

FAQs about Professional Information Files (PIFs) from the RTP Personnel Planning and Review Committee

There is much lore surrounding the requirements for the structure and contents of the Professional Information Files—the PIFs. In order to help RTP candidates create the most effective documents, and to help reviewing agencies who may advise them, we have gathered a number of questions about PIFs, and have tried to provide clear and constructive answers—as best we know them—to these questions.

Question #1 “What’s RTP? And what’s a PIF and what’s a PAF?”

Acronyms, for better or worse, abound in most institutions, and CSUN has its fair share. Three acronyms frequently are used in the personnel process and it’s essential to define them at the outset. **RTP** refers to “retention, tenure and promotion” and often is used as a short-hand notation for the personnel process.

The other two acronyms (**PIF** and **PAF**) refer to personnel files. Section 606 of the CSUN Administrative Manual authorizes two personnel files. While the focus of this document is the PIF, it’s helpful to distinguish the PIF from the PAF. The Professional Information File (PIF) is a file produced and maintained by the faculty member that contains information used in the RTP evaluation process (see Section 606.1.1). The Personnel Action File (PAF) is the official personnel file that is the property of the University (and kept in the office of the College Dean) that contains specific materials relevant to personnel actions (see Section 606.1.2), and is used in the process of evaluation of faculty (including RTP).

Question #2 “Why do we create these files?”

The RTP process requires that faculty under review submit a PIF. All tenure track faculty who are being reviewed for retention, tenure, or promotion (or some combination of these) “have the responsibility of establishing and maintaining a record of professional information to be submitted by the faculty member at the appropriate time for use in evaluation for retention, tenure, promotion, and service salary increase.” (606.1.1.a. *Section 600, Academic Personnel Policies and Procedures, aka The Blue Book*).

Question #3 “What goes into a PIF?”

The Blue Book specifies that the “[PIF] shall contain a current resume and such forms as the University may, from time to time, prescribe. The file shall also contain data on: 1) Professional preparation; 2) Teaching effectiveness; 3) Contributions to the field of study; 4) Contributions to the University and Community. The faculty member may include, additionally, any other pertinent support material.” (606.1.1.a. (2)) The PIF shall also include an index of the PIF contents.

Question #4 “What is ‘pertinent support material’?”

First, it is material relevant to the current review. Second, candidates should date

all materials so that evaluators can place each piece along a timeline for the review. Most importantly, candidates should consult with their Department Chairs and with the Chairs of their Departmental Personnel Committees for guidance with respect to how best to meet the requirements in what may be more specific Department RTP policies.

HINTS: Support material is likely to include copies of written submissions. The order of presentation of any copies (in a section or in an appendix) should be aligned with the CV and of course with the Index. And the order of items should present the most recent first, moving from there to the less recent work. If any of these writings are multi-authored, it's very helpful to describe the convention for ordering the authors (alphabetically, or with reference to the nature and substance of authors' contributions to the piece or the work that engendered it, for example).

Question #5 "What should go in and what can be left out?"

a. Teaching evaluations: Student and peer teaching evaluations from other campuses are not generally included in PIFs.

Summaries of student evaluations of teaching effectiveness as well as peer class visit reports are required to be in the PAF (the Personnel Action File) for at least five years. The PAF is kept for candidates' review in the College Dean's office, and candidates should review it periodically to assure that all materials specified are in place (see section 606.1.2, "Personnel Action File"). Since these evaluations are part of the PAF, they should not also go into the PIF.

Note that qualitative evaluations or free-form student comments are required to be in the PAF (Personnel Action File) along with the quantitative results.

b. Evidence of accomplishments prior to a candidate's CSUN appointment: Beyond evidence of Professional Preparation and complete CVs, which reflect full records of a candidate's activities and achievements, candidates should normally omit supporting material for activities and achievements prior to their CSUN appointments, as these are likely to have contributed to the candidates' being hired, rather than to their developing CSUN records of accomplishments.

c. Tenured candidates seeking promotion to the rank of Associate Professor or of Professor should normally omit supporting material that was used in securing a previous promotion to current rank. Any such material that is included should come with a short account of its place in the candidate's CSUN career, and with clear dates of its origin.

d. Probationary second-year faculty may include supporting material related to scholarly activities prior to the tenure-track appointment at CSUN to establish patterns of scholarly activity for themselves.

Third, fourth, and fifth year candidates should generally not include such materials. If candidates are concerned about inclusion issues, they should consult their Department Chairs, Department Personnel Committee members, and Deans.

HINTS: Bulky items, such as journals or books should be part of an appendix. Use a minimum of plastic sleeves. Photocopies of letters or other original documents unsheathed are preferable to sheathed originals. No multi-page document should be placed into a plastic sleeve; reviewers will be loath to extract it for examination.

Candidates might include extra copies of their Vitae, so that reviewers may check those out independently if the PIF itself is being read. These can be available in the Dean's office with PIFs and PAFs. If a candidate has worked with or in another language, abstracts, précis, and relevant translations of the work, where necessary, are very helpful to reviewers, few of whom will speak all of the languages candidates are likely to work with or in.

Question #6 "How do I document service to the University and Community?"

Listings of committee membership and of other related activities will be part of candidates' CVs. Supporting materials in the PIF related to this area of candidates' careers should include only the highlights. It is not advisable for candidates to place minutes of all meetings attended, or to include memoranda with calls to meeting, for example. A report, or a piece of work done on behalf of a committee or for a community project, for example, would all constitute "highlights." Also to be included in this category would be a description of one's responsibilities and activities for each relevant service experience that appears in the CV.

Question #7 "Is there a general 'rule of thumb' about what goes into the PIF?"

There are a few. Sensitivity and awareness of one's audience are important. Also important is the understanding that committees are reading multiple PIFs in a relatively brief time. Clarity, organization, and simplicity are crucial. Overall, candidates should make certain that their PIFs are very navigable.

The second most important rule of thumb is that *less is more*. For example, candidates should not include all four editions of a book preceding the 5th edition that has been published at the time of PIF construction and submission. Similarly, candidates should include the published copy of an article or a chapter without the many drafts preceding it.

The most important rule of thumb is for candidates to consult with their Department Chairs and Department Personnel Committee Chairs if they are concerned about the question of inclusion, or any questions in the process.

Note: *Not* included, of course, should be *any* personal identifying information about students such as grades or student I.D. numbers.

Question #8 “Are there some ways to add organization and clarity?” Here are some suggestions:

a. An introductory letter

One organizational strategy is to compose an introductory letter, of no more than two pages. This should introduce the PIF and highlight the most significant accomplishments since the candidate's appointment or last review, depending on which is most recent and relevant.

b. Interpretative notes

If there are materials whose inclusion or significance would be most clear only to someone from the candidate's own discipline, the candidate should make certain that someone outside of the field will also be able to appreciate the significance. A note about the readership of a journal or the location of a conference in a field (a national, regional, or small but competitive meeting, for example) will help explain the role of supporting material.

c. Order

The order of sections and arrangements of supporting materials should adhere to Department or College preferences, and should be clearly indicated.

Question #9: “I am concerned that because of the need to take ‘furlough days’ during the 2009-10 Academic Year, my research and scholarship, teaching, or University service may be affected. How should I account for this in my PIF?”

Faculty who are concerned that their teaching/direct instructional contributions, contributions to the field of study, and/or service to the University and community has been or may be impacted by the 2009-2010 Faculty Furlough Program may include a statement in their PIFs, either in the introductory letter or by separate document, about the impact. They may also submit a copy of the statement to be placed in the Personnel Action File.