

UCSD School of Biological Sciences
Normal Merit Standards
Ladder Rank Faculty
Revised: Winter Quarter 2026

A careful, holistic and timely assessment of academic personnel performance is a key function of our shared governance that starts with the Department faculty and Department Chair/Vice-Chair. The academic review process is founded upon principles of academic integrity as it defines the crucial moment in which a professional judgment is rendered about the significance of our colleagues' work. The School expects each Department to provide sound, objective, and expert evaluations of all academic review files. Files are expected to be complete, accurate, and in compliance with UC policy and adhere to the following basic requirements and performance standards. Accordingly, faculty are expected to engage in the review process and to be responsive to academic personnel staff and their Department Chair.

Each Department has also established their own merit standards that are complemented by these overarching School-wide standards.

Normal Merit Standards for Ladder Rank Faculty in the Professor Series

Faculty are evaluated on their research, teaching, professional competence and activity, and University and public service. In each domain, the School considers a broad range of scholarly contributions and activities, including contributions to UC San Diego's Principles of Community

Faculty in the School of Biological Sciences are expected to adhere to the highest standards of integrity in teaching, scholarship, and treatment of students, colleagues, staff, and other university community members. Correspondingly, collegiality is taken into consideration in the academic review process, as it is an essential component of teaching, research, and service.

Research

All faculty are expected to conduct research that advances the understanding of fundamental or practical problems in biological sciences. Some may also perform pedagogical research. Our foremost expectation is that research produced by School faculty should be of the highest quality. As well as advancing knowledge, School research should be rigorous, reproducible, and follow established norms of research integrity.

The School emphasizes the quality and long-term significance of published work and its wider impact on the biological sciences and on society via translational efforts, conservation, or increasing public awareness of various scientific issues. Productivity is evaluated based on a combination of the number and type of publications and other outputs, their immediate impact, and potential long-term significance.

Prior to promotion to tenure, Assistant Professors are judged largely on their progress in establishing an active, functioning, and independent research group and on publication of their work in selective peer-reviewed journals. Tenure will be considered when these benchmarks (at least two independent research publications as a corresponding author, see Departmental standards) have been achieved, and a sustainable, independent, positive research trajectory established. The School evaluates the sustainability of the research trajectory by assessing if faculty have sufficient funding and lab personnel to ensure continued productivity; if they have a track record of successful mentorship, given the central importance of research mentees for a productive research program in the biological sciences; and if in-progress research is poised to lead to publications and continued research support during the next review cycle. In progress research manuscripts can play an important role in demonstrating a sustainable research trajectory; these should be listed in Section C and available as preprints, and either submitted or close to submission so reviewers can judge the quality, novelty and impact of the research.

Following tenure, for Associate Professors, the expectation for a normal merit increase is approximately 1-2 research publications per year in selective peer-reviewed journals. Typically, we would expect the candidate to be a corresponding or co-corresponding author on an average of one paper per year. The School emphasizes the quality and impact of publications over their numbers and therefore fewer but more impactful publications will also satisfy expectations. Individual departments have their own publication norms and authorship practices as articulated in their Department Standards. In considering ‘normal standards’, Chairs may refer to the median track record within their department.

Research quality and impact may be established by citations, venue of publication, ability to garner extramural grant support, ability to stimulate subsequent studies, and broader impact on society via translational, conservation, or policy efforts. Some metrics such as citation rates are meaningful only in the longer term and can be strongly correlated with the level of current activity in a research area. Department Chairs are thus responsible for describing the context of the research for each faculty member, and for clearly outlining the significance of the candidate’s contributions to their field. Generally, promotion to Full Professor requires evidence of a national reputation in their field, advancement to Step VI requires evidence of an outstanding national reputation, and advancement to Above Scale requires evidence of a significantly higher level of national and international recognition. Promotion to each of these levels requires sustained and increasing research excellence.

We support UCSD’s ‘culture of collaboration’ and value collaborative and interdisciplinary research outputs, especially where a faculty member’s research focus is on development of new methods, technologies, or instrumentation. Faculty are expected to clearly document their individual contributions to collaborative publications, especially those involving other senior authors, to assist in the evaluation of their independence.

