

Research Scientist Appointment & Promotion Criteria
Review Committee
Summary Recommendations - November 2025

Introduction

The University of Michigan employs hundreds of faculty across campus on the research scientist track, whose work is essential to the university's research mission. The initial research faculty track was established in 1974 with current appointment and promotion criteria for research scientist and research professor tracks established in 2008. Research professor criteria were re-evaluated in 2022. Minor updates were made to research scientist criteria in 2018 and 2024. In 2025, this effort represents the first comprehensive review of RS criteria since 2008.

This memo summarizes the findings and recommendations of the Research Scientist Appointment and Promotion Criteria Review Committee (RSCR), which was charged in January 2025 by the Vice President for Research and Innovation. The committee, chaired by Lisa Prosser, was tasked with reviewing existing criteria for appointment and promotion on the research scientist (RS) track to ensure they optimally reflect the contributions of RS faculty, particularly in the context of team science.

Committee Charge and Process

The committee included faculty affairs leaders from academic units with the highest numbers of research scientists, as well as representation from the Provost's office and research scientist faculty. The overall goals of the committee were to make recommendations as to whether the existing criteria remain appropriate in their current form or whether they should be amended to better reflect the diverse contributions of research scientist faculty to the university's mission.

Recommendations

The committee considered the following set of related data and information: (1) benchmarking of research faculty criteria across a representative selection of public and private peer institutions, (2) promotion criteria for staff scientists and for research professors, and (3) internal data on hiring patterns, principal investigator (PI) status, and average time-to-promotion.

The committee met from March through October 2025 and developed the following recommendations:

1. Revise appointment and promotion criteria to reflect additional types of scholarly contributions. The revision below serves to distinguish research scientists from staff scientists by recognizing this broader set of contributions.
2. Revise criteria to remove required PI status for 'full' Research Scientist. This change more fully recognizes the team science role of research scientists and also serves to better differentiate the research scientist promotion pathway from the research professor pathway.
3. For research scientists, replace requirement for 2 arm's length external letters with requirement for minimum 2 non-arm's length external letters; with a total of 5 internal/external letters required, again to better reflect the team science role of research scientists.
4. Provide more transparent information on time-in-rank extensions (but keep current time-in-rank requirements unchanged).
5. The committee also discussed climate issues for both research scientists and research professors and recommended that a separate working group be established to specifically consider these issues.

The Grid and suggested recommendations

Performance Area		Associate Research Scientist (ARS)	Research Scientist (RS)	
Scholarship	OVPR Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong local and growing national scholarly reputation on the basis of research productivity and contributions over several years, possibly as part of a larger research program Record of peer-reviewed publications Scholarly contributions that serve to advance the field and/or strengthen the scientific community Participation in relevant academic or professional meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong regional, national and/or international scholarly reputation on the basis of sustained research productivity and contributions Substantial record of peer-reviewed publications Significant, sustained participation in scholarly activities that serve to advance the field and/or strengthen the scientific community relevant academic or professional meetings 	
	Implementation of Criteria	Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Productive over several years, possibly as part of a large program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustained productivity and contributions
		Peer-reviewed Publications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Growing record of peer-reviewed publications: although majority of contribution may be part of large author teams, demonstration of leading the output, writing of some scholarly work expected as typically measured as lead author on some publications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Substantial record, although majority of contribution may be part of a larger author team
		Academic / Professional Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in relevant academic or professional meetings; leadership/service to academic or professional societies, or Activities contributing to advancing the field (e.g., peer review, editorial positions, leading data training and dissemination, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significant and sustained participation in relevant academic or professional meetings; leadership/service to academic or professional societies, or Activities contributing to advancing the field (e.g., peer review, editorial positions, etc.)
Reputation Impact (scientific, policy, public)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong local and growing regional or national Some 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong regional, national and/or international Significant 		
Independence	OVPR Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independence not required or planned for, but would strengthen the case Plan for supporting role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independence not required or planned for, but would strengthen the case Significant and sustained participation on research projects in a team science role A Record of independent scholarship/scientific contributions, and/or Significant scientific managerial responsibilities such as supervision and mentorship of other research faculty 	
	Implementation of criteria	Intellectual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong evidence of scholarly contributions (see attached memo) Evidence of substantial supervisory role over defined area, e.g., Core Director
		Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of proposal efforts as Co-I 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of proposal and awards as Co-I Evidence of success with external funding as PI or Co-PI/MPI or substantive Co-I role with fiscal responsibility (e.g. modest size awards, including modest size foundation, industry and other small external funds or Site PI / Co-I with scientific and fiscal responsibility for a core or clearly-delineated scientific aim) not required, but would strengthen the case