

Faculty Promotion Guidance for Instructors, Senior Instructors, and Assistant Professors in the Tenured and Tenure-Eligible and Clinical Practice Tracks in the School of Medicine

I. Purpose and Scope

This document is intended to provide guidance on promotion from the rank of Instructor to Senior Instructor or Assistant Professor, and from Senior Instructor to Assistant Professor at the University of Colorado School of Medicine (SOM). It is meant to assist faculty members, their supervisors and mentors, and academic leadership. Promotion through these ranks should reflect progressive professional development, increasing contributions to institutional missions, and alignment with departmental goals. Promotion is not typically based solely on duration of appointment, but rather on evidence of sustained performance and contributions consistent with the criteria outlined by the department and SOM. This document addresses the progression among ranks for faculty in the Tenured and Tenure-Eligible and Clinical Practice tracks; it does not address an analogous progression in the Research Professor track. It is not prescriptive in nature; department or division leadership retains discretion in determining its applicability and implementation within their units. The terms promotion and academic promotion are used interchangeably throughout this document and refer to the advancement in faculty rank.

It is intended for use in **two contexts**:

1. **Internal promotion:** to guide promotion from Instructor to Senior Instructor, Senior Instructor to Assistant Professor, or Instructor to Assistant Professor. Faculty promoting in the Clinical Practice track will formally have the rank Assistant Professor of Clinical Practice, however for simplicity, throughout this document, the term “Assistant Professor” is used to refer to that level in both tracks.
2. **Faculty appointment:** to guide assignment of rank at the time of hiring based on qualifications, experience, and demonstrated competencies.

Alignment of Individual and Departmental Goals

Faculty promotion is a collaborative process that requires ongoing dialogue between the faculty member, their mentor(s), and division and department leadership. As part of the promotion discussion, parties are encouraged to consider:

- The faculty member’s professional goals, including alignment with job description and departmental priorities in the domains of teaching, clinical practice, scholarly interest or activity, and service.
- Ways in which a faculty member’s individual growth supports the department’s mission and the SOM’s broader objectives.
- Opportunities for mentorship, professional development, and contribution to the department’s educational, clinical, and scholarly missions.

The SOM recognizes that the Instructor and Senior Instructor ranks are used differently across departments. In some, these ranks serve as introductory appointments with the expectation of rapid promotion to Assistant Professor, while in others they are anticipated to be longer-term or even permanent faculty ranks. It should be recognized that academic promotion may not align with every faculty member’s career goals and the SOM values the contributions of all faculty as essential to its mission, regardless of rank or track. Faculty at all ranks are encouraged to engage in ongoing dialogue with department leadership, both prior to hiring and during routine reviews, to ensure alignment between individual and departmental goals, to clarify expectations regarding promotion, and to identify the support needed for a rewarding and sustainable career.

Importantly, successful performance of basic job expectations is not sufficient to warrant promotion.

For faculty considering whether academic promotion aligns with their individual career goals, the following factors should be considered. Promotion in academic rank provides formal recognition of sustained and progressive contributions, expertise, and professional growth. Promotion acknowledges the impact of work completed, may confer professional credibility within and beyond the institution, and may facilitate access to leadership roles, institutional service, and external opportunities. Faculty members may choose not to pursue promotion and instead find fulfillment and professional satisfaction through different career trajectories. Ultimately, the decision to pursue academic promotion is an individual one that should be guided by career goals, professional priorities, and alignment with departmental expectations and support.

Eligibility for Promotion

SOM faculty, in consultation with their mentor(s) and departmental leadership, must determine whether and when academic promotion is appropriate for their professional development. As defined by the SOM, readiness for promotion includes evaluation of a faculty member's performance in teaching, research or scholarly activity (where applicable), and/or clinical activity, as well as service contributions. Faculty at the Instructor or Senior Instructor rank should be eligible for promotion upon demonstration of the qualifications and criteria enumerated below.

Terminal Degree Considerations

Per the SOM Rules, faculty at the rank of Instructor should have a Master's degree or equivalent qualifications; Senior Instructors may have a terminal degree or equivalent qualifications; and Assistant Professors should have terminal degree appropriate to their field or equivalent qualifications. In many fields, educational standards and the definition of a terminal degree have evolved over time, thus a specific degree is not a prerequisite for any faculty rank. A terminal degree can be defined as one required for certification or practice in the respective discipline or area of specialization. In many fields, a Master's degree is considered terminal, even if a corresponding doctorate degree exists. Faculty achievements and contributions to the SOM should be the primary driver of eligibility for promotion, rather than possession of a specific degree. Faculty who perform the scope of activities required for promotion, including those in the domains of clinical activity, teaching, and/or scholarship, remain eligible for promotion.