Beyond School and University service, faculty members are evaluated on professional contributions, such as journal peer review, editorial roles, grant proposal reviews, chairing or organizing conferences, and service to professional societies, foundations, or governmental agencies. Such professional activities reflect a faculty member’s national and international standing and should increase as faculty move to higher ranks.

As faculty progress through the ranks, there is an increasing expectation for national and international recognition. This may be evidenced by invitations to external seminars or conference presentations, election to fellowship of professional societies or academies, and by competitive awards. Professional service as described below will also provide evidence of a faculty member's stature in their profession.

Teaching

All faculty are expected to demonstrate excellence in teaching at all levels, including classroom lectures, seminars, and independent studies, and to contribute to a learning environment that fosters the success of students and trainees from all backgrounds. Teaching assignments are determined by the School's Education Committee. The School offers a number of different types of courses, including lecture and lab courses. These different types of courses are all considered service courses independent of enrollments. Lab courses play an important role in instruction and require a substantial time commitment from the instructor who must be present during the entire lab. Teaching relief may only be granted for substantial service commitments on the recommendation of the Associate Dean for Education in consultation with the School of Biological Sciences Education Committee and Chairs and approval by the Dean, or by established formal processes for accommodations such as those provided by Disability Counseling and Consulting (DCC) for medical accommodations, and Academic Personnel such as Active Service Modified Duty (ASMD) for family-care related accommodations. Exceptions to traditional teaching loads should be formalized in writing and articulated in each review file impacted by teaching relief.

In evaluating teaching excellence, the School prioritizes effective and creative teaching, including efforts to boost student success that should be documented in the teaching statement and portfolio. Faculty should ensure that students of all backgrounds, abilities, identities, and learning styles are respected, supported, and shown the pathway to succeed. The School considers multiple measures of impactful teaching, which can be demonstrated in a faculty member's teaching statement, syllabi, student testimonials, and other materials such as SET reviews. Faculty members and Chairs are required to address notable teaching challenges. Faculty members are expected to provide context for any areas of perceived weaknesses and challenges and to provide a plan to address them.

In the biological sciences, like other experimental fields, effective mentorship is essential for a thriving research program. Mentoring is necessarily intensive, because the growth of trainees as independent scientists requires that faculty provide continuous training in sophisticated techniques, ensure safe and responsible conduct of research, guide decisions on experimental approaches, data analysis, and publication, and provide career guidance to an array of careers in industry and academia. The School expects faculty to maintain a positive mentoring environment in their teaching and research. As well as mentorship of their own trainees, faculty are expected to serve on doctoral or master's thesis committees and to pursue informal mentorship opportunities. Faculty are responsible for the training and mentorship of all members of their research group, including undergraduate researchers, graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, and technical staff. The School evaluates the effectiveness of mentorship and training by assessing mentee publications and presentations, trainee feedback, success obtaining fellowships and awards, placement, career outcomes, mentorship awards, and, for graduate students, successful progression towards their degree and completion within normative time limits.

University, Professional, and Public Service

Faculty members are expected to actively participate in the life of their academic unit, starting with involvement in faculty meetings, seminars, and recruitment activities. Additionally, faculty should contribute to the effective operation of the School through various forms of service. This includes serving on School committees or working groups and undertaking roles such as the lead instructor in a course or as a departmental representative on the Representative Assembly. All service activities shall be explained in the departmental letter, including what each service activity entails so that campus reviewers will understand their significance.

In line with the University's tradition of shared governance, senior faculty members are expected to engage in service activities beyond the School, such as participating in the Academic Senate or other campus-wide or system-wide initiatives as well as contributing service to their field (see above). Expectations for service and leadership grow with increased rank and step; consideration of merit advances or accelerations will be impeded for senior faculty who do not engage in selfless campus service. Faculty at higher ranks are expected, at a minimum, to serve on one School committee and expand their service contributions beyond the School. Full Professors, Professors at Steps VI-IX, and Professors Above Scale are expected to provide selfless service—defined as contributions extending beyond their immediate research areas—with greater leadership responsibilities and UC San Diego-wide or UC system-wide engagement expected when approaching Step VI and above.

