Tenure and Promotion of Faculty: Candler School of Theology

I. Purpose

Tenure and promotion in Candler School of Theology foster the educational mission of the School, both as a communal work and as a work of each faculty member. To this end, the faculty seek to envision and implement the mission of the school; support individual faculty in teaching, research, and service; and ensure stability for the School’s institutional life and academic mission.

1. Envisioning and implementing the mission of the school require a community of scholars who enhance the work of each individual and the work of the whole. Critical to its mission is the scholarly community’s ability to make judgments about the direction of its common life and to select people who can critically expand its visions. For these reasons, Candler’s hiring practices are rigorous, and the faculty bias is to nurture and encourage every new faculty member toward tenure. At the same time, decisions have to be made again at the time of tenure and promotion, based on the ability of faculty to contribute to the present and future directions of the School.

2. Supporting individual faculty in teaching, research, and service requires a spirit of free inquiry. Exploration of provocative questions and the consideration of unorthodox ideas are the very fiber out of which substantial research and excellent teaching are made. Students flourish when faculty members are engaged in significant research and when they share discoveries and the discovery process itself. Tenure and promotion provide strong institutional support to ensure that the quest for knowledge continues.

3. Ensuring stability for Candler’s academic mission and institutional life requires the faculty to be deeply engaged in the disciplines of theology, to carry on a rigorous dialogue across theological and other academic disciplines, to be critically and empathetically engaged with the church and other religious bodies, and to interact with the critical issues that face humankind in a particular moment. Tenure and promotion secure a stable faculty, who over time build a community of focused inquiry, both by collaborative research and teaching and by sustained conversations with one another.

II. Tenure and Promotion within a Professional School of Theology

As members of a professional school within Emory University, Candler faculty engage both the academy and the church through their research, teaching, and service. Consideration of a faculty member for promotion and tenure demands awareness of the tensions inherent in this dual engagement. The evaluation of individual faculty members takes into account the person’s contributions to Candler’s mission as well as individual accomplishments as scholar and teacher.

1. Theological scholars have responsibility for the preservation and production of knowledge. Integral to the university, the study of theology encompasses the practices
and cultural productions of peoples ancient to contemporary; engages literature across five millennia, reflects upon diverse enactments, commentaries, and debates; and interprets the multiple systems of practice and symbol generated by a world-wide, prolific, and fragmented Christianity.

Even when viewed by itself, Christian theology is a vast field of study, encompassing multiple languages, cultural systems, and practices. In fact, however, theology within the university is never an isolated and self-contained scholarship. It intersects every other field in the humanities and social sciences. Theology as studied within the university is inherently interdisciplinary. A theology faculty, therefore, is challenged not only by the requirement of depth but also by the need for breadth. No single scholar can have both qualities in the same degree. Because the Candler faculty makes up the largest portion of a leading Ph.D. program in the study of religion, it must have a number of scholars who excel in historical, theoretical, and constructive theological study and are able to direct the original research of students who help them create new knowledge. Since tenure and promotion within the University as a whole ordinarily focus on such forms of learning, and since there are well-established professional guilds within the various branches of theology, faculty whose work falls mainly within this side of the School’s mission have clear standards by which their research can be evaluated, whatever their field.

2. Theological scholars also have responsibility to reflect on and contribute to the church. Candler’s faculty thus engages the wide variety of disciplines and practices that support ecclesial reflection and professional ministerial training. The school’s largest degree program has as its goal the preparation of men and women for ministry in the church. This preparation necessarily involves education in the theories, methodologies, and practices specific to the arts of ministry, such as preaching, Christian education, liturgy, church administration, and pastoral care and counseling, as well as disciplines closely related to the traditional development of arts and sciences in the university, such as biblical studies, historical studies, systematic theology, and ethics.

