

UCSD DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHIATRY · ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Academic Promotion to Associate

Ladder, In-Residence & Adjunct Series — Advancement FAQ

▣ **ACADEMIC ADVANCEMENT FAQ · UPDATED SEPTEMBER 2026**

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This FAQ is meant to be an ongoing primer on how to develop a successful academic file for promotion to Associate Professor.

Review process: Faculty are reviewed for step increases every 2 years. The academic review process typically commences in the Spring 15 months prior to the July 1 effective date. You will be contacted by the Academic Resource Center (ARC) to submit documents for your academic review. The file is reviewed by the department (including faculty vote), the Senior Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, and the Committee on Advancement and Promotions (CAP).

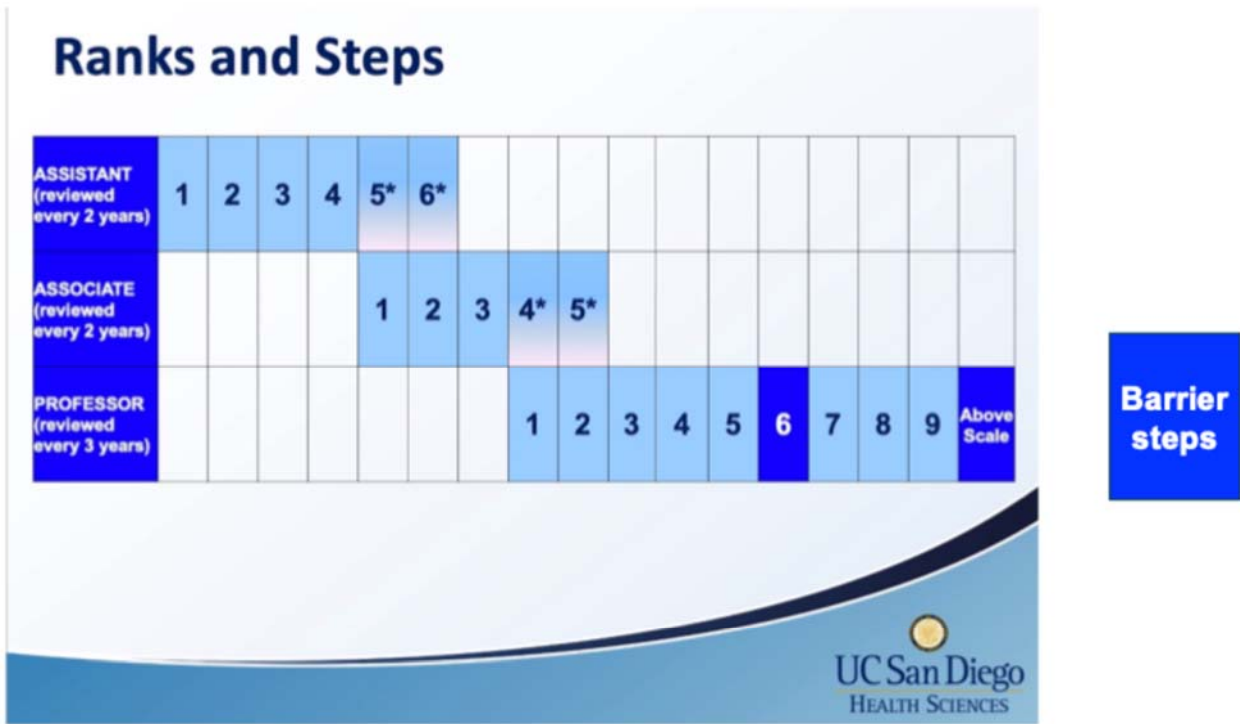


Understanding the Process

What is the “clock”? Assistant professors have 8 years to develop their academic file and promote. (see APM 133 <https://www.ucop.edu/academic-personnel-programs/files/apm/apm-133.pdf>) In practicality, they have 7 years to develop the file, as the last year will be when the review is conducted. The clock can be extended under some circumstances, when official leave is taken or under unusual external circumstances (e.g. COVID-19 shutdown). If you take parental leave make sure to have that leave applied to your clock. **DO NOT CHECK** the box that says “**Opt** Out: I DO NOT wish to have my probationary period automatically extended” on the Family Accommodations Reporting (FAR) form. Leave this checkbox blank because it will automatically increase your clock which is always a good thing in case you need the extra time. You may always go up for promotion earlier. If you have not promoted by the end of the 8 years, you will lose your faculty position.

What is the 4th year appraisal? After 3 years as assistant professor, the department and CAP will conduct a career review to identify strengths and any weaknesses in the academic file that need to be addressed to ensure promotion in future. They are looking for a trajectory that shows development of an independent research program as well as a trajectory of teaching excellence. The appraisal is meant to help you understand what benchmarks are still needed to ensure a successful promotion in the future. At the time of promotion, reviewers may go back to the assessment to see if the recommendations were addressed. The most common appraisal is “Favorable with Recommendations” which means the candidate is on track to promote, but they need to focus on certain areas identified by reviewers to ensure smooth transition to Associate. Most often this is in developing adequate evidence of an independent research program (see below).

Why would some assistant professors choose a merit to Assistant Step 5 instead of a promotion to Associate Step 1? For some assistant professors, it may be the best course of action to request a merit to Assistant Step 5 vs. promotion to allow them time to provide further evidence of independence. At their next review, the proposed action will be for an Associate Step 2 instead of Step 1. The chart below demonstrates how the rank and step system works.



