

Research Faculty Track Reappointment and Promotion Guidelines

Approved by VUSE Faculty September 4, 2025

B. Research Titles

At Vanderbilt University, the faculty members holding Research titles are expected to conduct research, publish scholarly work, help generate external funding to support research programs, and may assist in the supervision of students and trainees. Research appointments are typically supported by external funds, and such appointments are contingent upon the availability of the external funds.

Appointments as Research Faculty require a vote of all tenured/tenure-track and research faculty within the appropriate department. Those appointed at rank above Assistant Professor also require a vote by the tenured and research faculty of the same and higher ranks within the appropriate department. The Chair will report the faculty vote to the Dean and make a recommendation for appointment. After reviewing the dossier and the department recommendation, the Dean will determine whether to recommend an appointment to the Provost. All Research Faculty appointments require support and approval of both the Dean and the Provost (or their designees). Initial appointments may be for a term between one and three years and will include a minimum of one year of guaranteed financial support. Continuation of support beyond the first year, as well as any reappointment, will be contingent upon funding availability and satisfactory performance. Research Faculty, like all other faculty, will undergo annual reviews by the Department Chair. The Department Chair will seek feedback from the Research Faculty's sponsor (if there is one) and will consider it when available for their reviews.

The promotion plan for the Research Faculty track consists of two key milestones: promotion to the rank of Research Associate Professor and promotion to the rank of full Research Professor.

Research Faculty will follow the promotion guidelines as detailed below. Within 6 years (typically two three-year terms) in the rank, a Research Assistant Professor will be expected to be considered for promotion to Research Associate Professor. Similarly, a Research Associate Professor will be expected to be considered for promotion to Research Professor within 6 years in the rank of Research Associate Professor. Research faculty can be hired at any rank based on their experience, and their timeline for promotion can vary on a case-by-case basis. In exceptional cases, their next contract renewal can be initiated after a year of the previous renewal. Additionally, contract renewals are not necessarily tied to promotions. Any variations from the typical guidelines must be transparently discussed between the Department Chair and the candidate.

Offer of Initial Research Appointments

The initial appointment for a Research Assistant, Associate, or Full Professor will follow the process described below and may be for up to a three-year term. The offer for a Research Associate or Full Professor will be for up to a three-year term. Continuation of support beyond the first year, as well as any reappointment, will be contingent upon funding availability and satisfactory performance. The process begins with the candidate providing a dossier in collaboration with the Department Chair. This dossier should include the following elements:

1. **Research Statement:** A research statement written by the candidate in which research activities and contributions to the field are documented
2. **Curriculum Vitae:** An up-to-date curriculum vitae prepared in the format used for tenure-track dossiers, including full details on grant submissions, awards, scholarly work, and areas of professional activity.
3. **Endorsement Letter:** An endorsement letter written by the Chair of their Department or a sponsoring faculty member.

The Department Chair will arrange a faculty meeting consisting of the department's tenured/tenure-track and research faculty who will then vote on the offer. The Chair will report the faculty vote to the Dean and make a recommendation for or against the initial appointment. The Dean will make a decision after reviewing the dossier and the Chair's recommendation, and will then seek approval from the Provost or the Provost's designee.

Renewal of Research Assistant Professor

Research Assistant Professors are expected to operate in an independent manner, capable of developing, supporting, and initiating research efforts. Examples of the activities/metrics that provide support for renewal include*:

- Assists in writing and preparing grant proposals
- Mentors and trains students and post-docs
- Authors or co-authors research articles
- Presents posters or talks at professional conferences
- Teaches guest lectures in courses
- Assists in supporting, developing, and operating of research infrastructure and facilities
- Participates in departmental activities (seminars, faculty meetings, retreats)
- Reviews manuscripts for scientific journals and conferences
- Provides other professional services such as conference organization, chairing sessions in conferences, leading technical discussion groups

**These are examples, not an exhaustive list. Each faculty member is not expected to engage in all the bulleted activities.*

The renewal of the Research Assistant Professor will follow the process described below and will be for up to a three-year term. Renewal requests should be submitted to the Dean's office at least 2 months prior to the contract's end date for single-year reappointments or 16 months prior to the contract's end date for multi-year reappointments. Renewals for multi-year terms must be finalized 13 months prior to the contract's end date.

The process begins with the candidate preparing an up-to-date dossier in collaboration with the Department Chair or with a faculty mentor. This dossier should include the following elements:

1. **Research Statement:** A research statement written by the candidate in which research activities and contributions to the field are documented
2. **Curriculum Vitae:** An up-to-date curriculum vitae prepared in the format used for tenure-track dossiers, including full details on grant submissions, awards, scholarly work, and areas of professional activity.

3. **Endorsement Letter:** An endorsement letter written by the Chair of their Department or a sponsoring faculty member.

The Department Chair will arrange a faculty meeting consisting of the department's tenured/tenure-track and research faculty who will then vote on the renewal. The Chair will report the faculty vote to the Dean and make a recommendation for or against the renewal. The Dean will make a decision after reviewing the dossier and the Chair's recommendation, and will then seek approval from the Provost or the Provost's designee.

Promotion to Research Associate Professor

The promotion to Research Associate Professor will follow the same process as the renewal of Research Assistant Professor, including the required materials, with the additional steps described below. The initial appointment as Research Associate Professor will be for a three-year term. Promotion requests should be submitted to the Dean's office at least 2 months prior to the contract's end date for single-year reappointments or 16 months prior to the contract's end date for multi-year appointments. Promotions for multi-year terms must be finalized 13 months prior to the contract's end date.

