

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2, 2025

MEMORANDUM

TO: Deans, School Directors, and Chairpersons

FROM: Teresa Mastin, Ph.D., Vice Provost and Associate
Vice President for Faculty and Academic Staff Affairs



SUBJECT: Review of Academic Specialists

This memorandum outlines the procedures and timeline for the 2025-26 Academic Specialist reappointment, promotion, and continuing review cycle. This memo intends to ensure consistent application of university policies and provide clear guidance for colleges, departments, and schools as they prepare and submit their review materials for Academic Specialists.

The Review of Academic Specialists memo outlines the procedures for the annual review materials due to Human Resources (HR) by **Friday, May 1, 2026**. Provided as an attachment to this memo is the list of Continuing System specialists with a probationary end date of August 15, 2027. Review materials should be submitted to the FAS Review Non-Tenure inbox at FASreviewNon-Tenure@hr.msu.edu.



Continuing System Academic Specialists opting not to use their COVID-19 automatic extension—meaning review occurs at their pre-COVID-19 review date—should contact their Dean or Dean Representative to complete the [Continuing System Automatic Extension Opt-Out Form](#). The Continuing System Automatic Extension Opt Out Form must be completed and sent to FASreviewNon-Tenure@hr.msu.edu.

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As outlined in the [Academic Specialist Handbook](#), timely submission of review materials ensures the review and notification process follows the Academic Specialist review timetable. If you are unable to meet this deadline, submit a request for an extension to Faculty and Academic Staff Affairs (FASA) via email at fasaffairs@msu.edu by **Wednesday, April 1, 2026**.¹ FASA will respond to the extension request and notify HR. If granted, review materials must be submitted on October 15, 2026. Review materials should be submitted to the FAS Review Non-Tenure inbox at FASreviewNon-Tenure@hr.msu.edu. Decisions made through the extension process will take effect on January 1 of the following year.

Procedures for the Specialist Review Process have been formalized in the [Academic Specialist Handbook](#). Section 4.3 provides guidance related to evaluation, reappointment, continuing appointment status, and promotion of Academic Specialists, and is summarized below.

¹ The extension request only applies to Academic Specialists in the Continuing Appointment System with probationary status.

Core Values and Institutional Alignment

At MSU, our academic community includes a dynamic group of educators, scholars, researchers, advisors, and practitioners both within and beyond the tenure system. Academic Specialists are members of the academic community who bring deep expertise across multiple domains, including student success, engaged scholarship, community partnerships, teaching, and pedagogical innovation. Their contributions are integral to the university's mission of discovery, learning, and engagement.

RPC reviews should be grounded in the core institutional values of collaboration, excellence, equity, integrity, and respect. These values must inform not only the review process itself, but also how we define and assess scholarly and professional contributions.

In general, Academic Specialists submitting RPC materials using guidance in place before significant changes to compliance frameworks should be evaluated in accordance with the original guidance. Similarly, annual reviews should be conducted based on guidance in place for the period being evaluated. Units should continue to recognize Academic Specialist contributions that align with and demonstrate commitment to the university's land-grant mission, institutional values, and strategic priorities while using language that focuses on measurable outcomes and concrete activities.

While diversity, equity, and inclusion statements will not be submitted going forward, individuals will be expected to describe their full range of work within their appointment categories, which includes activities that further the university's mission, values, and strategic priorities through a broad range of efforts. This may include but is not limited to advancements in inclusive pedagogy, performing cutting-edge scholarship in under-researched topics and subject groups, expanding access and opportunity for all, reviewing and revising practices to assure fairness for all, enhancing respectful dialogue to increase understanding across differences, and creating spaces and programs that affirm and uplift often unheard voices.