Equivalent Qualifications

So-called "equivalent qualifications" will vary depending on a faculty member's role, experience, and training. These qualifications may include evidence of advanced clinical expertise, substantial professional experience, peer-reviewed scholarship, regional or national reputation, recognized leadership or educational contributions, certification or licensure beyond baseline requirements, or other indicators of engagement and impact within the faculty member's discipline.

II. Readiness for Promotion

In the sections below, examples of academic activity are presented in alignment with the domains described in the Promotion Criteria and Personalized Promotion Matrix (PPM) used for promotion to Associate Professor and Professor. The examples provided are not exhaustive, nor is there a pre-determined number of criteria that must be demonstrated prior to qualification for promotion. Rather, they are intended to guide faculty, mentors, and leadership in interpreting promotion criteria, assessing readiness for promotion, and identifying appropriate ways to demonstrate performance consistent with SOM Promotion Criteria. Faculty should prioritize activities that align with their assigned responsibilities, academic track, career goals, and institutional mission. Some examples in the tables below may be aspirational in nature and serve as a roadmap for future development. Faculty are expected to be familiar with the specific requirements for promotion in their selected track. Please refer to the [Office for Faculty Affairs \(OFA\)](#) website for additional information.

The 2025 Rules of the SOM describe faculty rank with the terms “promise in” (Senior Instructor) and “potential for excellence” (Assistant Professor). As these are not further defined, this document reframes the concepts as an evaluation of an individual’s *academic trajectory*, emphasizing patterns of growth, direction, and readiness for promotion. Academic trajectory may be demonstrated through evidence of sustained engagement, meaningful scholarly, teaching or clinical contributions, progressive development in scope or impact, and clearly articulated plans for future work. Together, both tangible work products and forward-looking plans should form a coherent body of evidence supporting both readiness for promotion as well as continued and expanded contributions in the requisite academic domains. Within this framework, accomplishments to date are interpreted as indicators of future contribution rather than endpoints.

- Evaluation for promotion to the rank of **Senior Instructor** should emphasize early evidence of engagement, developing contributions, and a credible trajectory for growth.
- **Assistant Professors of Clinical Practice** are expected to demonstrate contributions in clinical activity reflecting increasing scope, independence, or impact with a trajectory for excellence in clinical activity and at least meritorious teaching if promotion beyond Assistant Professor is part of career goals. These expectations should inform academic planning, scholarly or clinical goals, and academic track selection. Scholarship is not required but will enhance a faculty member’s application for promotion.
- **Assistant Professors in the Tenured and Tenure-Eligible track** should demonstrate a clear trajectory toward or have achieved meritorious performance in clinical activity, teaching, and research or other scholarly activity, with evidence of potential for excellence in at least one domain when applying for Associate Professor, as well as the capacity to participate productively in scholarly work.

Sample Criteria

The examples that follow are intended to illustrate how faculty at different ranks and across tracks may demonstrate these expectations through a range of academic activities, consistent with individual roles and trajectories. Some activities may apply to multiple domains, and faculty are encouraged to discuss with their leadership and mentor(s) appropriate delineation and description of such activities.

Clinical Activity

In addition to direct patient care, “clinical work” includes development of practice guidelines and other structured projects that assess and improve the quality of clinical care, enhance the patient experience, promote patient safety, and identify opportunities for greater value and efficiency in health care. Clinical work includes activities that advance health outcomes, empower patients, shape public health policy, and strengthen access to resources for all communities in order to address community health and healthcare needs.

Promotion to Senior Instructor:

Overall theme: <i>Demonstrate clinical expertise and emerging leadership within the local clinical environment.</i>	
PPM Item	Examples
C13	Demonstrate increasing independence managing complex patients while providing high-quality, evidence-based clinical care.
C14	Participate in clinic-, service line-, or department-level clinical initiatives (<i>e.g., workflow redesign, patient safety initiatives, clinical guidelines</i>).
C15	Serve as a clinical resource to colleagues and trainees through informal consultation or case discussions, letters of reference, or referrals from colleagues.
C18	Contribute to development or refinement of patient-facing materials or tools (<i>e.g., patient education handouts, triage algorithms</i>).
C18	Participate in QI or safety projects within their clinical area (<i>e.g., improving access, reducing no-show rates, standardizing assessments</i>).

Promotion to Assistant Professor:

Overall theme: <i>Demonstrate clinical expertise with clear leadership responsibilities and contributions that extend beyond the immediate clinical setting.</i>	
PPM Item	Examples
C13	Provide expert clinical care and is recognized as a referral resource within the division or system.
C13	Development of clinical expertise in a specific area through formal instruction (<i>e.g., formal certification, focused continuing education, advanced training workshops, specialty courses, or structured professional development programs</i>).
C14	Lead or co-lead clinical pathways, protocols, or care models (<i>e.g., new telehealth program, multidisciplinary clinic model</i>).
C14	Coordinate or direct a clinic-based, departmental clinical program, or pilot initiative.
C17	Disseminate clinical innovations through internal presentations, reports, or invited talks.
C18	Integrate QI, EBP, or research to improve clinical outcomes or decision-making.
C20	Provide system-level consultation or expertise, including regional education or outreach related to clinical specialty.

