

Paul D. Reich
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Professional Assessment Statement for Promotion to Professor

The tenure and promotion to associate professor process often felt like completing a checklist; my post-tenure experience has been infinitely freer. My department gives me latitude to pursue teaching, service, and research opportunities for which I have the strongest passion. These last six years, I have appreciated that freedom even more. With it, I have sincerely invested in the college's professional development areas and have met my department's criteria for promotion to professor.

Teaching

When evaluating teaching for promotion, the English Department asks, "Has the candidate consistently encouraged active learning?" I consider this query in every lesson I plan, class I teach, and interaction I have with students. My explication of teaching close textual analysis in my Canvas site's "Course Materials" section offers one window into my process. Often to great annoyance, my own active learning imposes itself on the media I consume: I can't enjoy a book, film, or television show without analyzing it. I have this department to thank for that, as a fortunate graduate of it. It gives me no small measure of satisfaction to hear and read that students have similar reactions to my courses. As she handed me her name card at Holt's 2021 Commencement Ceremony, one of my Summer 2020 students whispered, "I'll never watch a movie or tv show the same way again thanks to you." Should I have apologized or just returned my own gratitude? I chose the latter.

In my discipline, constant engagement with texts means that each has the potential to become part of a course. Of the 43 courses I have taught since I submitted my materials for tenure and promotion, 25 were new. While some are categorized around a similar theme—crime has been a favorite—others resist simple classifications. A review of my teaching record reveals two new threads post-tenure: a focus on contemporary literature and dedicated courses on television and media.

One surprising outcome of my Spring 2016 sabbatical was a newfound appreciation for 21st century literature; I immersed myself in contemporary novels, memoirs, and short story collections. Post-sabbatical, my interest continues. It is clear that students flourish when I am genuinely invested in the texts we discuss. I share my love of this media with my students, modeling our department's mission statement. A review of my CIE comments from Fall 2020, for example, shows terms that repeat throughout my evaluations: "engaging," "passionate," and "enthusiastic." I'm careful to make clear that my passion for a text comes from its complexity, my analyses of the creator's craft, and an understanding of my position in relation to it. For example, when discussing Carmen Maria Machado's *In the*

Dream House and considering the impact of her use of the second person perspective, I share my own feelings as a White, cisgender heterosexual man asked to experience the life of a Latina, cisgender queer woman. We examine her chapter “*Dream House as an Exercise in Point of View*” and the transition readers make with Machado as we separate the first person, present tense perspective of the author from the second person, past tense perspective. As we reckon with the abuse Machado endured and its aftermath, we simultaneously consider the mechanics of her presentation and its impact on readers.

My pedagogy has evolved post-tenure to include a scaffolded approach that prepares students to meet the course’s writing goals. I’m pleased to see students recognize explicitly what they’ve learned in my classes. In those same Fall 2020 CIEs where students noted my passion and enthusiasm, they discussed their improved critical engagement and writing. One student wrote: “This course focused on reading and writing. If I am being honest, this was one of the first classes where I actually read all of the course materials and finished the books. I was extremely engaged in the class and my grades and performance improved.” Another commented: “The consistent written assignments improved my writing technique and my ability to critically analyze literary works. Since the content of the work relates to societal issues, it broadened my view on clear flaws in civilization.”

While I have often included television and film as texts to complement my literature courses, my post-tenure teaching schedule now includes three courses devoted to television studies. Contemporary visual narratives, like their print peers, concern themselves with racial, gender, and social inequities but package these examinations in a medium that students are less likely to evaluate critically. My early work in these classes shifts students from passive to active viewers as I ask them to interact with these narratives in a new way. In my CIEs for my ENG 344 “TV as Storytelling,” one student noted: “I will never view any filmed entertainment in my old way as I have become more aware of camera work, lighting, and dialogue for each character.” Another said: “It was really fun to think about TV in this way. I never would have thought to analyze a show like *Stranger Things*, and it made me a more active viewer.”

