Rules for Tenure Evaluations at ISTA

Approved by the Executive Committee on October 16, 2024

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1. Preamble

These Rules describe the procedures for tenure evaluations and the promotion from Assistant Professor to Professor at ISTA. They apply to all Assistant Professors whose employment contract was signed after December 31, 2019 and to all other Assistant Professors who voluntarily agree to be evaluated under these new rules. Any significant changes to these Rules will require approval by the Executive Committee of ISTA.

2. Tenure Track

The tenure timeline starts with the arrival of the Assistant Professor on campus for full-time employment, unless the starting date is defined otherwise due to specific transition agreements.

The candidate, after consulting with the Area Chair, decides upon initiating the tenure evaluation process during the fifth year and the process must usually be initiated no later than five years after the start of a tenure-track employment.

In special cases of extraordinary success of an Assistant Professor, the candidate may submit a request to the Area Chair to start the tenure evaluation process earlier than during the fifth year.

In special cases of significant interruptions or delays in the research of the Assistant Professor due to circumstances beyond their control (e.g., delays with ISTA infrastructure, serious illnesses or serious accidents of the candidate or their immediate family, the President, upon recommendation by the Area Chair, may decide to pause the tenure timeline and postpone the start of the tenure evaluation process beyond the fifth year after the start of the tenure-track employment contract. In case of childbirth by the Assistant Professor, an automatic pause of the tenure timeline of one year is granted, unless the Assistant Professor requests otherwise. In case of adoption, or childbirth by the partner of an Assistant Professor, at the request of the Assistant Professor, the tenure timeline may be paused by a period defined with the Area Chair, corresponding to the period of parental leave taken, of up to one year per child and approved by the President.

Whenever a delay in the tenure evaluation process is approved, the employment contract of the Assistant Professor is extended accordingly.

Whenever the contract length will be longer than seven years, the extension must be reported to the Executive Committee by the President; whenever the contract length will be longer than eight years, the extension must be approved by the Executive Committee.

The Assistant Professor presents their research activities to the Institute (“Tenure Talk”) before the candidate initiates the process.

If the Assistant Professor decides not to initiate the process and to leave the Institute before or at the end of their employment contract, then no tenure evaluation will be performed. An Assistant Professor may go through a tenure evaluation only once.

3. Tenure Evaluation Criteria

Throughout the tenure evaluation process, the following evaluation criteria may apply:

- Significant scientific contributions, international standing of the candidate in their scientific community; acquisition of research funds;
- Professional development since joining ISTA; independence from previous advisors;
- Potential for future research contributions;
- Professional behavior and good track record as teacher, supervisor, mentor and colleague;
- Contributions to ISTA, to the scientific community and to society at large e.g. interdisciplinary research, educational and outreach activities, technology transfer, and/or other activities.

4. The Formation of an Ad-hoc Committee

For every tenure case an Ad-hoc Committee will be formed. The role of the Ad-hoc Committee is operative (it leads the tenure review process with the support of Academic Affairs) and advisory (it formulates an opinion and makes recommendations but no decisions). The Ad-hoc Committee consists of at least three, preferably four tenured professors (or equivalent): at least two are close to the research of the candidate and one or two may be further away. The Chair of the Ad-hoc Committee and one member must be internal; the other member(s) is/are external. The members of the Ad-hoc Committee may or may not be members of the Professorial Committee, however, if possible, an overlap of these two functions should be avoided. The President, the Executive Vice-President and the Area Chairs cannot serve on an Ad-hoc Committee. The Ad-hoc Committee members should not have close professional or private connections to the candidate (e.g. candidate's former PhD and/or postdoc supervisors, co-authors on joint publications, collaborators on current and/or past projects, formal mentors, or any other closely affiliated roles or any other family/civil union/partner relationship). The names of the members of the Ad-hoc Committee shall not be disclosed to the candidate.

The Area Chair and the Chair of the Professorial Committee appoint the Ad-hoc Committee Chair and the internal member of the Ad-hoc Committee. The external member(s) of the Ad-hoc Committee is/are appointed by the Chair of the Professorial Committee in coordination with the already appointed Ad-hoc Committee Chair and the internal Ad-hoc Committee member.