Teaching

Teaching broadly encompasses education provided to all levels of students, trainees, and other health care professionals. It includes not only didactic instruction but also mentorship, role modeling, and supervision of learners in classroom, clinical, research, and community settings.

Promotion to Senior Instructor:

Overall theme: <i>Demonstrate consistent participation in teaching and early educator potential at the local level.</i>	
PPM Item	Examples
T13	Regularly teach or precept learners (students, residents, fellows, graduate or post-doctoral trainees). This may occur in clinical, classroom, or laboratory settings.
T14	Participate in delivery of departmental or SoM-level teaching activities (e.g. <i>workshops, simulations, didactics</i>).
T16	Develop or update educational materials (e.g., <i>orientation guides, teaching cases, brief modules</i>).
T17/T19	Engage in foundational educator professional development (e.g. <i>teaching workshops, curriculum training</i>).

Promotion to Assistant Professor:

Overall theme: <i>Demonstrate sustained engagement in teaching with clear leadership roles, curricular impact, and educational dissemination.</i>	
PPM Item	Examples
T13	Design or lead a structured curriculum, course component, rotation, or simulation series.
T13	Regularly serves as a mentor for others.
T14	Assume leadership role(s) in educational programs (e.g., <i>course coordinator, preceptor lead, simulation leader</i>).
T17	Participation on search committees or other committees focusing on recruitment, retention or support of trainees, faculty, staff or others who are under-represented in medicine or science.
T13/17	Invited to deliver educational sessions, such as Grand Rounds, seminars, workshops, or lectures, at the departmental, institutional, or external level.
T18	Participation on a training grant.
T17/T19	Attend professional development activities and demonstrate application to work environment.

Research or Other Scholarly Activity

While scholarship is only required for promotion in the Tenured and Tenure-Eligible track, demonstration of contributions in this realm are encouraged for all faculty and evidence of such will enhance the application of every faculty member for promotion. The SOM recognizes four types of scholarship: that of application, teaching, integration, and discovery; these are considered equal in importance and weight. Additional details about each type can be found on the [Dossier Preparation website](#).

Promotion to Senior Instructor:

Overall theme: <i>Demonstrate foundational scholarly activity and contributions to team-based work.</i>	
PPM Item	Examples
S17	Contribute to a manuscript, case report, or clinical practice article (<i>i.e. acknowledgement on a publication</i>).
S18	Participate as a collaborator on QI or research project (<i>e.g. team member, co-investigator, or contributor</i>).
S18	Assist with data collection, IRB preparation, or protocol design.
S21	Present a poster at a local or regional conference.
S23	Participate in clinical improvement effort, protocol development, or clinical guideline or with documented outcomes.
S24	Contribute to improvement/evaluation of an educational session or tool.

Promotion to Assistant Professor:

Overall theme: <i>Demonstrate scholarly output with potential for increasing independence and external dissemination.</i>	
PPM Item	Examples
S17	Authorship on peer-reviewed publications (<i>e.g., case series, review articles, QI outcomes, education research, clinical studies</i>).
S18	Lead or co-Lead a QI initiative or research project (<i>e.g., team member, co-investigator, or contributor</i>).
S18	Lead or co-Lead protocol design, IRB preparation or guide data collection.
S19	Co-investigator role on an internal grant or foundation award.
S21	Present regional or national podium/poster presentations.
S23	Lead or co-lead clinical improvement effort, protocol development, or clinical guidelines with documented outcomes.
S24	Lead or co-lead the improvement or evaluation of an educational session or tool.

Leadership and Service

All faculty members are expected to contribute to the service mission of the SOM, although contributions in this domain are not sufficient in isolation to lead to promotion. While clinical activity is a form of service, it alone does not fulfil the service requirement for promotion to Associate Professor and Professor ranks. The SOM especially values service activities where the faculty member has demonstrated leadership and impact.

Promotion to Senior Instructor:

Overall theme: <i>Demonstrate participation at the local level (hospital and/or regional).</i>	
Matrix Item	Examples
Se1	Repeated participation on a clinical, departmental, or school-level committee or workgroup.
Se2	Ongoing involvement in a local/state professional organization committee.
Se3	Active participation in a local clinical or educational initiative <i>(e.g., developing patient education materials, improving clinic workflow).</i>
Se5	Serve as a member of a scientific/professional section or interest group.
Se7	Provide community or patient-family education programs <i>(e.g. webinars, school health talk, parent support group).</i>

Promotion to Assistant Professor:

Overall theme: <i>Demonstrate leadership responsibilities and external engagement.</i>	
Matrix Item	Examples
Se1	Consistent contributions or leadership role(s) in committees or workgroups <i>(e.g., chair/co-chair, leading a subcommittee or initiative).</i>
Se2	Active engagement in professional organizations at state or national levels <i>(e.g. committee membership, task force roles, abstract review, session moderation).</i>
Se3	Coordinate or lead a clinic-based or departmental program or pilot initiative.
Se4	Serve as an abstract reviewer or on an editorial review panel for a conference or journal.
Se6	Leadership role within professional organization or institutional initiative.

