

Procedures for Obtaining External Letters for Tenure Review

(Created: 11/09; Revised: 10/16 & 06/17)

External review letters are a critical piece of the promotion and/or tenure dossier. It is important that the steps below are followed so that the required number and type of letters are received.

The names of external reviewers who were asked to write letters, the names of those who wrote letters, and the letters themselves are confidential and shall not be revealed to the candidate.

The departmental review committee is responsible for obtaining at least six letters from reviewers external to the University. At least three of the six letters are to be from a list of six referees proposed by the candidate. The remaining letters (a minimum of three— and preferably more than three) are solicited from a list of external reviewers selected by the committee. A target of eight letters is recommended.

The reviewers should be selected not only on the basis of their credentials, but also because their reviews would be expected to be unbiased. The reviewers should have no professional or personal interest in the candidate's promotion or tenure, as might be expected of a dissertation or thesis advisor, co-investigator on a grant, co-author, classmate, former colleague, a person who has supplied a letter of recommendation for the candidate, etc.

Normally, external reviewers will be full professors from distinguished universities with exemplary programs or faculty in the relevant field, preferably from those in the top 25 in that field. If exceptions to this guideline are proposed, they must be justified in the initial request to the Dean.

In the spring of the academic year prior to the one in which the tenure/promotion review is to be completed:

1. Obtain from the tenure/promotion candidate the names, titles, brief bio-sketches, and contact information for at least six prospective external reviewers. Although the University is obligated to use names from a candidate's list, the reviewers the candidate suggests will be most credible if they meet the guidelines above. The review committee needs to give the candidate a specific deadline for completion of this step.
2. With the candidate's list in hand, the faculty review committee identifies at least six additional prospective external reviewers and prepares a brief bio-sketch for each. The candidate's list and the committee's list must not overlap.
3. The candidate's list, the committee's list, and all bio-sketches are submitted to the Dean. This material must be in the form of a memorandum in which the source of each name (i.e., candidate or committee) is identified. If any exceptions to the guidelines are proposed, a rationale is needed.

4. When written approval has been received from the Dean, the department chair contacts prospective reviewers by email to ascertain their willingness to serve as a reviewer. Copies of email messages must be retained for inclusion in the tenure dossier.

The committee decides which reviewers to contact; however, to assure receiving at least the required number of usable letters soon enough for use in the review, at least four letters from each category (candidate-proposed and committee-proposed) should be solicited at the beginning of the process.

If the required minimum number of reviewers in each category is not obtained from the approved list, additional names must be submitted to the Dean for written approval.

5. The standard template available from the Dean's Office must be used for the preparation of letters to individuals who agree to serve as external reviewers.
6. All external letters received prior to review of the dossier by tenured faculty of the department must be placed in the dossier and thus made available for their review.