Contextual Considerations for 2025-2026

Given the current external climate, notably the changes in the broader higher education landscape, Academic Specialists across the university may have encountered disruptions to their respective work. These disruptions have taken various forms, including stop-work orders, cancellations of federal grants, restricted access to datasets or databases maintained by federal agencies, and limitations on travel to present scholarly work at conferences typically supported by federal funds, as well as other hurdles around international travel. Community-engaged scholarship, teaching, advising, service/outreach, and curriculum development may have been interrupted due to reductions in programmatic funding and operational changes across public and private sector partners. Additionally, Academic Specialists whose work addresses topics that may now be subject to heightened scrutiny may find themselves navigating an increasingly complex environment in advancing or presenting their work.

Moving forward, evaluation processes should focus on allowing Academic Specialists to describe their activities through specific, substantive descriptions rather than categorical labels. This approach allows units to continue recognizing each Academic Specialist's contributions that align with and demonstrate commitment to the university's land-grant mission and strategic priorities while using language that focuses on measurable outcomes and concrete activities. The university remains steadfast in supporting all Academic Specialists in their efforts to create effective and inclusive academic communities.

The [Office for Faculty and Academic Staff Affairs](#) recognizes the challenges that many Academic Specialists are currently facing. These difficulties are being taken seriously, and we are actively engaged in conversations about how to best support Academic Specialists and ensure a fair and thoughtful approach to the RPC process. While the core criteria of RPC remain unchanged, the university affirms that Academic Specialists should be evaluated based on their assigned duties, the quality of their contributions, and the circumstances in which their work was conducted.

For the 2025-2026 RPC cohort, Academic Specialists preparing dossiers will present accomplishments achieved during the review period that may include work impacted by federal developments since January 2025. To inform both internal and external reviewers, Academic Specialists are encouraged to create a work interruption impact statement to include in their reappointment, promotion, and continuing dossiers as a standalone document during the review period. In such statements, Academic Specialists may create a record of interruptions and challenges to the areas for which they are appointed.

Candidates should also include a plan to address the challenges they have faced and whether mentor support would be helpful in their efforts. Inclusion of a work-interruption impact statement is optional; however, external reviewers (where applicable) are expected to give due consideration to the interruptions noted in the impact statement and seek guidance from unit administrators if they have questions.²

Academic Specialist in the Continuing Appointment System

a. Form A: Academic Specialist in the Continuing Appointment System

- i. This form provides a list of Academic Specialists in the Continuing Appointment System who are appointed in your college or administrative unit with a probationary appointment end date of August 15, 2027.
- ii. A recommendation for each individual is required and can be one of the following options:
 - A recommendation to reappoint for an additional probationary period.
 - A recommendation to reappoint with continuing appointment status.
 - A recommendation not to reappoint.
- iii. If you do not receive a Form A, this indicates that you do not have any specialists with probationary appointments requiring review. Should your unit choose to include individuals for promotion to the rank of Senior Specialist (fixed or continuing) or early review in the continuing system, they can be added to a blank Form A.

b. Form B: Provides Documentation of Academic Specialist Annual Performance Reviews

- i. This form provides a list of all Academic Specialists appointed in your college or administrative unit (both continuing system and fixed-term) who require an annual performance review, in accordance with the policies contained within the Academic Specialist Handbook (4.3.1).
- ii. Form B must be signed and dated by the unit administrator. All specialists, regardless of appointment type, should receive a yearly performance review. If annual reviews have not been completed for an Academic Specialist, the unit administrator should explain the incomplete annual evaluation.
- iii. A written summary of the annual evaluation is to be placed in the Academic Specialist's personnel file in the unit and given to the Academic Specialist within thirty (30) calendar days of the evaluation.

² If the impacts have significantly slowed progress, candidates can consider requesting an extension.

c. Form on Progress and Excellence: Academic Specialist Recommendation for Reappointment, Promotion or Award of Continuing Appointment Status

- i. A revised Form on Progress and Excellence has been distributed to provide for consistency in forms amongst the various academic classifications. For this review cycle, Academic Specialists can opt to use either form. Moving forward, the previous form will not be accepted.
 - ii. This form must be completed for everyone on Form A and for individuals submitting dossiers for promotion to Senior Academic Specialist.
 - iii. The form is to be completed based on assigned duties and responsibilities in alignment with the specialist position description form.
 - iv. This form **should not** be used for Fixed-Term Specialists moving to the continuing appointment system.
- d. The Reappointment in the Academic Specialist Appointment System ([Attachment 1](#)) of this memo covers the probationary process for Academic Specialists in the continuing system. Full instructions on how to process each form can be found in [Attachment 1](#).