Step 1: Candidate Dossier and Tenure File

Once the candidate has decided to start the tenure evaluation process, the candidate submits the following documents to Academic Affairs, which officially initiates the evaluation process:

a) a Candidate Dossier (see Appendix 1), which is to be checked by Academic Affairs for completeness;

b) a list of three proposed reviewers, each with a brief description of their general qualifications for the evaluation and their relationships to the candidate. The list should consist of active scholars who do not have a close relationship with the candidate. The candidate's former PhD and/or postdoc supervisors, co-authors on joint publications in the last five years, collaborators on current and/or past projects in the last five years, formal mentors, or any other closely affiliated roles or any other family/civil union/partner relationship are excluded from the evaluation;

c) a list of experts to exclude, with brief explanations of why the candidate would prefer that they will NOT be asked for reviews or serve as Ad-hoc Committee members;

d) any other material deemed relevant by the candidate (optional).

After receiving items a-d, Academic Affairs compiles the following material for the Tenure File of the candidate:

e) all official feedback documents from the Area Chair to the Assistant Professor, including documents from annual progress review meetings;

f) the part of topical review reports that specifically evaluate the Assistant Professor and their research group;

g) a brief statement, evaluating the qualitative and quantitative participation of the Assistant Professor in the teaching and supervisory activities of the Institute, by the Dean of the Graduate School, together with a list of all courses (co)taught and a compilation of all teaching evaluations by students;

h) a brief statement evaluating the qualitative and quantitative participation of the Assistant Professor in internal service activities of the Institute and commenting on their professional behavior, by the President, together with a list of these internal service functions held by the Assistant Professor;

i) a list of all successful grant applications including internal grant applications by the Assistant Professor (with titles, dates, amounts, and partner PIs);

j) a list of all science-education and science-outreach activities of ISTA with substantial contributions by the Assistant Professor;

k) a list of all technology transfer activities by the Assistant Professor;

l) a list of all reported external activities by the Assistant Professor;

m) any other relevant material as requested by the Area Chair, the Ad-hoc Committee, and/or the Professorial Committee.

The Tenure File will be provided to the Ad-hoc Committee in Step 2, and to the Professorial Committee in Steps 3 and 5, but only the Candidate Dossier will be sent to external reviewers in Step 4.

Step 2: Suggestion of Reviewers by the Ad-hoc Committee

The first task of the Ad-hoc Committee is to carefully review the Tenure File, write a summary of the case with regard to research, supervision, mentoring, teaching, internal services, and external activities, and propose a list of reviewers that could be asked for letters. The list of reviewers must be balanced according to experience, country of scientific institution, gender, connection to the candidate, and area of expertise: it should include both scientists whose expertise is closely related to the research of the candidate and scientists who have a broad overview of the field. The list of reviewers should consist of active scholars, who do not have a close relationship with the candidate, such as the candidate's former PhD and/or postdoc supervisors, co-authors on joint publications in the last five years, collaborators on current and/or past projects in the last five years, formal mentors, or any other closely affiliated roles. All reviewers must be tenured professors (or equivalent). If the Tenure File raises specific issues, these should be reflected by the choice of reviewers and specific questions to reviewers might be added. The list of reviewers must contain more names than the minimum number of required letters, which is nine overall, including at least six reviewers who were not proposed by the candidate. In addition, the list of reviewers must include the three reviewers provided by the candidate. As mentioned under Step 1(c), the Ad-Hoc Committee also receives the list of experts who should be excluded from the process, as suggested by the candidate.

If the Ad-hoc Committee needs clarification from the candidate regarding any aspects of their materials, Academic Affairs can send a written request to the candidate on behalf of the Ad-hoc Committee. The candidate should then provide written answers back to Academic Affairs by a specified date set by the Ad-hoc Committee.

Step 3: First Meeting of the Professorial Committee and Selection of Reviewers

The role of the Professorial Committee is to uphold a uniform tenure standard across all research areas of the Institute.

