External Letters of Evaluation for Promotion and Tenure

The University of Mississippi regards tenure and promotion as essential elements of maintaining a strong environment for teaching and scholarly research. A vital aspect of the tenure and promotion process is the evaluation of a candidate's accomplishments within, and contributions to, his or her field by reviewers external to the University. The purpose of these external letters of evaluation is to provide an independent and unbiased assessment of the national and international reputation of the candidate seeking tenure or promotion. Please note that this policy applies only to faculty reviews that require external letters.

Although an individual college/school, department, or program may develop separate policies and procedures related to additional letters of evaluation, this University policy sets forth the minimum requirements that must be followed for independent, external letters of evaluation. For a candidate's dossier to move forward, a minimum of four independent external letters of evaluation are required. If more letters are required or received by the unit, all must become a part of the candidate's dossier. External evaluation letters must be written by evaluators within the candidate's field at peer institutions who hold academic rank at or above the rank to which the candidate aspires (or currently holds if the candidate is seeking tenure only). Acceptable independent external evaluators are those without a close personal or professional relationship with the candidate. Examples of unacceptable external evaluators may include, but are not limited to, dissertation/thesis advisors, former professors or students, graduate student colleagues at institutions from which the candidate received a degree, faculty colleagues at institutions at which the candidate was employed, co-authors or co-investigators, and personal friends. If the candidate's field is very specialized or narrow such that external evaluators must be drawn from those with a close professional relationship, the unit must include a justification that will appear in the candidate's dossier to explain the exception to this policy. Such exceptions should be rare. Having served together with the candidate on national committees, study sections, or conference organizations does not preclude serving as an external evaluator. Because every possible conflict of interest may be unknown, external reviewers themselves are asked to refuse an assignment if an actual conflict of interest exists.

Units may determine appropriate measures of choosing external evaluators, including the number of names the candidate may submit for consideration. Candidates may neither personally solicit external evaluators nor be a part of the final determination of external evaluators, and the final list of those chosen as external evaluators may not be shared with the candidate. The dean of the appropriate school/college, or his/her designee, must review the list of external evaluators, but such review is limited to ensuring that the external reviewer criteria of both the unit and University, as described above, have been met. Once a final list of external evaluators is determined, the department chair, or designee, will contact all evaluators requesting an assessment of the candidate's contributions in research and/or creative activity. Each evaluator should receive at least the CV and evidence of scholarly/creative activity from the dossier under consideration, copies of the appropriate unit and University policies, and the list of items the external evaluator is to include in his/her evaluation letter. The solicitation letter to each external evaluator also must include a request for the external evaluator to send, based on unit policy, his/her CV in long or short form, or appropriate bio sketch. Of the external evaluation letters received, as noted above, all must be included in the dossier, and under this policy, no more than half of those letters included in the dossier may be from an evaluator recommended by the candidate.