Fixed-Term Academic Specialist

- a. The Report for Fixed-Term Specialists with sixty (60) or more FTE Service Months lists Academic Specialists who are eligible for promotion to Senior Academic Specialist. Promotion to senior status should be based on long-term, high-level performance, not merely time in rank.
- b. The criteria for consideration of promotion to the senior rank are subject to the same standards as the Continuing System.
- c. This report is to assist in identifying individuals who may qualify, based on their service time, to be promoted to Senior Academic Specialist.
- d. If an individual is being reviewed for promotion, then the Form on Progress and Excellence must be completed, and the individual's name should be added to Form A.
 - i. This form should **not** be used for Fixed-Term Specialists who are moving to the continuing appointment system.
- e. If a Fixed-Term Academic Specialist is being reviewed for promotion and there is a desire to move to the continuing system, do the following:
 - i. After the review has been completed and approved for promotion to Senior Specialist, the unit is then responsible for submitting an Academic Position Request (APR) in EBS to request an "exception to post." The exception reason will be "Internal Fill."

The Form on Progress and Excellence, available in Word format, can also be downloaded at:
hr.msu.edu/ua/forms/academic-specialist-recommendation.html

When submitting the Form on Progress and Excellence and its supporting materials, please note that it must be submitted in Adobe PDF format. The Adobe PDF document must be submitted in the correct order with specified bookmarking within the document to the new FAS Review Non-Tenure Inbox at FASreviewNon-Tenure@hr.msu.edu. Please see [Attachment 2](#) for the correct order and bookmarking.

Submission of Annual Reviews in the Review Process

Copies of the annual review letters must be submitted with the review materials. All annual review letters since the last reappointment, and/or award of continuing action, are required to be included in the Form on Progress and Excellence dossiers when provided from the college to the Office of the Provost for university review.

For Fixed-Term Academic Specialists, annual review letters must be submitted for the previous five years.

Additionally, consistent with department and college bylaws and policies, the Office of the Provost recommends that annual review letters be made available to department and college specialist unit review committees as part of the materials that they review. The availability of these letters will help committee members more fully assess the performance of Academic Specialists and consider the feedback received on expectations and accomplishments. Please include all evaluations since the last review (see examples below). Annual reviews should be placed chronologically from the most recent. Dossiers for promotion, continuing status, or continuing system reappointment are subject to an 85-page limit at the time of submission to the university. The 85-page limit does not include the completed Form on Progress and Excellence. Please review the [checklist](#) as a guide to assist units and specialists in the preparation of materials.

For example:

- For **Probationary Continuing System**, if it is the first probationary review, include annual reviews from the previous **two (2)** years. If it is the second probationary review, include the reviews since reappointment.
- For **Fixed-Term Specialists**, please submit annual reviews from the last **five (5)** years.

If there are any errors, or if any individuals have been omitted from Form A or B, please contact Paige Breen, breenpai@hr.msu.edu, and Bernadette Russell, brussell@hr.msu.edu.

For more information on the COVID-19 Automatic Extensions for Continuing System employees, please see the [FAQs for Extending the Reappointment Review Timeline for the Continuing Appointment System](#).

Questions about the review process should be directed to your [Faculty and Academic Staff Affairs liaison](#).

Enclosures:

- [Attachment 1 – Directions for Specialist Review Materials](#)
- [Attachment 2 – Required Bookmarking for the Form on Progress and Excellence](#)

Attachment 1 – Directions for Specialist Review Materials

Academic Specialist Appointment System

Academic Specialists can be appointed as continuing system, with continuing status, or fixed-term.

