

## Promotion strategies for property academics

Reflections from the Career Panel discussion at 31st PRRES Conference, Hobart,  
2025

### Abstract

Getting promoted is an important aspect of the development of property academics' careers. PRRES has a key role in this area to assist property academics navigate the challenges and opportunities of being promoted. This paper highlights the key issues concerning property academics attaining promotion in today's university environment, and identifies relevant promotion strategies. The authors have a diverse range of promotion experiences and will draw on these experiences to highlight key issues in promotion strategies. This is particularly relevant for Early Career Researchers (ECRs), as they navigate developing their careers as the next generation of property academics.

**Keywords:** Promotion strategies, property academic careers, universities, research, networks, Early Career Researchers

## **Introduction**

The university sector has changed considerably in recent years, seeing a reshaping of property academic careers. Property academics need to consider how they respond to these university changes in terms of moving their career forward, in particular, being promoted. So, how do property academics navigate this changing university environment in developing effective promotion strategies?

In total, the four authors on this paper have over 100 years of university experience in Australia and New Zealand over the last 50-year time period, so there is a clear depth of experience in the property academic sector. In three cases, the authors have recently been promoted to Associate Professor or Senior Lecturer, so they have recently “lived” the university promotion process and survived.

The objective of this paper is very forward-looking and seeks to assist property academics (and Early Career Researchers) develop a career promotion strategy in this increasingly challenging university environment. This is done by indicating a range of promotion strategies for property academics, with these strategies having a track record of being successful. Whilst “one size does not fit all”, and different universities have different priorities and procedures required for different levels of promotion, it is possible to select elements of this overall promotion strategy as needed. Our focus in this paper is on promotion strategies that are relevant at all levels for property academics in their career development. This paper is also based on a panel session held at the 31<sup>st</sup> PRRES conference in Hobart in January 2025, which was very well-received.

### **Associate professor Dulani Halvitigala: Comments**

Dulani Halvitigala is an Associate Professor in Property at RMIT University. She brings considerable experience to property education and research, having worked at universities in Australia and New Zealand, before moving to RMIT. Dulani was promoted to Associate Professor at RMIT in 2023, bringing recent experience of successful promotion strategies.

Dulani's role in this paper is to provide the context and literature concerning getting promoted. There is a wide body of knowledge regarding academic careers and promotion, both in the general university context and in the property discipline.

There are numerous papers on various aspects of property academic careers. These include aspects such as property research publication trends/directions (e.g.: Chan *et al*, 2008; Weeks *et al*, 2007), research impact (e.g.: Newell *et al*, 2022), career challenges and opportunities (e.g.: Manning and Roulac, 2001; Newell, 2007; Newell *et al*, 2023), promotion issues (eg: Manning *et al*, 2007; Newell *et al*, 2023), role of practical experience (Hardin, 2000), and property education trends (e.g.: D'Arcy and Taltavull, 2009). In this paper, we will focus on promotion strategies for property academics.

These property publications have been supported by a wide range of publications in the higher education journals that relate to general academic career issues across a wide range of disciplines, such as mentoring/support systems (e.g.: Eliasson *et al*, 2000; Kirchmeyer, 2005), life balance and parenting (e.g.: Harris *et al*, 2019; Sallee *et al*, 2005), online learning (e.g.: Marasi *et al*, 2022), discrimination (e.g.: Filandori and Pasque, 2021), gender roles (e.g.: Long *et al*, 1993; Nielsen, 2016), international careers (e.g.: Jepsen *et al*, 2014), and academic success/promotion (e.g.: Nguyen *et al*, 2014; Ortlieb and Weiss, 2018; Smith *et al*, 2014; Todd and Bird, 2000; Van Balen *et al*, 2012).

However, many of these papers are now dated and do not capture the recent important changes relating to the dynamics of academic promotions today. We will focus on academic promotion strategies, particularly focused on ECRs. The added value of this paper is the identification of promotion strategies that the authors have used in their recent successful promotion applications.

