Merit Standards for Project Scientists

Department of Education Studies

Winter 2026

The Department of Education Studies follows University of California policy (APM 311) and UC San Diego campus procedures (PPM 230-311) regarding the appointment, reappointment, merit increase, and promotion of Project Scientists.

General Definitions and Descriptions

Individuals in this series are evaluated on their research contributions and professional competence within a defined research program under the supervision of a faculty sponsor or principal investigator. Appointees are expected to:

- Support, but not necessarily lead, an independent research program
- Make significant, original, and creative contributions to a research or creative program or project.
- Demonstrate a broad range of knowledge, technical expertise, and competency.
- Contribute meaningfully to collaborative research efforts.

Service to the University or profession is not required but may be considered positively when documented and endorsed by the supervisor. Mentor letters provided by the supervisor are an important component of the file and must provide detailed assessments of:

- The candidate's intellectual contributions.
- Their level of independence.
- Their role in publications and projects.
- The overall impact of their work.

(1) Research Contributions.

Evaluation is based primarily on the quality, significance, originality, and impact of contributions to research programs. Scholarly contributions may include, but are not limited to:

- Peer-reviewed publications
- First-, second-, and/or co-authored publications
- Data products, databases, or curated resources
- Software or computational tools
- Instrumentation, experimental systems, or technical innovations
- Reports, white papers, or other recognized scholarly outputs, including educational resources such as lessons, curriculum, or educational media

For collaborative projects, documentation must clearly describe the candidate's specific intellectual and technical contributions.

(2) Professional Competence.

Professional competence is demonstrated through:

- Sustained engagement in research activities
- Technical and methodological expertise
- Independent problem-solving and judgment
- Participation in collaborations, professional meetings, or scholarly activities
- Recognition of expertise within research teams or the broader field

Promotion and Career Advancement

Merit Advancement

Merit advancement is based on continued contributions of high quality and significance to research programs. Evidence should demonstrate:

- Sustained scholarly productivity
- Ongoing original and creative input
- Growth in independence and responsibility
- Continued high professional competence

Advancement is based on impact and quality rather than numerical thresholds alone.

Accelerated Advancement

Acceleration may be recommended when performance substantially exceeds normal expectations for rank. Indicators may include:

- Exceptional intellectual and experimental leadership
- Demonstrated higher levels of independence and creativity
- First- or senior-author publications in high-impact venues
- A publication record that exceeds typical expectations in quality and/or impact
- Successful designation as Co-Principal Investigator on competitive grants
- Leadership in major research initiatives
- Significant achievements in the development of research tools, infrastructure, or data resources
- Exceptional leadership or service within the laboratory, research unit, or campus

Acceleration requires clear evidence that accomplishments go beyond standard expectations in both scope and impact.

Promotion to Associate Level

Promotion is a career review that reflects cumulative achievement, professional growth, and sustained impact. Promotion from Assistant to Associate Project Scientist requires demonstrated:

- Creativity and independent judgment
- Meaningful and clearly documented intellectual contributions
- Growing leadership within project teams
- Contributions such as first-, second- and/or coauthored publications, major technical deliverables, or project coordination roles

Promotion to Full Level

Promotion from Associate to Full Project Scientist requires:

- A sustained record of impactful contributions across multiple projects
- Increasing recognition within the field or research community
- Continued high professional competence
- Leadership in collaborations or major components of research programs
- Innovative contributions that materially advance research objectives