Candler considers theological learning to result from a reciprocal process in which all these forms of study and practice are mutually formative. Just as faculty responsible for the traditional disciplines must be informed by engagement with practice, so must faculty engaged in practical theology be conversant with the traditional theological disciplines. A theology school looks to practical theologians to inform ministerial practice theologically, and, equally important, to challenge and inform theological discourse on the basis of religious practices, religious experience, and the church’s practice of multiple ministries in the world. Similar to practical theoreticians in Emory’s other professional schools, the faculty who focus on practices often have less access to research funding, fewer venues for publication, and more complex standards of peer evaluation. Their learning and competencies are nevertheless essential for the school to carry out its educational mission.

Within theological education, Candler is distinctive because the entire faculty participate in professional ministerial formation through the program of contextual
education. The effective participation of an individual faculty member in this program is an important way of helping Candler fulfill its mission. The faculty have committed themselves to contextual education as a way to embody Candler’s engagement with both the university and the church. While substantially improving the theological education of ministers, this commitment can also significantly reduce the time and energy that an individual faculty member, especially one involved in the Ph.D. program, has for other teaching and research. Candler considers, however, that its responsibilities require its faculty to engage the life of the church and the larger culture, to play a role in public discourse, and to represent a theological perspective in issues of public concern.

Within the context of their common endeavor, individual faculty members are inevitably and legitimately drawn more toward engagement with the University or more toward engagement with the church. Fair and responsible review of Candler’s faculty demands clear identification of the kind of scholarship done by each faculty person and its contribution to the complex ecology of learning and teaching in this school of theology.

III. Criteria

Each faculty member is expected to embody the standards of teaching, research, and service outlined below and to encourage and support the formation of persons who will exercise leadership in the church.

1. Teaching.

   A. Tenure requires a positive assessment of the candidate’s capacity to teach effectively. The assessment includes classroom teaching, whether at the master’s or the doctor’s level. It also includes teaching that occurs in directed studies or other tutorial settings and in the direction of theses, projects, and dissertations. Because of the importance of contextual learning at Candler, the ability to teach effectively in the contextual education program is part of the evaluation. To that end, a teaching portfolio, required from each candidate for tenure and promotion, should include a brief discussion of the candidate’s aims and teaching methods in the contextual courses as well as in other teaching contexts.

   B. The review should assess teaching in the light of several criteria: (1) the ability to demonstrate thoughtful reflection and self-awareness about teaching, as evidenced by the statement of the candidate’s philosophy of teaching and the description of teaching methods and course design in the teaching portfolio; (2) seriousness of preparation for classes, as evidenced in syllabi and course handouts; (3) a concern for the learning of students, as evidenced, for instance, by examples of typical written feedback on student work and by a history of willingness to meet individually with students; (4) and the ability to engage students with the subject matter, as evidenced by statistical and critical summaries of student evaluation forms and by letters solicited from students by the tenure committees. Other evidence might include teaching grants, participation in teaching workshops, and teaching awards.
C. In addition to student evaluation forms and letters submitted by students, the review committee considers the teaching portfolio prepared by the candidate, assessment by co-teachers in jointly-taught courses, and reports from two faculty members with first-hand knowledge of the candidate’s teaching in either the master’s or the doctoral programs or both. As part of the tenure review, the School asks pre-tenured faculty to plan two class sessions during their first six years of teaching to which they will invite a senior colleague as observer and consultant. The senior colleague will be asked to write a description of the class (about two single-spaced pages), with attention to the style of lecturing or discussion, the interaction between teacher and students, the material being taught, the syllabus, the reading, the class requirements, and the flow of the class session. One purpose of the exercise is to facilitate a discussion between colleagues about teaching, but the two descriptions will also form part of the candidate’s teaching portfolio. The candidate is free to add a written commentary on the descriptions as an additional part of the portfolio.

Candler faculty are expected to administer formal anonymous course evaluations in two courses a year and to send them to the office of the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. The teaching portfolio should contain materials that convey the substance of those evaluations.

2. Research.

A. The faculty are expected to engage in a continuing pattern of scholarly reflection, research, and writing. In assessing this scholarship, the relevant committees and deans place a premium on work that reflects originality in its conception and makes fresh contributions that help advance a field of study.