In its concluding paragraph on teaching, the English Department “expects candidates for promotion to Professor to exhibit ongoing interest in teaching improvement.” Although my course topics change, the structure of my classes is refined through constant, deliberate reflection. When I had a particularly frustrating semester where a few students dominated class discussion, I crowd-sourced my departmental colleagues as to their approaches to remedying this problem (Professors Russell and Boles were particularly helpful); the discussion facilitations outlined on my Canvas page were one successful solution to this problem. As you’ll see in the assessment of my scholarship, the pedagogical research I’ve published as an associate indicate continued “interest in teaching improvement.”

Scholarship

A key component of the seminar-style environment for which I strive is the way my own research often flows from and to the courses I teach. Over the past three summers, I have been fortunate to work with two students on Student Faculty Collaborative Research projects (one of which is part of this promotion file). I have found an associate professor's research life immensely rewarding and have appreciated the interconnectedness of my teaching and scholarship.

In its criteria for research and scholarship, the English Department expects candidates for promotion to professor “to have a book or five articles/essays (print/electronic).” I have published three pieces of pedagogical scholarship since submitting my materials for tenure. My chapter “Challenging the Discipline: First-Year Seminars and the Benefits of an Interdisciplinary Model” in the Rutgers University Press collection *The Synergistic Classroom: Interdisciplinary Teaching in the Small College Setting* evolved from teaching back-to-back RCCs in 2016 and 2017. At Rollins we attempt to prepare students for college, providing essential academic skills that introduce them to our disciplines and ensure their success. As my title indicates, I show how these courses would be more effective if they abandoned their disciplinary focus for an interdisciplinary model emphasizing skills and exposing students to a range of analytical approaches. In a special issue of *Interdisciplinary Humanities* entitled “Bridging the Gap? Digital Media in The Literature Classroom,” “Television as Text: *True Detective* in the Introduction to Literature Classroom” makes a different kind of (inter)disciplinary argument. Although film has long been a part of the canon in the literature classroom, television has often been dismissed as a medium unworthy of critical attention. Contemporary television provides not only texts worthy of that attention but also an accessible medium with which students in introductory classes are more familiar. My final pedagogical publication—“‘Dope on the damn table’: Narrative Discourse in *The Wire* and African American Literature”—joins the work of other scholars as we consider the impact of HBO's groundbreaking show. An expansion of an earlier essay that appeared in *Teaching American Literature*, I demonstrate the value of *The Wire* as “a framing device for our study of black narratives... [that] force[s] students to accept discrimination not as a part of our historical past but as a dominant influence on our historical present and future.”

I have published four additional critical essays; combined with my pedagogical work, I surpass the department's minimum criteria for promotion. These seemingly disparate essays are connected by their focus on race, the archive, and/or interdisciplinarity. Part of a special issue of *The New Americanist*—an American Studies journal that focuses this collection on African American archival projects—“‘Ho for Kansas!': Poetic Expressions in African American Newspapers of the Middle West” examines poetry created by local citizens and published in 19th century Black newspapers. I focus on two poets, who provide readers with “clear lessons about right and wrong and encouragement for the Kansans who

would enact them. When studied together, these poems portray an African American community in Kansas that is defiant, unapologetic, and optimistic about their future.”

In a critical publication co-authored with Professor Emily Russell, the African American community is featured through a more contemporary media platform. “#DrySeptember: Reading William Faulkner through the Lens of Black Twitter” makes a novel argument: both Faulkner’s short story “Dry September” and Black Twitter “demonstrate how community and identity—among both dominant and marginalized groups—are contested and constructed through discourse and around an off-stage or absent center of racial violence.” This article was awarded the 2019 Jerome Stern Prize for Best Article in *Studies in American Culture*.