What is required for promotion? See below for the general elements that are examined for a promotion file. Please note, when ARC sends you the call email for your academic file materials and they say you are “eligible for promotion”, you must contact the VCAA office to go over your file with you to help choose the best course of action for success.

What is the most common reason for not being approved for promotion? For assistant professors, the most common reason that promotion is not approved is because there is not enough evidence of an independent research program. One highly weighted piece of evidence for independence by reviewers is if the candidate has procured independent research funding that spans a reasonably long time (3+ years). R01-equivalent awards, VA Merits, other large foundation or federal grants provide strong evidence that a research program you are leading as PI has robust investment from the field. Based on past experience, an R21 or other smaller grants do not provide as much evidence for independence and likelihood of successful trajectory to associate. The second highly weighted piece of evidence is that the candidate’s publication record includes papers where they are senior

author (evidence that they led the research) without their mentor. Having enough independent papers is where many of faculty struggle, especially if they are on mentored career development awards. It is critical for faculty to develop a plan in how they can develop independent papers for promotion. Discuss with your mentorship team how you can best develop these papers in your research area.

How many independent papers do I need to promote?

This is a moving target, but we can at least say that if you have 3+ senior author papers without your mentor and the other elements of your file meet the benchmarks, you are likely to succeed based on past files reviewed by CAP. There is always nuance and it may be possible to be promoted with less in certain cases, e.g. if the paper is very high impact, but certainty is much lower. In our experience a higher level of certainty will come with 3+.

What if my research program requires my mentor to be on my papers? There are a few instances of large team-science approaches where a paper without your mentor is not feasible. Such cases include when working with an longstanding large longitudinal cohort that your mentor established or consortia data in which there are many people providing data (e.g. Psychiatric Genomics Consortium). The academic file will need to describe the candidate's independent contributions very clearly, and often an additional letter from one of the team members (mentor or collaborator) may be necessary to establish the independence of your work. We encourage you however to talk with your mentor early and develop other independent collaborations, data sets etc. to carve out research projects where they would not be an author and you are senior author. This latter approach has the most certainty for successful promotion.

What if I can't get an R01 equivalent grant as PI in time for promotion? CAP has acknowledged that funding lines are out of the candidate's control and in the self-assessment information on grant scoring and attempts may be helpful to give context. A very strong publication record with multiple papers as senior author without mentors and without other senior faculty may help mitigate this in some cases. However, in our experience, not having an independent funding source for your research program will make promotion much less likely.

Below lists general frequently asked questions for what one needs to succeed in promotion to the Associate rank in each of the four areas for Assistant Professors in the Ladder rank, In Residence and Adjunct series. Please refer to the *Psychiatry Academic Advancement Guidelines – Ladder, In Residence & Adjunct Series* and arrange a meeting the Vice Chair of Academic Affairs (Victoria Risbrough, vriskbrough@health.ucsd.edu) to make sure you understand the expectations for academic advancement if you have any questions.



Requirements for Promotion

Research or Scholarly Activity

- ✓ Identification of a clearly independent research program. The most highly weighted evidence for independence by CAP

- o Publishing first or senior authored publications with no previous mentors as co-authors. Note that reviewers sometimes get confused if you are first author and a senior investigator is last author, they may think that the more senior investigator led/funded the project. Senior author papers are the best evidence for most reviewers. In our experience 3+ papers of this type supports promotion.
- o Active research grant as PI. In our experience, typically a 3+ year grant.
- ✓ Evidence of continued research/publication productivity. As a general guideline, the new contributions would include 3-4 peer-reviewed publications per year on average, 1 of which should be 1st or senior authored.

Teaching

- ✓ Active teaching role. This is typically one guest lecture per quarter and individual mentorship of UCSD trainees
- ✓ Teaching evaluations
 - o Didactic (required)
 - o Mentees (optional)
- ✓ Any negative teaching evaluations should be addressed in self-assessment

University & Professional Service

- ✓ Active service role. This is typically at least 2 committees meeting 4+ times per year.
- ✓ For assistant professors, this service can be within the department. You will be expected to serve outside the department at the Associate Rank.

External Referees

- ✓ Referees must be at the Associate or full Professor rank, expert in the field, and genuinely independent. Former advisors/mentors and recent (within 5 years or less) active collaborators are not considered independent. Candidates must not contact referees directly, ARC will contact them for the letter to maintain the confidential referee process. If there is evidence they were contacted by the candidate, that will make the letter unusable.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to reach out to our office, and the earlier in your advancement and promotion process the better we can advise you. We are here to help advise you to make sure your promotion file is successful. Another wonderful resource is Academic Resource Center – which provides one on one workshops for promotion files: <https://vchs.ucsd.edu/administration/aa/for-faculty-and-academics/faculty/faculty-trainings.html#how-to-get-promoted-workshops>

It is helpful to also consult the “where CAP stood” reports, which give an update on how CAP is reviewing files. Go to <https://senate.ucsd.edu/committees/standing/academic-personnel/> and navigate to the where CAP stood menu, and select the most recent year. 2025-2026 Report: <https://senate.ucsd.edu/media/757689/where-cap-stood-2025-26final.pdf>