B. Ordinarily, the expectation is for articles or books singly written. In some instances, leadership in a collaborative research and writing project in which the candidate is the primary author can help meet this expectation. The review will also assess other collaborative scholarship, editorial work, translations with critical introductions, and original composition, whether musical, poetic, dramatic, or artistic. An appendix describes the criteria for faculty in music.

C. Primary consideration is given in the tenure review to evidence that faculty members will continue scholarly work of high quality. This evidence should include published scholarship that has received rigorous peer review. If the earliest published work is a form of the dissertation, the expectation is that the candidate would also present further published work, whether building on the dissertation or taking new directions, that continues or exceeds the dissertation's level of scholarly achievement. In any case, the school expects evidence that points toward a research agenda and a career of scholarship. All work submitted as evidence for research should be in a form that can be evaluated by reviewers able to comment on its potential contribution to knowledge and insight in the field.
D. The work to be reviewed should include evidence of serious engagement with primary data, knowledge of the methodological issues in the discipline, conceptual depth, the orderly organization of thought, and the capacity to present the results of one’s scholarship with clarity and imagination. Writing that primarily presents, applies, or popularizes the original research of other scholars does not meet these criteria unless it is an exceptional work of critique or synthesis recognized by experts in the field as a highly significant if not seminal contribution to a discipline. Within the pre-tenured period, it is reasonable to expect publication of at least a full-length original book or a series of articles of exceptional merit in highly regarded refereed journals. The number of publications, however, is not as important as the quality.

Work presented to professional societies for public scholarly evaluation can be considered in the tenure review, though it should be part of a larger research record that includes publication. Candidates should be aware that for purposes of tenure and promotion a book published by a press with high standards for acceptance of manuscripts will usually carry greater weight than books issued by publishers with less rigorous standards. A refereed article in a top-rated journal will normally be given more serious consideration than an invited article in a festschrift or house journal. In every case, however, the quality of the writing and research is the primary consideration.

Books and articles directed to a broader audience and designed to deepen the insight of the general reader, including books written for the church, will also merit consideration as evidence of the candidate’s commitment to a career of productive scholarship if they present theological learning with originality, imagination, and insight.

E. Promotion to full rank requires a continuing pattern of productivity manifest in further published writings that make the faculty member’s work available to a broader community of scholars for evaluation. The expectation is that such publication would have a discernible influence on the advancement of a discipline. Such influence can be measured by citations, reviews, public scholarly discussion of the work, and evaluative statements in the letters of the reviewers. The minimal expectation is another full-length original work or its equivalent in articles.


A. The faculty and administrative staff must undertake many collegial and administrative responsibilities within Candler and Emory University and provide a variety of forms of leadership within the church. Tenure and promotion decisions inevitably require judgments about the willingness and competence with which the candidate meets the criterion of service.

B. Since the work of administering the school is done through a structure of standing and special committees, high-quality participation and leadership in these committees is the most common means through which faculty provide service to the seminary, the Graduate Division of Religion, and the University. This is the one form of service in which conscientious involvement is expected of every member of the faculty.
In addition, the school recognizes the value of faculty involvement in community events, especially in the activities conducted through the Office of Student Programming.

C. Service to the church can be an opportunity for integrating theology and practice as well as a means of furthering the mission of the school. It can include involvement at the local, regional, conference, national, and international levels; participation in ecumenical activities and organizations; service as consultant, writer, or speaker to boards and agencies; and membership on board and agency committees. It can also include teaching and preaching in congregations, pastors’ schools, continuing education events, lay institutes, conferences, colleges, and similar settings.

D. Contributions to other parts of the university also help to meet the criterion of service. These contributions can include teaching (in courses either singly or jointly taught), participation on dissertation and examination committees, joint membership in other departments, work on search committees in other schools, and involvement in faculty governance at the university level.

E. Service to the scholarly guilds and to other organizations that promote scholarship or learning within a discipline merit consideration in tenure decisions. This service can include, for instance, membership on committees, organization of sessions, and the reading of papers and responses to papers.

F. Public service outside the university is also considered. Such forms of service can include involvement in shaping public policy and community action that reflect values integral to the mission of the school.