The Department Chair will establish a departmental Ad Hoc committee to evaluate the candidate's dossier after obtaining approval from the Dean of the School of Engineering. The Ad Hoc committee will comprise a minimum of three faculty members of higher ranks from the tenured and research faculty members. At least one of the committee members is expected to be a Research Associate Professor or Research Full Professor whenever possible. The Ad Hoc committee can include faculty from other departments or other university centers with the approval of the Dean. This committee will review the dossier and provide their evaluation at a faculty meeting to the department's tenured and research faculty holding the rank of Associate Professor or Professor, who will then vote on the promotion. The Chair will report the faculty vote to the Dean and make a recommendation for or against the promotion. The Dean will make a decision after reviewing the dossier and the Chair's recommendation, and will then seek approval from the Provost or the Provost's designee.

Renewal of Research Associate Professor

Research Associate Professors are expected to work independently or in collaboration with members of the Vanderbilt research community, with the goal of developing a national or international reputation in their area of research focus. Example activities/ metrics for this position may include all those for Research Assistant Professor plus*:

- Writes independent grants and manuscripts with input from the PI or the Core Director
- Serves on student dissertation and thesis committees
- Serves as a co-mentor of graduate students and postdoctoral fellows
- Reviews grant applications, or participates on grant review panels
- Develops new research areas, or significantly enhances an established research program
- Develops or adopts new research methodologies and resources
- Leads course sections and/or develops educational tools
- Gives invited lectures at conferences and other institutions
- Chairs sessions at scientific conferences and organizes technical conferences

- Contributes to patents on new technologies
- Independently directs and oversees a Core Facility, organizes faculty user committees, and educates users

**These are examples, not an exhaustive list. Each faculty member is not expected to engage in all the bulleted activities.*

The renewal of the Research Associate Professor will follow the same process as the renewal of Research Assistant Professor, including the required materials. They can be renewed for up to one three-year term at a time. In this case, only the department's tenured and research faculty holding the rank of Full and Associate Professor will vote on the renewal.

Promotion to Research Professor

The promotion to Research Professor will follow the same process as a renewal of Research Associate Professor, including the required materials, with the additions described below. The initial appointment as a Research Professor will be for a three-year term. The candidate will prepare an up-to-date dossier in collaboration with the Department Chair or a faculty mentor. This dossier should be similar in content to the one required for promotion to Research Associate Professor, but with a higher level of accomplishment reflected in the candidate's achievements. Additionally, the dossier for promotion to Research Professor will require three letters of recommendation from external researchers, who the Department Chair will select from a list provided by the candidate and faculty holding the rank of Professor in the department.

The Ad Hoc committee evaluating the dossier will comprise a minimum of three full Professors from tenured and research track, with a preference for at least one being a full Research Professor. This committee will review the dossier and provide their evaluation to the department's tenured and research faculty holding the rank of Professor, who will then vote on the promotion.

The Department Chair will report the faculty vote to the Dean and make a recommendation. The Dean will make a decision after reviewing the dossier and the Chair's recommendation, and will then seek approval from the Provost or the Provost's designee.

Renewal of Research Professor

Research professors are expected to function independently, take on leadership roles in their professional community, and develop a national and international reputation in their area of research focus. Example activities/metrics for this position may include all those mentioned for Research Associate Professor plus*:

- Becomes the PI of funded grant applications and runs own research program
- Becomes the senior and/or corresponding author on publications
- Serves on grant review panels
- Wins national and international awards in their field
- Serves as the Scientific Director of Core Facility
- Serves on Ad Hoc committees reviewing Research Assistant and Associate Professors for promotion
- Makes technology development decisions, negotiates and sets contracts with vendors
- Holds leadership roles in professional services

**These are examples, not an exhaustive list. Each faculty member is not expected to engage in all the bulleted activities.*

The renewal of the Research Professor will follow the same process as the renewal of the Research Associate Professor, including the required materials, and can be for terms up to three years. Note that renewal of the Research Professor will not require external letters and only department's tenured and research faculty holding the rank of Professor will vote on the renewal.

-----**Previous version of VUSE Policy**-----

Candidates for promotion to the rank of Research Associate Professor will prepare a dossier with the Chair of their Department or a sponsoring faculty member. This dossier will document the impact the candidate has on his/her field of activity. It will contain the following

1. A research statement written by the candidate in which contributions to the field are documented,
2. A complete curriculum vitae prepared in the format used for tenure-track dossiers, including full details on research proposals, awards, and support,
3. A letter of endorsement written by the Chair of their Department or a sponsoring faculty member.

The dossier will be presented by the Chair to the tenured department faculty holding the title of Associate Professor or Professor who will vote on it. The Chair will report the vote of the faculty to the Dean and will make a recommendation for promotion. The Dean will review the dossier and make the final decision.

Candidates for promotion to the rank of Research Professor will prepare a dossier with the Chair of their Department or a sponsoring faculty member. This dossier will be similar to the dossier required for promotion to the rank of Research Associate Professor, except that it will also include a minimum of three letters of recommendation written by prominent members in the candidate's area of expertise, at least two of whom are affiliated with academic institutions. Reviewers will be selected by the Chair or the sponsoring faculty member in consultation with the candidate. Letters will be solicited by the Chair.

Once it is assembled, the dossier will be presented by the Chair to the tenured department faculty holding the title of Professor who will vote on it. The chair will report the vote of the faculty to the Dean and will make a recommendation for promotion. The Dean will review the dossier and make the final decision.