- Continuing System Academic Specialists are under probationary periods and are reviewed per the probationary guidelines in the Academic Specialist Handbook. Academic Specialists who have been granted continuing status are no longer under probationary periods.
- Fixed-Term Academic Specialists are employed on a fixed-term basis with an end date and do not have probationary review periods.

a. Probationary Periods

For probationary periods and more information related to them, please see section 4.2.8 in the Academic Specialist Handbook.

- i. An Academic Specialist is appointed initially for a probationary period of three years and may be reappointed for an additional probationary period of three years. If an Academic Specialist is appointed beyond the two probationary periods, Continuing Appointment status is granted. If at any time during these two probationary periods an Academic Specialist is promoted to the rank of Senior Academic Specialist, Continuing Appointment status is granted.

b. Preparation for the Review of Academic Specialists for Reappointment

- i. The Academic Specialist shall be notified when the reappointment review is to take place.
- ii. Individuals may submit evidence to substantiate excellence in relevant scholarly activities such as course/curriculum development, teaching, publications, public service/outreach, academic advising, grants, creativity in program development, and leadership in other areas related to assigned duties.

c. Unit Review Committee

- i. A review committee shall be established to advise the unit administrator about the reappointment, award of Continuing Appointment status, or promotion. For more information on the composition of the review committee, see sections 4.3.3.3 through 4.3.3.6 of the Academic Specialist Handbook.

d. Evaluation

- i. The evaluation of each Academic Specialist shall be based on the individual's assignment specified in the specialist position description and on the effectiveness in the appropriate functional area(s): advising/teaching/curriculum development, research, or service/outreach. The kinds of evidence to be considered must be established at the time of appointment. Each Academic Specialist is to be evaluated based on individual merit, not merely on time spent in the position.
- ii. In addition to the review committee's advice, the unit administrator may also consult with administrative staff, faculty, students, and/or other qualified individuals inside or outside the unit regarding the reappointment review.
- iii. The Academic Specialist should be informed of those individuals from whom the unit administrator is requesting advice; the Academic Specialist is not informed of those individuals who provide external letters of evaluation, unless stipulated by unit policy. See also Confidentiality of Letters of Reference for Reappointment, Promotion and Tenure Recommendations in the Faculty Handbook.

- iv. An assessment is made of the availability of position funds and/or changes in the needs of the department or unit, which may result in the need for non-reappointment. Reappointment or award of Continuing Appointment status must promote the objectives of improving academic strength and quality.

e. Recommendation

- i. The recommendation of the academic unit administrator is forwarded for subsequent review and action by the relevant major academic unit administrator (usually the Dean).
- ii. Deans should indicate the personnel action recommended on Form A, and for each individual on Form A, complete the Form on Progress and Excellence. Return Form A and the Form on Progress and Excellence to the HR email at FAReviewNon-Tenure@hr.msu.edu, no later than May 1, 2026.
- iii. The Office of the Provost will review these recommendations and respond to the Deans no later than August 1, 2026.
- iv. After notification of the response by the Office of the Provost to the recommendation by the Dean(s) for each Academic Specialist **not recommended for reappointment**, a letter of notification from the unit administrator, chairperson, director, and/or Dean(s) must be sent to the individual. The letter must be sent as soon as possible and **no later** than December 15, 2026, and **must** contain the following items:
 - 1. Notification that the Office of the Provost concurs with the decision not to reappoint.
 - 2. The specific end date of the probationary appointment. (i.e., August 15, 2027).
 - 3. A statement (which appears in section 4.4.1.1 in the Academic Specialist Handbook) that: "Upon receiving notice of non-reappointment, the Academic Specialist may request from the administrator responsible for the recommendation, in writing, the basis of the decision which resulted in non-reappointment."

Additionally, copies of the notification letter shall be sent to the Dean/separately reporting director and the Provost. A copy should also be attached to the first page of the Form on Progress and Excellence. The decision not to reappoint the Academic Specialist on a probationary appointment in the continuing appointment system does not require action by the Board of Trustees.

