

Best Practices for Constructing and Maintaining a High-Quality Working Personnel Action File

The Working Personnel Action File (WPAF) is a critically important dossier because it will be at the core of every review that you have at Cal Poly, from periodic reviews to retention reviews to promotion and/or tenure reviews to post-tenure reviews. Consequently, it is important that you invest the necessary time to ensure that your WPAF provides a clear and succinct record of your professional goals, plan for achieving those goals, and achievements in teaching, research/scholarship/creative activity (hereafter referred to as scholarship), and service. Instead of a repository for everything remotely relevant, the WPAF is a streamlined, well-structured and connected dossier that makes a clear case for your achievements during the period of review. First year faculty, please note that because of review cycle dates, you are asked to submit your initial WPAF after just a little over one quarter at Cal Poly. We are aware that this first WPAF may be much lighter due to such a short period of evaluation, but this provides an excellent opportunity to develop a proper and informative organizations to set the stage for future reviews.

Through the oversight and coordination of the CLA Evaluations Personnel Analyst, the College of Liberal Arts (CLA) has developed a sophisticated and well-run review process, including a uniform organizational structure for the WPAF and some guidelines for what to include in each section. This is provided in Appendix A1 in the CLA Policies and Procedures document.

The purpose of this best practices document is to go beyond the appendix by providing guidance on developing an excellent WPAF. These suggestions result from years of reviewing WPAFs in the Dean's Office and by department chairs. We hope that you find the recommendations beneficial. Please also be careful to consult department policy and best practice documents. Any questions that you have can first be directed to department chairs or PRC chairs and then escalated to the college if necessary.

Types of Reviews and Periods of Review

Probationary faculty are reviewed every year and, from the candidate's perspective, the reviews will feel the same each year. Probationary faculty can check the end of their offer letter for the details of their review schedule; the offer letter is also in the Personnel Action File (PAF) if a faculty member has misplaced their copy. For each year, the review is labeled either a periodic review or a performance evaluation for retention until the mandatory performance evaluation for promotion and tenure review.

A periodic review is performed solely for the purpose of feedback to the probationary faculty member, and the review stops at the level of the Dean. A retention evaluation informs the decision of whether or not to offer the probationary faculty member a new two-year contract, and this review stops at the level of the Provost. The period of review for a periodic review is the previous academic year. The period of review for the initial performance evaluation for retention is the time since the start of employment. For the second performance evaluation for retention, the period of review is the time since the previous evaluation (generally the previous two years). The period of review for tenure and/or first promotion evaluation is the time since the beginning of employment at Cal Poly. Unless a faculty member received time on the tenure clock based on past experience at the time of hire, this review occurs during the sixth year at Cal Poly, so the period of review would be the previous five years.

Faculty who are tenured have periodic reviews every five years, and the period of review is the previous five years. The exception is if they are having a performance evaluation for promotion to full professor, with the period of review being the time since the last promotion. This performance evaluation resets

the clock for post-tenure reviews every five years.

1. Index

The best WPAFs are extremely well organized with clear connections across subsections of each major section. Thus, the optimal strategy is to first lay out an outline of your WPAF with a draft index that lists what you believe to be the *relevant and useful* subsections within each major section. As you actually begin to construct your WPAF, you may see a need to change the organization, making a note of that in your draft index. Once you complete your WPAF, return to and finalize the index, making sure that it is accurate and adequately detailed to enable a reconstruction of your WPAF, if necessary. Remember that in Interfolio two documents may be combined into one pdf, depending on the way in which you are organizing your dossier. Denoting each document in your index would still be helpful. The final index will be placed as a permanent record in your Personal Action File (PAF) at the conclusion of the review cycle.

2. Curriculum Vitae (CV)

The second section is your current CV, with achievements and service contributions during the *current period of review*, as defined above, highlighted in yellow. The CV also becomes a permanent record in your PAF at the conclusion of the review cycle.

This would seem to be a simple and straightforward task, but we see CVs in a variety of formats and structures. This, to some degree, just represents disciplinary differences and it is manageable during the review process. What is more difficult, however, is that sometimes achievements/contributions are inaccurately recorded within sections of the CV. For example, a CV may have a heading of “Refereed Publications” and then list work products that clearly are not refereed publications. Somewhat similarly, faculty will sometimes use major categories that are too broad, making it difficult to sort through and assess the merits of each item listed. Staying with examples in professional development achievements for the moment, a faculty member might have a major category titled “Publications, Presentations, and Contributions to Popular Press,” with a double-digit listing of entries that includes very few refereed publications, perhaps even none. The same issue could occur in a major category titled “Awards, Acknowledgments, and Public Recognition” that includes multiple listings that are all popular press commentary, with nothing rising to the level of an award. In addition to making the evaluation process more difficult for reviewers, this approach may unintentionally diminish assessment of your work.