Springing from our SFCS summer research, Emily O’Malley and I co-authored “‘A prison of our own sins’: The Unacknowledged Legacy of 19th Century Slave Narratives in HBO’s *Westworld* and Hulu’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*” in UNLV’s *Popular Culture Review*. Like my previous two critical publications, this one considers race in contemporaneous media. But here, we are concerned with how (White) storytellers employ African American historical experiences for the gain and development of their (White) protagonists in their bid to cast them as victims of oppressive patriarchies.

Like my other works, “Precious Resources: Cultural Archiving in the Post-Apocalyptic Worlds of *Mr. Burns* and *Station Eleven*” is concerned with the historical record, preservation, and how cultures reflect the persons within them. Published in *Text & Presentation*, it focuses its attention on how the two texts value culture and attempt to preserve the historical record in worlds disrupted by apocalyptic events. Both authors “critique the worlds in which this privileging occurs and argue instead for one that is both egalitarian and miscellaneous. These acts of cultural preservation, when they are inclusive, can aid in the formation of new communities and the processing of grief for the old ones, including the inhabitants of those worlds left behind.”

“Precious Resources” developed from a presentation I delivered at the 2019 Comparative Drama Conference and my teaching of the critical texts. The English Department expects candidates for promotion to professor “to have engaged in a pattern of continuing scholarly activity.” As my CV indicates, I meet this requirement with conference presentations. While I enjoyed engaging with other scholars in discussions of literature, media, and pedagogy, I was proud to deliver a joint paper with my student, Molly Fulop, on our SFCS research; there’s nothing quite like seeing an academic conference through the eyes of a first timer.

Service

My teaching and scholarship have been informed by my passion and media interests, but they have also been guided by a significant change in the student population I served as an associate professor. I was teaching almost exclusively Holt students; I now instruct CLA students in most of my classes. This has affected how and what I teach, allowing me to pursue research opportunities with two CLA students I detailed in the previous section. But in terms of service, the most significant growth I experienced as a faculty member came with my acquisition of CLA advisees.

In its service criteria for promotion, the English Department affirms the “variety of ways in which faculty may fulfill such obligations to students, colleagues, and the institution,” including “both first-year and major advising.” As I discussed in “Challenging the Discipline,” I taught three RCCs from Fall 2016 through Fall 2018 and acquired close to 50 CLA advisees. While managing the number of advisees was a particular challenge, the quantity of sessions allowed me to improve their quality. If I had initially approached advising as a limiting relationship between student and faculty where the end goal is the selection of courses leading to graduation, I soon learned the importance of developing a mentoring relationship in which the student could discuss issues relevant to their whole life at Rollins. These conversations—ranging from career guidance to depression to sexual assault—are difficult and time-consuming. In the years I taught RCC, they would often take the bulk of my time in a given week. These conversations are an unacknowledged part of faculty work, but they are often the most essential ones I’ll have during a semester.

As President of the CLA Faculty, I used time at the 2019 Faculty Retreat to focus on these difficult conversations, allowing faculty to share best practices as we acknowledged publicly the work we so often do in private. I serve as a faculty representative on the JED Campus Team and the Postvention Committee, two groups working to improve the mental health of students, faculty, and staff. My interest in this work resulted from the struggles I see our students having as they attempt to navigate college in the 21st century. As I advocate for more student help, I often remind my committee members that faculty, too, need access to these resources as they process what they hear and experience from their students.

Although we have no formal process for evaluating advisors, I was selected as the 2019 Professing Excellence recipient, awarded for excellence in first-year advising. I have been fortunate to serve as a RCAM since 2018 and have been recognized in several of the year-end Advising Appreciation presentations from Gabriel Barreneche and Tiffany Griffin. In 2019, I was individually acknowledged for my advising work with highlights from two of my students. One wrote: “[Dr. Reich] is like a mix between a professor, a paternal figure, and a friend for me. Whether it’s helping me pick my classes for next semester, letting me

bounce ideas for a paper off of him, or supporting me by giving me tissues and advice when I'm going through a tough time, he is the person I trust more than anyone else on campus." Another wrote: "When I lost a friend last semester to suicide I even considered transferring to a school abroad to give myself a chance to start anew and forgive myself and others for what happened before. Through all of this, and most recently, he has stepped up as my advisor and my friend, pointing me in the right direction, making me laugh, assuring me that I am capable of great things." These comments represent the work I try to do as an advisor, which isn't limited to two cursory appointments a year but requires sustained engagement with students working through both personal and academic challenges.