In case a Professorial Committee member has close professional or private connections to the candidate (e.g. candidate's former PhD and/or postdoc supervisors, co-authors on joint publications, collaborators on current and/or past projects, formal mentors, or any other closely affiliated roles or any other family/civil union/partner relationship) they have to disclose the actual or potential conflict to the Professorial Committee Chair and Vice-Chair. The Chair and Vice-Chair will decide on a case-by-case basis on exclusion from the deliberations of the Professorial Committee taking into account the ISTA Anti-Corruption and Conflict of Interest Guideline.

At the first meeting of the Professorial Committee, the Chair of the Ad-hoc Committee or, in rare cases, a Deputy selected by the Chair presents the candidate and the list of suggested reviewers, including a reserve list, and discusses any specific questions to reviewers suggested by the Ad-hoc Committee. The Professorial Committee is free to add to, remove

from, and/or prioritize names on the reviewer list. The final list of selected reviewers must be balanced according to experience, country of scientific institution, gender, connection to the candidate, and area of expertise: it should include both scientists whose expertise is closely related to the research of the candidate and scientists who have a broad overview of the field. The list must contain more names than the minimum number of required letters, which is six letters from reviewers who were not proposed by the candidate and who do not have any close relationship to the candidate (as defined in Step 1(b)). In addition, the three reviewers provided by the candidate must be contacted. The lists of suggested and chosen reviewers, and the collected letters, must be kept strictly confidential.

Step 4: Collection of Review Letters and Ad-hoc Committee Recommendation(s)

Academic Affairs contacts the chosen reviewers and asks (and reminds) them to send letters to Academic Affairs (see Appendix 2). All reviewers who have accepted to write a letter are provided with the complete Candidate Dossier. All received letters, statements, and other responses by reviewers (such as reasons given for declining a review and/or short comments), including the absence of any responses, must be provided to the Ad-hoc Committee, Professorial Committee, and President together with a summary indicating which reviewers were contacted and answered, and who among them were suggested by the candidate or may not be independent due to collaborations or other reasons.

A reviewer's response should include several sentences assessing the candidate's work and scientific stature in the field in order to count towards the required minimum number of six letters from reviewers who were proposed by the Ad-hoc Committee and/or Professorial Committee and who do not have any close relationship to the candidate (as defined in Step 1(b)). The Chair of the Ad-hoc Committee and the Chair of the Professorial Committee may wait for more than the minimum number of required responses and will decide together when a sufficient number of letters has been received.

Once the required number of letters has been received, the Ad-hoc Committee compiles an evaluation of the case along with a recommendation. In case of non-unanimity, the Ad-hoc Committee may submit either a majority and minority report or separate reports of individual members. These Ad-hoc Committee report(s) are first submitted to the Chair of the Professorial Committee. All letters, reports, and recommendations are then distributed to the President and Professorial Committee one week ahead of its second meeting. Any letters that arrive late (between the distribution of the material for the meeting and the meeting itself) are distributed to the Professorial Committee, the Ad-Hoc Committee, and the President.

Step 5: Second Meeting of the Professorial Committee and Vote

The President may submit a written statement and/or a recommendation to the Professorial Committee before the meeting and/or present a statement and/or a recommendation during the meeting.

The Chair of the Ad-hoc Committee presents the complete case and a recommendation to the Professorial Committee and the President. After a discussion of the case, the President and the Ad-hoc Committee Chair, if that person is not a member of the Professorial Committee, leave the meeting. Following a closed discussion of the case, the Professorial Committee takes an open vote on whether the tenure evaluation process was conducted properly and whether the collected material provides a sufficient basis for a tenure decision or if additional information is required prior to taking a vote.

If more than 25% of the Professorial Committee members present vote that more information is needed, the tenure vote is postponed until such information is obtained. The additional information may be gathered through additional letters or through various other less formal methods, such as e-mail exchanges or phone consultations. In special cases, the Professorial Committee may also decide to invite internal and/or external experts as guests to the Professorial Committee meeting for a discussion.

If no additional information is needed, the tenure vote is held as a secret ballot. For any decision on a promotion, at least 75% of the members must attend the meeting and participate in the vote (not including abstentions). A positive decision requires at least 75% positive votes of the members of the Committee attending the meeting. Abstentions are possible but are not included in the vote count. If the number of abstentions is too high, a quorum will not be reached, invalidating the vote. Then a subsequent meeting of the Professorial Committee on the tenure case will be called by the Chair of the Professorial Committee.