A fairly typical format for a CV would begin with a section on education, followed by a section on professional or academic employment. The order of subsequent sections may vary, but typically includes sections on peer-reviewed publications (sometimes broken down by books, book chapters, and journal articles), other publications (e.g., technical reports, encyclopedia entries, book reviews, trade articles, popular press articles, etc. – depending on discipline), invited presentations, refereed conference presentations, grants and fellowships (applications and receipt of award), teaching (typically listing courses taught), awards and honors, and service (usually subdivided by service to the department, college, university, discipline, and/or community). In the visual arts, the same general structure would work, but language like “juried exhibitions” would replace “peer-reviewed publications” and often be broken down by solo exhibitions and group exhibitions, etc. Similar extrapolations can be made for other distinctive disciplines.

3. Professional Development Plan

The professional development plan is your blueprint for a successful career that, if followed, will carry you through the ranks of the academy, from assistant professor to associate professor with tenure and on to the rank of professor. The optimal plan goes forward five years from the current date and outlines the strategies and sub-goals that will lead to excellence in teaching, a record of good service/citizenship within the university, and a level of scholarly productivity that easily exceeds departmental and college thresholds for the next rank or continues a record of scholarly success for faculty already at the rank of professor. As earlier years drop off the plan, those goals that were achieved will show up in the achievement sections of your WPAF (6, 7, and 8 below). Goals that were not achieved are carried forward in the plan to a new future year or are revised or abandoned. This is also true for promotion and/or tenure reviews; a plan for the next five years should be included. The professional development plan is meant to provide flexible structure and takes into account new pedagogical and/or research interests and opportunities.

Professional development plans should be ambitious by aiming well above minimum criteria, yet be realistic. The plan should also be appropriately detailed and address development on all three major dimensions, teaching, scholarship, and service so that progress and currency with the discipline can be assessed. Given our emphasis on increasing diversity and inclusion within the college and university, we invite you, as a best practice, to consider how you might support this effort in the future through your teaching, service, and/or scholarship. One way in which you could do this would be to use this as a place where you could locate a diversity statement to detail the ways in which you incorporate diversity and inclusion in your teaching, scholarship, and/or service. As with the index and CV, the professional development plan becomes part of the PAF at the end of the review cycle.

4. Narrative

Although the narrative is optional, this is an opportunity to introduce the reviewer to your career trajectory, including the relationships between your teaching, scholarship, and service, while integrating information from the evidence categories. This section also can be used to provide context for your achievements and your challenges. For example, some research points to somewhat lower instructor evaluations in courses that students find particularly difficult (e.g., statistics and research methods) or in courses that address topics that students find personally challenging (e.g., privilege and power, gender, race, etc.). If you believe that your evaluations speak to issues other than your actual performance, this is a place to note that. You may also discuss these issues with your department chair when putting together your materials.

For promotion and/or tenure reviews, use this section to also detail how you believe you have met or exceed criteria for promotion and/or tenure. Of course, this should be linked to and supported by your professional development plan and your record of achievement in teaching, scholarship/research/creative activities, and service.

5. Summary of Courses Taught

This summary will be provided to you by the Dean's Office for your review and verification of the summary's accuracy. You will then include it in your WPAF.

Categories for Evidence of Achievement

There are three categories for evidence of achievement: Teaching Performance, Professional Growth and Achievement, and Service to the University, Profession, and Community. Each piece of evidence

should be placed only once in the WPAF within the category of greatest relevance. Achievements that have relevance to categories beyond the one in which the documentation is placed can be discussed in the narrative to highlight the link between categories.

6. Teaching Performance

This is the first of the three sections in which you are asked to provide ample evidence on which to base an assessment of performance. As directed by the CLA Policies and Procedures document, evaluators will “*consider such factors as the faculty member's competence in the discipline, ability to communicate ideas effectively, versatility and appropriateness of teaching techniques, organization of courses, relevance of instruction to course objectives, methods of evaluating student achievement, relationship with students in class, effectiveness of student advising, and other factors relating to performance as an instructor.*” The evidence that is considered includes samples of course materials, including syllabi, quizzes, exams, grading rubrics, lecture materials, examples of Learn-by-Doing activities and assignments; and samples of graded papers, assignments, and exams, representing a range of grades assigned. Thus, it is important that all of these materials are in your WPAF and easy to locate. Names on samples of student work should be redacted to keep students’ identities anonymous.

Note. *Please organize all materials by course. Within each course, typically documents and exemplars are only provided for the most recent offering of the course during the current period of review. The exception might be when you want to highlight improvements in syllabi, rubrics, etc. for the most recent offering of a course by contrasting with samples from the previous offering.*

As a best practice, we invite you to also provide information on your use of inclusive teaching methods and/or integration of diversity into courses, as appropriate (e.g., contributions to the discipline by those from underrepresented groups or discussions of historical and/or contemporary diversity/inclusion issues from the disciplinary perspective of the course), as well as your completion of any diversity and inclusion trainings or workshops to improve the quality of your teaching. Examples of such experiences could include CTLT programs (e.g., TIDE, accessible document design, etc.), book circles devoted to teaching with attention to diversity, and/or inclusion, or creation of new courses or special topics related to these domains. This information will enable us to better chronicle work being done in the college and assess college-wide progress in the areas of diversity and inclusion and teaching excellence.

