored article in a non-refereed journal or periodical
- A multi-authored conference paper
- A multi-authored commentary in a newspaper or magazine
- A multi-authored article in a refereed journal conference proceeding or journal

*Grants*

- Publications resulting from the research conducted under the grant\*\*\*
- The awarding of the grant
- Applying for the grant

\*\*\*The application for and awarding of a grant will, depending on the prestige of the grant program, be considered a valued part of the faculty member's research program. However, the publications and presentations that come from the grant research will be significantly more important than the awarding of the grant itself. Grant activity that does not result in research being disseminated by publication or in some other venue will be considered a lesser contribution to the overall research program as compared to grants that lead to publication.

*Other factors*

- The number and location of citations of the faculty member's work
- Awards or other forms of recognition
- The "visibility" of the faculty member within the discipline

### III. Discussion of Research Output

#### A. Online publications

Some journals, even though they employ the same peer-review methods as their printed brethren, are not “published” in the traditional sense and are distributed only online. Recognizing the development of such communication technology, the School has determined that online journals that are peer-reviewed will be judged by the same standards as those that appear in peer-reviewed print outlets.

#### B. Law review articles

Almost all law reviews and other legal journals are edited by students under faculty supervision, but are not directly managed by faculty members. Article submissions are not sent to referees who judge the worthiness of the article and recommend revisions. Instead, the decision to publish and how the article is to be edited are made by the student editors at the law review.

Professors at law schools write articles for law reviews and have been promoted and tenured based on those activities. The same standard should be applied to those working in journalism and communication programs. Thus, faculty members who publish in law reviews will be given the same credit they would have received had the article appeared in a refereed journal.

#### C. Book chapters

Book chapters may not have gone through a traditional refereed process. In some cases, chapters and a book proposal will have been approved by a single editor or a group of editors. In other circumstances, outside reviewers evaluate the worthiness of the research and its suitability for publication. Their positive recommendation may be required before a book contract can be offered.

Although book chapters may not be reviewed by referees, when it comes to assessing their contribution to an assistant professor’s research program, such chapters will be evaluated based on the quality of the research and the writing and not devalued merely because they did not go through a blind-review process. Individual circumstances will dictate how chapters—such as those submitted to books which contain chapters written by other contributors—will be compared to the value of a refereed-journal article.

#### IV. Assessing the quality of the research

- In general, the quality of an individual research publication can be evaluated through such characteristics as: the theoretical and practical importance of the questions driving the study; the competent execution of the study; the significance of the findings produced by the study; and its overall contribution to the scholarly field. Presumably these benchmarks of quality are met when the work has been accepted for publication by a reputable peer-reviewed scholarly outlet. The quality of an assistant professor's research publications is also addressed in the promotion and tenure process itself through the letters written by the external evaluators, who are distinguished scholars in the assistant professor's area of expertise. Essentially, the more that one's peers in the field are in agreement about the merits of a publication, the less "subjective" is the overall judgment of quality.
- Some publications may be eligible for awards given by professional associations; however, these awards are relatively few in number and shouldn't be considered a principal means of evaluating quality.
- The quality of a refereed journal article is often assessed by the number of authors who have cited the article. This is a commonly accepted measure of the influence of a research publication within a scholarly field. However, citation counts (or "citation impact") are probably a more useful measure for promotion to full professor. Most assistant professors' work has not been in publication long enough to generate a meaningful number of citations.
- The quality of refereed journal articles can also be assessed in terms of the standing of the journal in which it is published. That is, the reputation of a journal might instill a measure of confidence in the overall quality of the articles it publishes. The "impact factor" of a journal is one quantitative method of evaluating a journal's standing (and thus the articles published in it). Other indicators of a journal's standing include its perceived prestige, its acceptance rate, and the size of its readership. Thus, in some instances, lesser-cited journals can be influential within their particular ambits.
- The quality of book chapters is not as easy to ascertain, since they are not usually subject to a peer review process. (Some edited volumes, such as the Communication Yearbook series, do employ a peer review system for making acceptance decisions for individual chapters.) Certain types of edited volumes, such as the "handbooks" published by Sage, signify a relatively high level of accomplishment on the part of the author. Ultimately, judgments about the quality of most book chapters must rest on the internal characteristics of the work (see the first bullet point), and how they relate to the rest of the assistant professor's research program.
- The quality of books follows much the same scheme as already outlined for refereed articles. The book should be evaluated in terms of the important questions (or issues) it seeks to explore; the execution of the research and writing; the significance of the

findings (or the originality of its analysis, if it's not a conventional empirical study), and its contribution to the field. Ideally, the book should have been accepted by a university press or a commercial publisher of scholarly work on the basis of anonymous peer reviews. The acceptance rate for manuscript submissions will also be a factor. The reputation of the press – or the distinction of the press's "catalogue" in which the book was published – is also a consideration. Unlike refereed articles, a book is often reviewed. Thus, the overall tenor of the reviews can provide important evidence of quality. However, because of the lag time between a book's release and the publication of reviews, it may not always be possible to use this benchmark to the fullest extent. It is also important to note that the number of copies sold is not necessarily an indicator of a book's quality.

## Appendix – Recommendations for assistant professors

### I. A sustained program of research

It is important that regular-title faculty members get started immediately on research projects. He or she will usually undergo a tenure review beginning in the fall of the sixth year. Thus, the faculty member has only five and a half years to establish a research program, and that time goes by quickly. Some outlets, such as refereed communication journals, have long lead times. It can take several months for an article to be evaluated by referees, and depending on the comments, several more months to revise and resubmit. The article, if accepted, will then be published after an additional period of time.

Assistant professors must also recognize how much competition there is among those submitting articles to journals. If their submission is rejected, they must be prepared to revise the article and submit it elsewhere or move on to the next project.

The promotion and tenure committee needs to see a sustained effort over the probationary period. Assistant professors, although busy with classes, advising, committees, and other work, cannot afford an extended break from research activities. Summers can be particularly important for research, and new faculty members should be discouraged from teaching then.

Faculty members should also take advantage of the various grant programs that the University offers in providing money to help fund research. Those programs are at both the College and University level.

### II. Coherence of the Research Program

Faculty members are granted substantial discretion to pursue the research efforts that most interest them. Research articles or other projects do not need to be on the same subject. But the overall program has to have some coherence. Within a fairly broad outline, it has to be clear what research questions the faculty member is investigating and what methods are

being used to pursue those questions. In order to have an impact on the discipline, demonstrate the likelihood of continued publication after tenure, and reflect positively on the School and the University, the faculty member must develop a high level of knowledge and research skills in a particular area. The research projects must have some relation to each other, even if they employ different methods and are distributed through a variety of outlets.

### III. Mentoring

It is in the best interest of the School for regular-title faculty members to be encouraged to pursue high-level research and to be supported in those efforts. A mentoring system for assistant professors can help, but it cannot replace the initiative and hard work that must be undertaken by the faculty member. No assistant professor can justifiably argue that his or her tenure bid failed because of inadequate mentoring. The faculty member is responsible for pursuing a successful research program.