FROM OFFICE OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS POLICIES AND PROCEDURES HANDBOOK

3.7 External evaluations

The TIU head, chair of the committee of the eligible faculty, or equivalent individual as stated in the TIU’s APT Document, is responsible for requesting the external letters of evaluation.

External evaluation letters must be submitted on institutional letterhead and carry the evaluator’s signature. PDFs submitted electronically are acceptable as long as they are on letterhead and signed.

Under no circumstances should candidates contact prospective or actual external evaluators regarding their case at any stage of the review process, nor should they discuss their case with any evaluator or provide additional materials to any evaluator even if the evaluator initiates the contact. Such contact compromises the integrity of the review process. Soliciting external evaluators and providing materials to them is solely the responsibility of the TIU head, chair of the committee of the eligible faculty, or equivalent individual as stated in the TIU’s APT Document.

Faculty Rule 3335-6-04 (B) (3) requires that no more than one-half of the external evaluation letters in the dossier may be from persons suggested by the candidate. OAA requires a minimum of five external evaluation letters.

In order to meet this requirement, more letters should be solicited from persons not suggested by the candidate than from persons suggested by the candidate. So as not to exhaust the pool of potential evaluators, it is also best that the number of evaluators suggested by the candidate be limited to three or four.

It is the unit’s obligation to obtain the required number of evaluations and to begin the process of obtaining these letters well in advance of the review. In the event that a unit is unable to obtain the required five external evaluations, the unit must document its efforts, noting the individuals who were contacted, how they were contacted, and the dates and number of times they were contacted. The unit should notify the college and OAA as soon as it becomes apparent that it will not be able to obtain the required letters in time for the meeting of the eligible faculty. The lack of five external letters will not stop a mandatory review from proceeding, but will halt a nonmandatory review from proceeding unless the candidate, P&T chair, and the chair all agree in writing that it may proceed and will not constitute a procedural error.

All letters solicited and received must be included in the dossier unless OAA approves their removal from the review process.

To best assure meaningful and credible external evaluations while meeting the above requirement, the following suggestions are offered. Units may follow other procedures, but these have proved to work very well.

- The TIU head and/or P&T committee should generate a lengthy list of prospective evaluators who are not employed at The Ohio State University. These should be distinguished faculty (or occasionally nonacademics who have similar research credentials and experience) who are in a position to comment in an informed way both on the quality of the candidate's scholarly work and on its significance to the broader field in which it resides. External evaluators must be able to provide an objective evaluation of the scholarly work. They should generally be full professor at rank or must be at the rank above the candidate being considered unless an exception has been granted by the college (or OAA in the cases of colleges that are TIUs). They may not be former advisors, collaborators, post-doctoral supervisors, close personal friends, or others having a relationship with the candidate that could reduce objectivity. It is essential that the individual or body generating the list of prospective evaluators ascertain the relationship of those individuals with the candidate before seeking a letter of evaluation and not seek letters from persons who cannot provide an arm's-length evaluation.

- Letters from collaborators may be appropriate as a means of determining a candidate's contributions to jointly conducted work, but collaborators must not be asked to write an external evaluation. They cannot be arm’s-length since they would be, in part, evaluating their own work. Collaborators can generally be identified by examining the candidate's list of publications and grants, but the best way to avoid asking a collaborator to be an external evaluator is to ask the candidate to review the full list of potential external evaluators, to identify all who have been collaborators, and to describe the nature and timing of the collaboration. A different request letter from the one sent to regular external evaluators must be sent to research collaborators.
The candidate should be shown the list to identify any conflicts of interest or other issues that would interfere with the objectivity of the reviews, and be invited to augment it with several names of persons who meet the criteria for objective, credible, arm's-length evaluators. Unless the persons so identified do not meet such criteria and the candidate cannot offer acceptable alternatives, the TIU should make every reasonable effort to obtain at least one letter from a person suggested by the candidate. OAA does not require that the dossier contain letters from persons suggested by the candidate.

The TIU head (or dean) may choose to seek approval of the tentative list of prospective evaluators for each candidate from the dean (or OAA) to minimize the risk that the selection of evaluators will subsequently be judged inappropriate. If such approval is sought, the dean (or OAA) must be provided complete and accurate information about the prospective evaluator's credentials and relationship with the candidate.

Approximately three months before completed evaluations are due, the person designated by the TIU to solicit external evaluations should send out letters of invitation to the prospective evaluators. The letter of invitation should state expectations, due date for receipt of the completed evaluation, and the realities of the Public Records Act (see Volume 1, Chapter 8, Section 5.0). See Letter 201 in the OAA Policies and Procedures Handbook for a sample letter to external evaluators.

Evaluators who accept the invitation should then be sent the appropriate materials. All evaluators should be sent the same materials unless there is a substantive reason for differentiating among evaluators. In a case in which evaluators are sent different materials, the TIU head or chair of the P&T committee must provide an explanation to be included in the dossier. When evaluators are sent different materials (different research papers), TIUs must take care to assure that sufficient letters are obtained regarding the different sets of papers to provide a meaningful body of evaluative information about each set.

The likelihood of obtaining a useful letter is greatly increased when the evaluator is not only given plenty of time in which to review the materials, but when the nature of the requested letter is carefully explained. Evaluators should generally be asked only to provide a critical analysis of the candidate's scholarly work (at least partly on the basis of provided materials). Evaluators should specifically be asked not to comment on other matters such as whether the candidate should be promoted and tenured at Ohio State or would be promoted and tenured at their own institution.

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