### **Associate Professor Connie Susilawati: Comments**

Connie Susilawati is an Associate Professor in Property at QUT. She brings over 30 years of experience in property education and research. Connie was promoted to Associate Professor at QUT in 2020, so she brings a major understanding of the current promotion processes in universities. Connie reflects on the promotion process at QUT and possible future changes.

A promotion can be considered comparable to applying for a higher-level job; in many cases, universities expect you to be doing the job already, even before promoting you. Often, you will be asked to classify your performance as good, excellent, outstanding, to a world leader. It is important to be realistic in your evaluation. It helps if you can clearly show that you will be excellent in this higher-level position and clearly show your future trajectory and how you will add value in this new role.

Generally, there are three criteria that are assessed in the promotion process:

Research (publications, research income, PhD supervision); typical weighting is 40% of the employed hours.

Teaching and Learning (evidence is needed of teaching quality; typically, over three years); again, the typical weighting is 40% of the employed hours.

Leadership and Engagement (internal and external); typical weighting is 20% of the employed hours.

These criteria weightings may vary depending on the level of promotion being sought; higher-level promotions require a stronger focus on research. Importantly, you need to cover all three criteria at all levels of promotion.

Recent years have seen changes to the promotion requirements for most universities. These include changes of the 'framework' or 'benchmark' regarding research activities, where today, there is much less focus on quantity metrics and much more focus on quality and impact metrics. Impact goes beyond the standard h-index and number of citations, to also involve impact on industry, government, society and environment. It is more difficult to show these broader aspects of impact, but you need to think about what impact you have achieved in your research. Often, you are asked to indicate your top 5 papers and why they have had a real impact.

Some universities have also brought in restrictions if you miss out on promotion. They will restrict your number of applications, even recommending that you wait for a specified number of years before re-applying to the next level. You can sometimes request to apply earlier if you can show significant improvement since the last application. This is often the case at the professor level promotion. In other cases, you cannot re-submit the following year after being rejected two years in a row. So, reflect carefully on whether you have a strong case; get a colleague to give you frank feedback on your case, and see if there is room for improvement.

Other supportive developments include informal promotion clubs within the university to support colleagues in the promotion process. Take advantage of these developments, as you often meet colleagues in other disciplines and see how they view promotion through a different lens.

Finally, for academic promotions, PRRES has a key role. PRRES is the main 'meeting' for academics in the Pacific-Rim region. Whilst promotion has university-based requirements and differences, there is a property discipline norm. To facilitate this, there is a proposal to establish a PRRES Academic forum to discuss promotions and potentially other career-building topics to support our property colleagues. This would be an online meeting in between the regular PRRES conferences, conducted in a 'café style' format. This would see a sharing of experiences. Other aspects are a course leaders' forum, mentoring and teaching support, particularly for Early Career Researchers with limited property industry backgrounds who have come directly from their PhD into being a property academic. A PRPRJ special issue may also be considered going forward. PRRES will keep you informed on developments in this area.

### **Dr Mustapha Bangura: Comments**

Mustapha Bangura is a Senior Lecturer in property at UTS. He has worked at several universities in developing his academic career (*e.g.*: WSU). Mustapha has publications in leading property journals and has a strong teaching track record. Importantly, Mustapha was promoted to Senior Lecturer at UTS in 2024, so he brings significant recent experience of the current university promotion processes. Mustapha will reflect on this recent promotion to Senior Lecturer and the critical factors in his promotion.

It is important to maintain a balanced approach by actively doing research, teaching, and service and engagement activities.

In the research domain, Mustapha had a clear strategy to target A/A\*/Q1 property journals, benefiting from critical comments from the referees to help shape his research capability. Also, he consistently attended the PRRES conference, plus explored attending future

ARES/AsRES/ERES conferences, with their benefits including networking, and familiarising himself with evolving research themes and methodologies.