Reappointment with Continuing Status

a. External Review

- i. If the recommendation is to award Continuing Appointment status, external letters of support must be included.
- ii. The purpose of the external review is to be evaluative of the specialist's dossier for the award of continuing status and/or promotion to Senior Academic Specialist. External reviews are required to ensure that individuals recommended have an achievement and performance level that is comparable with high-level performance in their functional area(s) and position.
- iii. External letters of review should be from leading professionals/scholars in the relevant discipline external to the unit, college, or institution. An external reviewer could be someone at MSU, but not within the specialist's department.

Generally, an external reviewer should be a leader in their respective field or functional area(s). The specialist being evaluated may provide a list of reviewers; however, the unit administrator determines the final list of reviewers. The unit

administrator initiates outreach to the reviewers and should describe the specialist's assignment (for example, the percentage of appointments devoted to the functional area they are being asked to assess) for the referee to make an informed assessment of performance.

- iv. We will accept **three (3) to six (6) external letters**. All external review letters should be signed by the evaluator.
- v. All external reviewers should be of equal rank or higher.
- vi. For more information on external review letters, please see [External Letters of Reference in the Faculty Handbook](#).
- vii. Letters of support can be included as part of the specialist dossier, but are not required. They are letters from peers, colleagues, students, or others in support of the candidate.

b. Recommendation

- i. The recommendation of the academic unit administrator is forwarded for subsequent review and action by the relevant major academic unit administrator (usually the Dean).
- ii. Deans should indicate the personnel action recommended on Form A, and for everyone on Form A, complete the Form on Progress and Excellence. Return Form A and the Form on Progress and Excellence to the HR inbox at FAReviewNon-Tenure@hr.msu.edu, no later than May 1, 2026.
- iii. After review by the Office of the Provost, the recommendations will be returned to Human Resources so that the employee's record can be updated with the recommendation.
- iv. After the record has been updated, notification of each Academic Specialist that was awarded continuing status will be sent to the Dean via email notification no later than August 1, 2026. The notification will include a template letter for the chairperson, director, and/or Dean(s) to use in notifying the Academic Specialist of the approved recommendations.
- v. Approved promotions and with continuing status actions will be effective August 16, 2026.

Promotion to Senior Academic Specialist

As an Academic Specialist, promotion to senior status should be based on long-term, high-level performance, not merely time in rank (for a minimum of sixty (60) FTE service months at the university). This long-term, high-performance in the position is demonstrated by assigned duties and recognition by peers and colleagues both within the university and regionally, nationally, or internationally, based on what is appropriate for the specific position. Such recognition is based on external peer review involving evaluation of the performance of the specialist according to their specialist position description in one or more of their assigned functional areas: teaching, advising, curriculum development, research/creative activity, and/or public service/outreach.

A promotion recommendation requires (1) a robust review of the specialist's ability to demonstrate long-term, high-performance in their position, and (2) endorsement by the unit review committee, academic unit administrator, intermediate administrators/head of MAU, and the provost that merits the award of promotion to the rank of Senior Specialist.

Academic Specialists with fixed-term appointments who have completed sixty (60) FTE service months are eligible for promotion to Senior Academic Specialist, subject to the same standards and criteria applicable to individuals in the continuing appointment system, and should complete the Form on Progress and Excellence, and the individual's name should be added to Form A.

For more details on eligibility, refer to section 4.3.3.5 in the Academic Specialist Handbook.

a. Unit Review Committee and Evaluation

- i. Individuals who believe they have developed an appropriate record of activity and competence may assemble a compendium of scholarly achievements, evidence of distinction and recognition of external peers and colleagues, and submit documentation for review.
- ii. A review committee shall be established to advise the unit administrator about the promotion and shall follow the guidelines for the review of Specialists in the Academic Specialist Continuing System.
- iii. In addition to the review committee's advice, the unit administrator must have evidence of external recognition based on external peer review involving evaluation of performance in one or more of the assigned functional areas: teaching/advising/curriculum development, research, public service/outreach.
 - Requests for external review shall be made in accordance with unit procedures and should follow the same guidelines around External Review letters as those of Academic Specialists being reappointed with Continuing Status above.
- iv. The evaluation of each Academic Specialist shall be based on evidence of a significantly long and sustained period of excellence in the performance of assigned duties, evidence of creativity and leadership, and recognition of distinction by peers and colleagues both within the University and regionally, nationally, and internationally.