III. Preparing for Promotion and Beyond: First Steps, Supporting Materials, Moving Forward

Faculty considering promotion should meet with their mentor(s), as well as section, division or departmental leadership to confirm readiness, academic track and rank selection, and alignment with their role. Important steps include a review of promotion criteria, assessment of a current CV, and confirmation of the departmental promotion timeline. Early alignment on track, readiness, and timing supports a smooth promotion process.

Materials that support promotion:

- Cover letter
- Curriculum vitae
- Letter(s) of recommendation from leadership

The OFA has created templates for cover letters and CVs that are obligatory for promotion to the ranks of Associate Professor and Professor; use of these should be considered at all levels for consistency and familiarity.

Additional materials departments may request:

- Letters of reference documenting contributions or accomplishments
- Supporting documents
- Personalized Promotion Matrix

Review Process

Departments will have different review processes of those requesting promotion; familiarity with how this works in your department is essential. The process for promotion to Senior Instructor or Assistant Professor is not centralized in the SOM, and departments will retain autonomy. One common means of ensuring rigorous review and equity across sections or divisions is the formation of a group of peers who have already been promoted; this group reviews submitted documentation and makes a recommendation to departmental leadership.

Application of statutes within the Equal Pay for Equal Work Act currently mandates that, with very limited exceptions, faculty promoting to the rank of Assistant Professor are required to apply to an internal job posting. This is to ensure that the SOM is meeting legal standards regarding pay, hiring, and promotion transparency. Any questions regarding this process may be directed to departmental leadership and CU Anschutz Human Resources.

Next Steps After Promotion: Planning for Continued Growth

Once faculty have attained the rank of Senior Instructor or Assistant Professor, they should continue to meet regularly with their mentor(s) and leadership to assess progress, refine goals, and ensure alignment with future expectations. Some faculty will remain at the rank of Senior Instructor, while other may elect to pursue further promotion to Assistant Professor. Although

the Clinical Practice track does not require promotion beyond the rank of Assistant Professor, those faculty should still develop plans for ongoing career development and be encouraged to pursue further promotion if consistent with individual and departmental goals. Ongoing documentation of clinical, teaching, scholarly, and leadership contributions is required to support the mandatory early career comprehensive review required of all Assistant Professors during their third or fourth year in rank. As faculty develop their professional goals, they should consider engaging in organizations at the regional and national levels to support career growth and develop connections that aid in later promotions. Early, proactive planning helps clarify trajectory and supports continued professional growth.

Mentorship and Career Development

Mentors play a critical role in supporting faculty success. A mentor provides guidance, advocacy, and constructive feedback related to academic, clinical, and career development. All faculty should identify a primary mentor who can guide their professional development and provide support toward promotion where applicable. In accordance with SOM rules, departments must ensure that adequate mentoring and career development programs are in place for all full-time faculty (including those employed by affiliate institutions) at ranks other than Professor.

A primary mentor is often an experienced faculty member with relevant expertise who can support the mentee's growth regardless of formal seniority. Faculty may consider additional mentors who support specific areas of their career development; these may be internal or external to their department and from various disciplines or educational backgrounds. Faculty members are responsible for understanding the policies of their individual departments regarding requirements surrounding mentorship.

Faculty who have been promoted are encouraged to mentor colleagues earlier in their careers; this creates a supportive academic community, contributes to teaching and mentorship accomplishments that fulfill the SOM Promotion Criteria, and fosters a culture that benefits both the department and the mentor's professional development.

Faculty Recognition Beyond Promotion

Promotion to a higher rank is a significant academic achievement that reflects a faculty member's accomplishments and growth. There are no school-wide methods for "rewarding" faculty promotion, nor should there be the assumption that a faculty member will be granted additional compensation or time to devote to non-clinical activities following promotion. Individual departments may adopt recognition practices that align with their culture, values, and resources. Examples of recognition used in some departments include:

- Email announcements
- Certificate of recognition
- Celebration events or luncheons
- Additional continuing education funding

- Increase in responsibility and/or leadership

Faculty should be aware that their section, division, or department may participate in any, all, or none of these options. All faculty members are encouraged to discuss recognition practices with their leadership as part of routine reviews and prior to submitting an application for promotion. Departments may create or engage in recognition or awards programs outside of academic promotion at their discretion.