Assistant Professors should have light service loads and are expected to serve on one School committee. Faculty members at all ranks and career stages should clearly document their service roles, including committee, working group, or commission involvement, detailing the frequency, scope and impact of their service commitments. Faculty are expected to actively participate in committees, and School committee chairs may be consulted to verify and assess individual contributions. School committees are expected to maintain accurate records of membership and attendance.

Contributions to UC San Diego's Principles of Community

The School seeks to create and sustain an environment that embraces and promotes the success of individuals from a wide range of backgrounds, cultures, and life experiences. Faculty are encouraged to make contributions to promote UC San Diego's Principles of Community (<https://www.ucsd.edu/about/principles.html>) in the School, at UC San Diego, and at larger scales, to foster the success of students from all backgrounds in the classroom and in STEM degree programs and careers, and build a supportive community that fosters productivity, creativity and belonging for all. Such contributions will be recognized and can include enhancing our community through service, teaching, research, or combinations of these areas. Contributions that demonstrate accountability, provide detailed success metrics, and document partnerships with community organizations and schools are encouraged.

Addressing Impacts

Faculty may document significant external factors that may have affected their research, teaching, or service during the review period, such as grant funding delays or cancellations, labor actions, or laboratory floods or fires, so reviewers can evaluate performance relative to opportunity. These impacts should be discussed in the research, teaching, and service statements. This context may be

considered in merit and similar performance-based reviews. For promotion reviews at any level, and for accelerations, expectations are not reduced based on external impacts; when an ongoing impact affects the ability to meet normal expectations, it should be addressed through formal accommodations or workload adjustments arranged in advance through the appropriate offices. To preserve privacy, health- and family-related circumstances should not be disclosed in the review file; instead, formal accommodations should be sought through Disability Counseling and Consulting for medical issues, or through Academic Personnel for family-care related issues.

Accelerations

Accelerations are exceptional and are considered when contributions significantly exceed the normal departmental expectations in one or more of the areas of review: research, teaching, professional competence and activities, and university and public service. There should be no evidence of weaknesses in other areas.

In the domain of research, accelerations may be proposed when the combination of the number of publications and their significance exceeds normal standards as defined by each Department. The Academic Senate Committee on Academic Personnel (CAP) has described the general expectations for accelerated advancements as research/creativity being twice that expected throughout one review period. Because the School of Biological Sciences emphasizes the quality and impact of publications more than their number, a twofold increase in the number of publications would only merit consideration for acceleration if the significance and impact of such publications remained high. Accelerations are most commonly considered when one or more corresponding or co-corresponding authored research publications are especially transformative or pathbreaking and a twice-the-expected-impact over the review period argument can be made. Exceptional teaching, outstanding service, and the extent of contributions to UC San Diego's Principles of Community will be considerations in determining the appropriateness of a recommendation for acceleration. In teaching, a combination of consistently excellent classroom teaching; unusual teaching innovation; revamping a major curriculum; leadership positions in undergraduate and graduate programs; and teaching awards may contribute to an acceleration. In service, activities with significant, broad, and transformative impact may contribute to an acceleration. As with other service, expectations for contributions to the Principles of Community will be commensurate with rank, especially if such contributions are to be included in the justification for an acceleration.

Campus Presence

As an in-person institution, the University conducts its regular business, including teaching and research, with faculty, staff, and students physically present. The connectivity and common experiences afforded by campus presence are essential for building, strengthening, and maintaining a robust university culture that supports our innovative work as a student-centered, research-focused, service-oriented university. Therefore, faculty are expected to be in service and on campus throughout the academic year, in sync with the academic and administrative calendar published each year. Essentially, unless on an approved leave or due to approved accommodations (such as ASMD or as a result of the interactive process), faculty should be present and available throughout the fall, winter and spring quarters.