b. Recommendation

- i. The recommendation of the academic unit administrator is forwarded for subsequent review and action by the relevant major academic unit administrator (usually the Dean).
- ii. If an individual is to be recommended for promotion, add their name on Form A and type "additional action" in the 'comments' column. Complete the Form on Progress and Excellence and return to the Human Resources inbox at FASreviewNon-Tenure@hr.msu.edu, no later than May 1, 2026.
- iii. After review by the Office of the Provost, the recommendations will be returned to Human Resources to update the record with the recommendation.
- iv. After Human Resources processes the actions for promotion to senior specialist, a notification of the response by the Office of the Provost, for each Academic Specialist recommended for promotion, will be sent to the Dean via email notification no later than August 1, 2026, and will include a template letter for the chairperson/director and/or Dean(s) to utilize if desired to notify the employee of the approved recommendations.
- v. Approved promotions and the award of Continuing status will be effective August 16, 2026. Promotional increase is effective October 1, 2026.

Form B: Annual Reviews

- a. The Academic Specialist, with a probationary appointment or with a continuing appointment, shall be evaluated annually to determine progress toward goals and/or the identification of goals. The Academic Specialist shall be notified of when the evaluation is to take place, what procedures are to be followed, and what criteria are to be used for the evaluation. This notification should be at the time of appointment and, subsequently, two months before the evaluation.
 - i. A written summary of this evaluation shall be placed in the personnel file in the unit and given to the Academic Specialist within thirty (30) calendar days of the

evaluation. Unit administrators must review such evaluations personally with the Academic Specialist.

- b. An Academic Specialist with a fixed-term appointment for six (6) months or more should be reviewed by the unit administrator no later than two (2) months prior to the appointment ending date regardless of the probability of reappointment. The annual evaluation procedures for the Academic Specialist in the continuing appointment system are to be used to the fullest extent possible. A summary of this evaluation shall be placed in the personnel file in the unit and given to the Academic Specialist.
- c. Deans should complete Form B listing the date of the most recent review for each specialist, the person conducting the review, and determine whether opportunities for the specialist's professional development have been explored in the past year. If annual reviews have not been completed for an Academic Specialist, the unit administrator should explain an incomplete annual evaluation. Form B should be signed and dated by the Unit Administrator and returned to Human Resources via email at FASreviewNon-Tenure@hr.msu.edu, no later than May 1, 2026.

Attachment 2 – Required Bookmarking for the Form on Progress and Excellence

When submitting the Documentation of Progress and Excellence and supporting materials, please note that they must be submitted in Adobe PDF format. The Adobe PDF document must be submitted in the following order, with bookmarking added to the document:

- Academic Specialist Recommendation Page (Documentation of Progress and Excellence Form)
- Summary Statements
- Letters from Department Head, Dean, or Unit Review Committee
- Specialist Position Description
- Academic Advising
- Teaching Activities
- Curriculum Development
- Research
- Outreach
- Scholarly Presentation and MSU-affiliated Non-credit Instructional Activities
- Publications
- Grants
- Committee Service
- Additional Significant Contributions
- Reflective Essay (**no longer than 5 pages**)
- Impact Statement (optional)
- C.V.
- External Reviews (required if the recommendation is to award continuing appointment status or to promote to Senior Academic Specialist)
- Annual Reviews (in order of most recent/current first, followed by prior years)
- Appendix (include linkable materials; see [dossier checklist](#))

Questions regarding the order of materials and bookmarking can be directed to Paige Breen, breenpai@hr.msu.edu, 517-884-0157, or Bernadette Russell, brussell@hr.msu.edu, 517-884-0214.

For helpful information about Academic Specialists, Academic Specialist Review, or samples of Documentation of Progress and Excellence and Reflective Essays, please visit the following link: aan.msu.edu/academic-career-paths/thriving-as-an-academic-specialist-at-msu.