7. Professional Growth and Achievement in Teaching, Scholarship/Research/Creative Activity, and Service

This is the section in which you provide evidence of your research, scholarly, and/or artistic achievements. While the exact nature of professional achievements will vary somewhat across disciplines, in all cases there must be scholarly/creative projects that have been peer reviewed and distributed/exhibited/performed through appropriate professional channels. For traditional publications, this means that they appear in well-respected, rigorously peer-reviewed journals, per the college document. For books and book chapters, a comparable level of peer review is expected, and the book should be distributed by a reputable publisher. For exhibitions or performances, this generally means that they are beyond the local and at least occur in regional settings that are clearly juried. Alternatively, in the case of performances, if they are local, then there should be a documented vetting process that leads to a reputable award of at least regional stature. Finally, in the visual and performing arts, competitively earned residencies and fellowships based on one’s work provide additional confidence that the work was of high quality and subjected to peer review.

In all cases, the onus is on the candidate to document the peer-review process and the status of the journal, publisher, venue, and/or award in instances in which this is not self-evident.

A special note about grants is warranted. Faculty are encouraged to seek funding to support their research, scholarship, and/or creative activity because those funds often enable the faculty member to pursue projects more thoroughly or to tackle more ambitious projects. Although grant activity valued and examined as part of research achievements, like conference and invited presentations, a funded grant proposal does not constitute the equivalent of an article in a well-respected, rigorously peer-reviewed journal. In part, this is because a grant proposal is proposed rather than actual new research, scholarship, and/or creative activity.

Only work already “in press,” in print, exhibited, or performed should be listed as achievements in this category. For all such listings, provide a copy of the publication and a copy of the acceptance letter or, alternatively for exhibitions or performances, provide comparable documentation, which would usually include a copy of the program and pictures of the exhibit and/or recordings of the performance. In instances in which there are one or more co-authors, co-creators, or co-performers, list all and briefly note what your role was in each co-authored or co-produced work product. Similarly, for refereed conference presentations or invited presentations that have been completed, please document the nature of the presentation (keynote, invited, refereed, poster session, roundtable, workshop, etc.) and provide a photo copy of the front page of the program and the page(s) with your presentation(s). We do NOT need the entire conference brochure.

Note. *Evidence of achievement in research, scholarship, and/or creative activity is generally provided only for the current period of review.*

Presented separately in a way to avoid confusion with what has already been achieved, please also report work under review and in progress so that an assessment of your pipeline can be made. As with other sections, we invite you, as a best practice, to note professional achievements relevant to diversity and inclusion. This will enable us to be aware of what our faculty are doing in these areas and ensure that their work is known to the rest of the college and campus.

8. Service to the University, Profession, and Community

In the spirit of shared governance and responsibility, it is essential that all faculty be engaged in institutional service at the department, college, and/or university levels, and that they be on campus enough to effectively participate in committee assignments, department discussions, and decision-making. Although we have reduced service expectations for assistant professors, primarily limited to within the department, it is important for all faculty to participate in the life of the university throughout their career at Cal Poly. Per the CLA Policy and Procedures document, evaluators assessing service contributions will “*consider such factors as the faculty member's participation in academic advisement; placement follow-up; co-curricular activities; diversity-related activities; department, college and university committees; Academic Senate and its committees; individual assignments; systemwide assignments; and service in community affairs directly related to the faculty member's teaching area, as distinguished from those contributions to more generalized community activities.*”

Consequently, it is essential that you provide appropriate documentation of the quantity and quality of your service contributions to the department, college, university, profession, and/or community. Generally, this is done by listing your committee assignments, including your role on the committee

(member, co-chair, chair), and other service contributions followed by documentation, when available, of the nature and quality of your contributions. If you chaired a committee or organization, a brief summary of activities and achievements by the group is valued.

Another type of institutional service is the commitment of your time to participation in workshops or other programs that will enable you to be a more effective university citizen. Examples of such work include things like completing UndocuAlly trainings, participating in university panels and presentations, guest lecturing in classes, becoming a BEACoN mentor (research or professional), or advising a club or organization.

Service to the community and/or profession are also valued and should be documented in similar ways.

Diversity related service is already highlighted in the first paragraph of this section, but we would still appreciate you calling specific attention to this work in your WPAF, again so that we can monitor and make others aware of the work being done in the CLA.

Note. *As with the previous categories, documentation of service contributions is typically limited to those occurring during the current period of review.*