Besides advising, the English Department recognizes "participation in service to the Department" as a way to fulfill this obligation. My most visible service to the department post-tenure has been my three-year term as department chair from June 2016-August 2019. In some ways, my experiences administering the Holt English program prepared me for this position; I had for some time worked on the department's course schedule and helped manage conversations with the Dean and Registrar's office about enrollments and staffing. I was less prepared to handle personnel issues and worked closely with Dean Cavanaugh over my first two years to resolve them in ways we hoped were fair and equitable. These experiences were, for me, draining and upsetting but also instructive. I learned to communicate more effectively, to send fewer emails, to have more in-person conversations. To listen. All qualities I hope have served me well as faculty president.

I feel fortunate that in my time as chair our department successfully shepherded two colleagues through their mid-course reviews and a third colleague through his first two annual reviews. We developed two new major/minor maps, and I led the effort to rewrite our entire course catalog, a document that hadn't been overhauled in nearly two decades. This rewrite clarified the department's distribution requirements and established media as one of three primary genres for our curriculum. While the pragmatic part of me was pleased that we found common ground in these curricular questions, my proudest moment as department chair was as its representative before the CLA faculty in November 2018 when we moved that our colleagues endorse the college's non-discrimination policy. To see Professors Hudson and Jones unify our department, our faculty, and our campus through their initiative was something special.

As I completed my third year as department chair, I understood that some issues I was passionate about—faculty workload, student wellbeing, curriculum—were ones I couldn't completely address as chair or a faculty member. As President of the CLA Faculty, I could. Early in my presidency, I created space in faculty meetings for open conversation between faculty. These conversations centered on issues like student health and faculty work life, to both build comradery and encourage administrators and governance committees to take

on these issues. With the support of the Executive Committee, I charged an ad-hoc committee to examine the “Service” category of our tenure and promotion criteria—with a particular emphasis on advising. Their report clarified the time faculty devote to service work even as we rarely receive credit. It also established the importance of advising and sought to expand its formal definition.

My experiences as department chair prepared me for the first nine months of my presidency. Nothing could have prepared me for the last nine. The impact of COVID-19 not only disrupted our meeting schedule, place, and format; it also shifted focus from issues we wished to tackle to new problems that affected the entire campus. As a member of the COVID Financial Strategic Planning Task Force, I worked with other EC members, staff, and administrators to develop strategies for balancing the AY2020-2021 budget in anticipation of reduced enrollment and associated income. This time-consuming, difficult work required each of us to balance our constituents’ interests with those of the college. I hope we never need to revisit income deficits; this work was the most important I performed for the faculty in my first year as president.

My two years as President of the Faculty satisfies an additional service requirement for my department—“service on all-college or ad hoc committees, or holding offices within the faculty”—but it is difficult to quantify. My CV attempts to list the many responsibilities I had as president (chairing search committees, delivering addresses at commencements, etc.), but I suspect my greatest impact will happen as chair of the Curricular Optimization Task Force, a group of faculty and administrators charged with examining course enrollments, course planning, credit hours required for graduation, and other larger curricular issues. Our recommendations will help shape the curriculum and faculty at Rollins for years to come.

As I reflect on the last six years of my professional life, it seems foolhardy to predict what my next six will look like. I do know that I’ll continue to be guided by my love for literature and media, and the joy I feel when our students exhibit similar passion. I suspect this will dictate the research and service projects I undertake, and I expect to approach those with the same energy exhibited throughout my career at Rollins.