Media engagement was also seen as important for highlighting the impact of his research; this included The Conversation, which is a very high-profile media opportunity. He also provides support to other HDR students in their thesis research, both as a support player as well as wanting exposure to other research methodologies.

In the teaching domain, Mustapha adopts teaching strategies that enhance the industry relevance of his lectures. He also coordinates and supports the delivery of several subjects to highlight his breadth of teaching coverage. Contributing to curriculum development was also important, as it enabled him being up-to-date with evolving teaching strategies. Critically important were improved SFS ratings (teaching evaluation scores), with a minimum average score of 4 out of 5; this highlighted the student evaluation of the quality of his teaching, as well as providing constructive feedback for improving his teaching quality.

In the service domain, Mustapha took on leadership roles in the School/Department/Faculty, such as Course/Program Director or Associate Director. This reinforced his leadership skills. He also took on leadership or was part of the team preparing the internal and external (*e.g.*: RICS and API) re-accreditations and annual reports. This helped him understand the big picture for the UTS property degree. He was also visibly and actively involved in School/Department/Faculty events like Open Day, Orientation, etc, to highlight the value of doing the property degree.

In conclusion, you also need the support and guidance of senior property academics in establishing your academic career. In Mustapha's case, he is very thankful to Chyi Lin Lee, Graeme Newell and Hera Antoniadis for their support and guidance over the years. Mustapha is pleased to have recently received a promotion and to be entering the next stage of his academic career as he works toward promotion to Associate Professor.

### **Professor Graeme Newell: Comments**

Graeme Newell is Professor of Property Investment at WSU. He has over 45 years of experience in property education and research, with strong links to the property industry in Australia and internationally. Graeme was promoted to Professor at WSU in 1999 (ouch) and actively supports his property colleagues in their careers. He has seen how universities have changed in recent years and brings strong insights to promotion strategies for property academics, particularly concerning the important role of networking.

Graeme's contribution to this discussion of promotion strategies is to highlight the importance of networking in your career and your role as an expert in your discipline area of property. Both academic networks and property industry networks are essential in your career.

For your academic networks, it provides you with an opportunity to develop a strong international focus to your career, resulting in joint publications, research grants, being on editorial boards, receiving invitations as a keynote speaker at conferences, and receiving major achievement awards.

The easiest way to do this is via the conferences run by the regional real estate societies; this includes ARES, ERES, AsRES and PRRES. These conferences let you hear the latest property research, but more importantly, they get you known in the wider property academic community as an expert in your discipline area. Many academics find networking difficult; it is an acquired skill and needs effort, but it will definitely be worth it.

Similarly, property industry networks are best established by staying connected to your property graduates as their property careers develop and they take on senior property industry roles. Most property graduates value their university experience very highly and are more than happy to do guest lectures for you. This will certainly increase your standing with your property students, as they soon realise you have strong property industry connections. Equally important is attending property industry conferences and being a member of the various professional associations, such as the API. Few property academics do this, but the benefits are significant. Once known in the property industry for your industry focus, the benefits include access to private, in-house and confidential data, as well as the opportunity to secure property industry research grants.

If Graeme reflects on his own experiences with networking, it was not a natural skill set for him, but he soon recognised its importance in his academic career. He had to work hard on this networking skill to make it look easy, but the benefits were highly significant. Let him highlight some wonderful examples.

In his property career, the best decision Graeme ever made was to attend the ARES and ERES conferences. He has attended these conferences each year for over 30 years. Importantly, it gave him the opportunity to become known to the wider property academic community as a top-quality player. It provided an opportunity to do publications with wonderful colleagues such as Jim Webb, Alastair Adair, Stan McGreal, Martin Hoesli, Chau Kwong Wing and Elaine Worzala. Wonderful colleagues who also became good friends. From ARES, Jim Webb became his mentor, a truly inspiring person who believed in him. Doors opened within ARES; this included meeting leading property academics, publishing in the ARES journals (such as JRER and JREPM), having his property research read via the ARES journals by leading ARES members, and getting onto major editorial boards for these top journals. All of these were amazing networking opportunities that had such an important impact on his academic career and getting promoted; it clearly showed he had international networks and connections.