A positive decision proposes approval of the promotion of the candidate from Assistant Professor to Professor. A negative decision does not propose such approval.

Step 6: Consequences of the Tenure Decision

If the President agrees with a positive decision of the Professorial Committee, the candidate is promoted and offered an unlimited contract as Professor of ISTA. If the President agrees with a negative decision of the Professorial Committee, the candidate's contract will end as stated in their employment contract. The candidate may be offered an extension of their Assistant Professor contract of up to maximum 12 months after the decision and will then leave the Institute – in this case no step raise in salary will be given for the extension of the contract.

If the President disagrees with the recommendation of the Professorial Committee, then the President may appeal to the Executive Committee, which makes the final decision after hearing the President, the Chair of the Professorial Committee, and the Chair of the Ad-hoc Committee.

The candidate has no right of appeal.

5. Appendix 1: Candidate Dossier

1) CV

Personal details
Name, website of research group

Education
In (reverse) chronological order after secondary education
- Period, program, university, academic degree obtained
- For doctorate: period, title of thesis, supervisor

Further academic training and employment
In (reverse) chronological order
- Period, name of employer, immediate superior, job description / area of work

Leaves (sabbatical leaves, maternity/paternity leaves, long-term sickness; etc.)
In (reverse) chronological order

Awards and distinctions
In (reverse) chronological order
- year, name of prize, name of awarding organization/institution

Grants
In (reverse) chronological order, approved or active:
funding agency, title of project, co-investigators, period, budget

Mentor(s)
Name and affiliation, period of mentorship, number or frequency of meetings

Mid-term review(s)
Name(s) of mid-term reviewers, date and format

2) Scientific Research

Research overview
(up to 3 pages)

Research accomplishments as Assistant Professor at ISTA
(up to 3 pages)

Statement of future research
(1-2 pages)

Selected publications
Description of and links to up to three “most significant” publications and brief explanation of their significance. Preprints may be included. Usually, at least two about work done at ISTA are recommended; in cases of "accelerated" tenure (3 years or less), at least one publication about work done at ISTA is recommended. (Up to 1 page)

Publication list
List publications according to the following sections (if applicable)**:**
- Original Articles in preparation
- Original Articles submitted to peer-review

- Peer-reviewed Original Articles
- Refereed Conference Proceedings
- Peer-reviewed Review Articles
- Non-peer-reviewed Publications
- Books and Book Chapters
- Other Publications

If applicable, a statement addressing involvement in publications and joint authorship

Intellectual property and technology transfer
Patents, licenses, trademarks, start-ups, technology transfer projects, etc.

Other research output
Software, data sets, blogs, other online material, prototypes, designs, etc.

Scientific talks at conferences / workshops / etc.
In chronological order after joining ISTA

- event, date, location, title

Scientific lectures / courses / etc. at external institutions
In chronological order after joining ISTA

- location, date, title

Other external institutions visited
In chronological order after joining ISTA

- institution, local contact, period of stay

Scientific collaborations inside and outside of ISTA

- institution, local contact, type of cooperation

Past and current visitors at ISTA
Name, type of position, home institution, period of stay, project/title of talk

3) Teaching and Mentoring

Teaching statement
Description of your principles for graduate education and your contribution to the Graduate School, up to 2 pages

Courses taught
In chronological order

- Course, type of course (core, breadth, advanced or service), period and hours taught, co-taught with NN (if applicable), format (homework, exams, etc.), number of students, brief description of the course (textbook etc.)

