

Case study: Sul Ross State University

Empowering faculty to share their creative stories

Discover how Sul Ross uses Interfolio to deliver a smoother review process for all faculty



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Introduction

Nestled in a small mountain town in West Texas, Sul Ross State University combines transformational education opportunities with breathtaking scenery.

With 178 tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty members, Sul Ross is able to provide an incredibly personalized experience to its population of approximately 2,000 students. Given the importance of faculty to this excellent student experience, the institution's strategic plan highlights a goal to retain and empower faculty, including providing faculty with opportunities for career advancement and pathways to upper career mobility. To support this goal, Sul Ross implemented Interfolio Review, Promotion & Tenure (RPT), which helps the institution deliver a smoother review process for faculty — especially those with unique items to include in their packet.

Themes discussed:

- Showcasing faculty work across disciplines
- Streamlined support for smaller schools
- Lightening the load for all stakeholders

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Michelle Lancaster

Director of Academic Affairs,
Sul Ross State University

With faculty-student relationships being so crucial for a smaller institution like Sul Ross, reducing the administrative burden on faculty was a priority, helping to free up additional time for them to focus on student-centered activities. Prior to launching Interfolio RPT on campus, faculty would spend a great deal of time compiling their physical promotion and tenure packet materials in binders, which would then be transported by wagon from one committee to the next and stored in various places around campus. And since each member of the committee required their own copy for review, this could mean creating up to 15 copies of a single candidate’s binder, taking away valuable time from institutional administrative staff as well. “That’s a lot of hiking around campus or digging through archives or filing cabinets — it was so time consuming,” noted Michelle Lancaster, Director of Academic Affairs at Sul Ross. “I don’t have to do all that anymore, so I appreciate this product very much. It allows me to do my job better.”

By implementing tools that simplify essential processes for faculty, institutions can better support faculty satisfaction and retention. “The easier we can make these processes for faculty, the more likely they are to appreciate the institution,” noted Lancaster. “These efforts contribute to retaining faculty, which contributes to student retention as well. If you don’t have the faculty, you’re not going to have the students – they may show up, but they’re not going to stay without quality faculty.”

Showcasing faculty work across disciplines

Digitizing faculty reviews in RPT has been particularly beneficial for faculty in Fine Arts disciplines, who often submit unique materials to help tell their stories. “If you have a four-by-eight-foot canvas that you’ve worked on for a year, the full picture doesn’t quite come across when you have to put it on a piece of paper and add it to your binder,” said Lancaster. Because Interfolio is built to enable every faculty member to tell their distinct story in a way that reflects the full scope of what they do, the digital approach is a game-changer for painters, musicians, actors, and other faculty members in the arts. “With Interfolio, you can digitally scan it, you can take photos of it, you can video it.”

Lancaster recalled a music professor who was up for tenure and submitted a video of a conducted piece rather than a written list outlining their efforts. “You can get a list of their works, but it’s just not the same as being able to click on a link to hear it, see it, and almost experience what it was like to be there. It’s so much more evocative, and you can just understand so much better what’s involved — the effort, the work, the blood, sweat, and tears.”

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Streamlined support for smaller schools

For smaller schools with limited resources, getting up and running with new technology can sometimes feel like a lot to take on. However, the small team at Sul Ross had RPT in place in just two months to support their review processes. “We were motivated!” said Lancaster. “Interfolio may be the most user-friendly platform I use. And the Services team is just spectacular — they are very responsive, and that’s made all the difference.”

After a new provost instituted third-year reviews for tenure-track faculty members, Lancaster was able to quickly create the new template within RPT. “It was really simple,” she shared. “It took me less than an afternoon to create a new process in a template.” Looking ahead, Lancaster noted that she intends to set up templates within Interfolio to streamline annual evaluations for all faculty members next. “It gives us a way to get all of their documentation in one place,” said Lancaster. “Anytime administration wants to take a look at what faculty are doing, it’s right there. Who’s doing what? What percentage of them are publishing? What percentage is actively doing research? What do our grants look like? These details can all be centralized and used for so many different things.”

Lightening the load for all stakeholders

The days of dragging around canvas wagons full of paper materials are over for the team at Sul Ross, and campus stakeholders are really seeing the benefits. “It has been easier for the administration and for faculty,” shared Lancaster. “It is so much more convenient. The whole process is faster, smoother, and more reliable — nothing gets lost between buildings or damaged.”

While having faculty make the shift from print to digital wasn’t initially mandatory as the institution rolled out RPT, Sul Ross has now completed the transition and ensures faculty are using the technology to make the process smoother for all stakeholders. “The more we can digitize things, the more processes we can put online, the better it is for everybody,” said Lancaster. “This year, we have almost three times the number of candidates who are eligible — RPT is going to be such a time-saver.”



About Interfolio

Interfolio's innovative Faculty Information System enables academic leaders to achieve strategic success and drive institutional impact. Trusted by more than 425 institutions worldwide, the Faculty Information System streamlines processes for faculty hiring and recruitment, academic appointments and timelines, activity data reporting, and reviews and promotions.

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