Similarly, the industry networks that he had established were critical elements of his receiving industry research grants, from groups such as the API, Investment Property Forum, EPRA,



INREV and APREA. Importantly, he was known to these organisations as an expert property researcher who could be trusted to deliver a high-quality, industry-relevant and industry-readable report, clearly highlighting the property industry implications. Attending their property industry conferences was also an important element in getting known by the international property industry, often doing presentations to property industry leaders globally. It also gave him the opportunity to attend their property industry conferences at amazing venues, such as London, Athens, Madrid, Hong Kong and Singapore.

So why are these networks important for your promotion prospects? When you apply for a promotion at any level, you will require references from key players who can talk about your skills, reputation and contribution to the property discipline. They need to know you as a person and understand your fuller contribution to the property discipline. These letters need to go beyond just a restatement of your CV. So, your networks become very important in this regard. Typically, three references are needed (more at the professor level), and they are submitted directly to the promotion committee. They should be at senior levels, both local and international. Graeme has sat on many promotion committees at various universities, and these committees love this style of promotion reference where they clearly go beyond just stating the facts; they show that you are a contributor and that you are internationally-connected in the property discipline.

Graeme really enjoys writing these promotion letters for colleagues that he knows; he is only repaying what was done for him in the earlier stages of his career. Recently, he has helped Connie Susilawati, Dulani Halvitigala, Mustapha Bangura, William Cheung, Chyi Lin Lee, Olga Filippova and Michael Rehm with successful promotion letters.

What should your strategy be concerning these promotion letters? Firstly, these letters should be from senior academics you know. If you ask someone to do a letter after only having had coffee with you at a conference, the response will be poor; either no letter or one just reciting your CV. The layers needed for these promotion letters build up over time as you expand your networks. So, know potential referees for your promotion application, and conferences are the best way to do this, by meeting people and setting up your networks over time. If done correctly, these letters have a powerful impact on promotion committees. In many promotion letters today, the referee is often asked if they would employ the applicant. Make sure the answer is yes.

All the above is very positive, but what about those times when you do not get promoted? After working so hard, you will be disappointed and angry; how will you cope with this disappointment? The standard reply from people when they miss out on promotion is that the university “moved the goalposts”. But often, it is more a case of you not knowing where the goalposts are and you moving them to a space that suits your case. In some cases, you simply are not ready for this higher-level role required. So, pay attention to the promotion committee’s feedback; reflect on this constructive feedback before rushing in and applying



again in the next round. Some universities have a requirement that if you miss out on promotion, you can not apply again for 2 years; so be careful.

Overall, your networks are an essential component of getting promoted. Often, these networks become good friends after regular meetings at conferences and when they see the quality of your work. Doors will open for you; papers, research grants, editorial boards and promotions will result. All part of your amazing journey as a property academic and developing your career.

## Conclusion

It is important for property academics to understand the promotion process in universities today. Getting promoted is important in terms of your academic recognition in the property discipline, and for your self-esteem. This is particularly relevant for ECRs as they develop their property academic careers. ECRs are the next generation of property academics. The authors have provided considerable insights into the current promotion processes in universities, as well as identifying promotion strategies to enhance your promotion prospects. We wish you well in your property academic career and in getting promoted. We would love to hear your promotion story when you are next promoted.