Planned teaching activities
New or updated courses, contribution to the development of the Graduate School, up to 1 page

(Co-)Supervision of students
Name and status of student, institution, period, project, participation in qualifying exams and thesis defenses;
For students who have graduated: thesis title, new position and affiliation

Other group members

Name, type of position (postdoc, intern, etc.), period, project;
For group members who have left the group: new position and affiliation

Awards, distinctions and grants of group members
Including fellowships

Group members on leave
Maternity/paternity leaves: Name of group member, period of leave
Other leaves: N.N. (details omitted for data protection reasons), period of leave

Membership in exam and thesis committees
Name and status of student, institution, period, supervisor, project (thesis title, if applicable), participation in exams and defenses

Rotation students at ISTA
Name, period

4) Service

Service to the scientific community
Organization of conferences and workshops, editorships, program committees, advisory boards, service in professional associations, major reviewing activities, etc.

Internal service at ISTA
Membership in SSU user groups and other committees, specific responsibilities assigned by the President, etc.

Outreach activities
Media contacts, participation in public events, activities relevant for other areas of society, etc.

Other activities
Efforts to increase interdisciplinary interaction, participation in teacher or lab management training, efforts to promote diversity or equal opportunity, etc.

6. Appendix 2: Template for Letters to Reviewers

Subject: ISTA: Request for tenure review

Dear Professor Z,

We write to ask for your assistance in evaluating NM, who is currently a tenure-track assistant professor at ISTA. NM is being considered for promotion to professor with tenure. The main criterion for promotion is international scientific impact and leadership, at a level comparable to tenured scientists at the top research institutions in the world.
Please note that ISTA has no associate professors, only tenure-track Assistant Professors and tenured Professors. Promotion to professor with tenure at ISTA therefore means promotion to the highest academic rank, and depending on the scientific discipline this step may be considered equivalent to promotion to associate professor (with tenure) or to full professor at institutions which have tenure at both levels.
Please take this special circumstance into consideration when you formulate your recommendation.

[Additional paragraph for candidates, who are evaluated with the fast track option, may be added here.]

We appreciate your candid assessment of NM's research and future promise, in case you have any comments on their service and teaching accomplishments, your assessment would also be appreciated. Please feel free to comment on any aspect you consider as relevant, but your opinion on the following questions would be especially valuable:

1. What is the international standing of the candidate in their specialized field of research (please state the field) and in the wider research area (please state the area)?
2. What are the candidate's most significant scientific contributions? Have they been achieved since the candidate joined ISTA?
3. How has the candidate developed since joining ISTA? Has the candidate's research become independent from previous supervisors and has the candidate built up a successful research group and research program?
4. How would you compare the candidate to the international leaders of the field at a similar career stage currently or in the past? (please name the members and scope of the comparison group)
5. How innovative is the candidate's future research plan and what is the candidate's potential for major research accomplishments in the next 5-10 years?
6. Would you recommend the candidate for a tenured position at one of the worldwide leading research universities? (please name the institutions you consider, including yours)
7. How do you rate the qualifications of the candidate as a teacher, mentor, and supervisor?
8. How do you rate the service contributions of the candidate to the scientific community?
9. Please name 3-5 other independent leading researchers in the candidate's field who would be qualified to review the Candidate's research. (We only use this information to check if we have chosen a pertinent and representative sample of reviewers).

In addition, please indicate how familiar you are with the candidate and their work, and to what extent you have been collaborating with them or are planning to do so.

We will make every effort possible to keep all information you provide confidential. Your response will be made available only to the members of our promotion committee, which is composed, at present, of tenured professors of ISTA and external leading scientists. Your identity will not be revealed to the candidate nor will they receive any excerpts of your letter. Likewise, we would ask you to treat this request and shared information confidentially. Attached please find the candidate's CV and publication list. If you send us a positive response to our request, we will send you the candidate's complete file, including a research statement prepared by the candidate.

We would be very grateful if you could send us your opinion via e-mail to faculty.affairs@ist.ac.at by MM, DD, YYYY. Please confirm the receipt of this request as soon as possible and let us know if you will be able to participate in this evaluation process.

The evaluation of our tenure-track faculty relies significantly on external experts like yourself. We realize that careful reviews take time and we are enormously grateful for your assistance. If you do not have time or do not feel qualified to comment on all aspects mentioned above, we would also be interested in your shorter comments.

Many thanks for your help!

Kind regards,

Martin Hetzer

President

ISTA

(only if requested by the chair of Ad-Hoc Committee)

(NN)

(Professor)

(promotion committee member)