



University of
South Australia

Academic Promotions

INFORMATION FOR APPLICANTS AND PROMOTION PANELS:
ASSESSMENT OF ACHIEVEMENT RELATIVE TO OPPORTUNITY



Introduction

This resource has been prepared to

- support and encourage promotion applicants to describe relevant personal circumstances and working arrangements and the impact they've had on career achievements and progression;
- provide guidance to promotion panels on assessment of merit relative to opportunity.

Background

The academic promotion process is designed to recognise sustained academic excellence and performance at or above world-class standard, within your discipline area. It covers the quality, impact and influence of your leadership and of your work across the three areas of contribution: research, teaching and learning, and engagement depending on the type of academic role you hold at UniSA (ie Teaching, or Research, or Teaching and Research).

You will need to provide evidence that demonstrates you are already performing at the level to which you are seeking promotion and evidence of an upward trajectory in your performance.

At UniSA, the how of what you do and the impact that you have on other people is as important as the knowledge you bring. The [Core Attributes of UniSA Staff](#) (Core Attributes) define UniSA's expectations for how our people will lead and engage with each other. As part of your application you will have an opportunity to explain how you demonstrate these qualities (see the academic promotion guidelines for more information).

Promotion is assessed on the basis of merit, relative to opportunity.

The University recognises that a range of personal circumstances and approved working arrangements can affect career achievements and progression. Relevant circumstances can include

- carer responsibilities, such as for children, elderly parents, or ill relatives;
- ill-health, disability, or 'misadventure', whether temporary or permanent;
- part-time or flexible work;
- career interruptions and delays such as parental leave, time out for work in a different field and/or late entry to academia;
- other relevant circumstances.

The inclusion of such information within a promotion application may appear incongruous because it challenges, to some degree, the traditional division between public and private life. In addition, the inclusion of such material and a description of how it has negatively affected performance and achievements may seem akin to requesting 'special consideration' for 'underperformance', with a corollary concern about possible dilution of appropriate standards of merit. These reasons may explain some of the sensitivity on the part of applicants and panels when it comes to describing and evaluating this sort of material.

However, the consideration of achievement relative to opportunity aims to ensure that individuals who describe such relevant personal circumstances may be assessed fairly and holistically, with assurance that merit standards are being maintained. In contrast with a special consideration approach highlighting how performance has been negatively affected, an achievement relative to opportunity approach facilitates positive acknowledgement of what has been achieved given the actual opportunities available.

The assessment of achievement relative to opportunity in relation to promotion

In considering merit for promotion and the concept of achievement relative to opportunity, the following factors are relevant

- the quality and impact of achievements;
- the overall productivity of achievements, including the quantity, rate or consistency of achievements over time, and relative output across the various academic areas.

Personal circumstances or working arrangements may affect the overall time available for academic activities and the capacity to undertake certain types of academic activity, which in turn may affect productivity (quantity and rate of output) in the relevant areas over time.

The inclusion of assessment of achievement relative to opportunity within the academic promotion application enables a promotion panel to consider how individual circumstances may have affected opportunity and achievement while ensuring that the quality and impact of achievements are demonstrated to the required standard.

Some examples may illustrate these concepts

- An academic returns to work after a career interruption whilst on parental leave, which affects research achievements during this period and immediately afterwards as she re-establishes research projects and networks.
- An academic who works part-time describes how her attendance on campus for three days a week allows her to make significant and ongoing contributions to a limited number of roles and committees within her Division, School and in her discipline. In assessing her application, her sustained and high quality of service is acknowledged, and she is not penalised for a lack of breadth of service.
- An academic with sole caring responsibilities for his elderly parents is limited in his capacity to present at international conferences but lists a high citation rate for a small but appropriate number of publications in prestigious journals. Based on a holistic assessment, the panel determines that the applicant has demonstrated the appropriate quality and impact of performance in the overall criterion of research without penalising him for relatively lower output in any single research-related activity or for his overall research output.
- An academic who works part-time calculates his overall service time in effective full-time years of service in his promotion application and demonstrates how his achievements are consistent with expectations of performance at the appropriate academic level for the number of full-time years.
- An academic describes how a significant illness in the years immediately prior to a promotion application has affected his overall productivity. In assessing his application consistent with a whole of career approach that does not require a consistent level or type of contribution every single year, the panel acknowledges that a sustained high achievement of the requisite quality has been demonstrated, although recent output has been affected by his personal circumstances.
- An academic took a period of leave four years ago to care for her terminally ill child. This has created a gap in her research and teaching record and reduced productivity immediately after returning to work. The panel considered her prior and current rate of achievements and made an assessment based on the quality of the work, which did not require continuous and uninterrupted performance for success.

Including achievement relative to opportunity: Information for applicants

Applicants wanting to include an achievement relative to opportunity statement should attach and upload a separate one-page statement as part of their application.

In some situations, an applicant may not want to disclose any details to a panel due to the highly sensitive nature of the circumstances that have led to the need for the request. In these cases, the applicant may submit an extra-ordinary confidential request to the Senior Consultant responsible for academic promotion and the Executive Director: People, Talent and Culture.

Please contact the Senior Consultant responsible for academic promotion (contact details are available on the academic promotion website) for further information and advice.

Assessing achievement relative to opportunity: Information for promotion panels

When evaluating an individual's record of achievements, factors that have affected an applicant's opportunities should be considered to avoid the inadvertent assessment against the notional standard of an uninterrupted full-time career trajectory where it does not apply.

In line with the examples described above, panels are requested to give appropriate consideration where they determine that personal circumstances or working arrangements have affected

- the overall time available for academic activities and therefore the quantity or rate of output;
- the opportunity to participate in certain types of academic activities;
- the consistency of activities or output over the period under consideration.

Assessment of achievement relative to opportunity is consistent with an evaluative framework in which an assessment of the overall quality and impact of achievements is given more weight than the quantity, rate, or breadth of particular achievements. However, it is necessary to assess overall productivity in order to determine whether 'sustained' performance of the appropriate quality has been demonstrated. As promotion decisions are based on assessment of prior achievements, panels should avoid making inferences about the future capacity or achievements of applicants based on any personal circumstances and associated career impact disclosed in this section of the application.

All information submitted in relation to personal circumstances will be kept confidential and will be used only for the purposes of assessing the promotion application in which it is contained. Panels will use the information supplied to assess applications against the published criteria.

Panels will not take into account circumstances that are known to them but not referenced in applications.

Thank you to the University of Melbourne for allowing use of its resource *Academic Promotions: Guidelines for assessment of 'performance against opportunity.'*