## References

- Chan, K., Hardin, W., Liano, K. and Yu, Z. (2008), "The internationalisation of real estate research", *Journal of Real Estate Research*, Vol. 30 No. 1, pp. 91-124.
- D'Arcy, E. and Taltavull, P. (2009), "Real estate education in Europe: some perspectives on a decade of rapid change", *Journal of European Real Estate Research*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 69-78.
- Eliasson, M., Berggren, H. and Bondestam, F. (2000), "Mentor program- a short-cut for women's academic careers?", *Higher Education in Europe*, Vol. 25 No. 2, pp. 173-179.
- Filandori, M. and Pasqua, S. (2021), "Being good isn't good enough: discrimination in Italian academia", *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 46 No. 8, pp. 1533-1551.
- Hardin, W. (2000), "Practical experience, expectations, hiring, promotion and tenure: a real estate perspective", *Journal of Real Estate Practice and Education*, Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 17-34.
- Harris, C., Myers, B. and Ravenswood, K. (2019), "Academic careers and parenting: identity, performance and surveillance", *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 44 No. 4, pp. 708-718.

- Jepsen, D., Sun, J. and Budhwar, P. (2014), "International academic careers: personal reflections", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 25 No. 10, pp. 1309-1326.
- Kirchmeyer, G. (2005), "The effects of mentoring on academic careers over time: testing performance and political perspectives", *Human Relations*, Vol. 58 No. 5, pp. 637-660.
- Long, J., Allison, P. and McGinnis, R. (1993), "Rank advancement in academic careers: sex differences and the effects of productivity", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 58 No. 5, pp. 703-722.
- Manning, C. and Roulac, S. (2001), "Where can real estate faculty add the most value at universities in the future?", *Journal of Real Estate Practice and Education*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 17-39.
- Manning, C., Webb, J., Rodriguez, M., Epley, D., Newell, G., Roulac, S. and McDonald, J. (2007), "Writing for publication to ensure tenure and promotion for real estate faculty", *Journal of Real Estate Literature*, Vol. 15 No. 1, pp. 1-36.
- Marasi, S., Jones, B. and Parker, J. (2022), "Faculty satisfaction with online teaching; A comprehensive study with American faculty", *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 47 No. 3, pp. 513-525.
- Newell, G. (2007), "Challenges and opportunities for property academics", *Pacific Rim Property Research Journal*, Vol. 13 No. 2, pp. 136-145.
- Newell, G., Adair, A., Taltavull, P. and McGreal, S. (2023), Identifying career strategies for property academics. *Journal of Property Investment and Finance*, Vol. 41 No. 6, pp. 616-623.
- Newell, G., Marzuki, J., Worzala, E., Adair, A., Hoesli, M. and Rodriguez, M. (2022), "The significance of impact in real estate research publications", *Journal of Property Investment and Finance*, Vol. 40 No. 1, pp. 49-67.
- Nguyen, H., Badiozaman, I. and Ling, V. (2024), "Agency in academic promotion: Self-oriented and socially-oriented strategies amongst Australian academics", *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 48 No. 11, pp. 1609-1623.
- Nielsen, M. (2016), "Gender inequality and research performance: moving beyond individual-meritocratic explanations of academic advancement", *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 41 No. 11, pp. 2044-2060.
- Ortlieb, R. and Weiss, S. (2018), "What makes academic careers less insecure? The role of individual-level antecedents", *Higher Education*, Vol. 76, 571-587.
- Sallee, M. Ward, K. and Wolf-Wendel, L. (2016), "Can anyone have it all? Gendered views on parenting and academic careers", *Innovative Higher Education*, Vol. 41, pp. 187-202.

Smith, K., Else, F. and Crookes, P. (2014), "Engagement and academic promotion: a review of the literature", *Higher Education Research and Development*, Vol. 33 No. 4, pp. 836-847.

Todd, P. and Bird, D. (2000), "Gender and promotion in academia", *Equal Opportunities International*, Vol. 19 No. 8, pp. 1-16.

Van Balen, B., Van Arensbergen, P, Van der Weijden, I. and Van den Besselaar, P. (2012), "Determinants of success in academic careers", *Higher Education Policy*, Vol. 25, pp. 313-334.