

External Review Letters

Recommendations for department chairs during promotion & tenure reviews



Recommendation: Standardize the External Review Process

- Utilize the Office of the Provost template to request reviews from external experts.
- Clearly outline the purpose of external reviews in the request letter. Provide explicit information about evaluation criteria, institutional policies, and tenure/promotion expectations.
- Any adjustments should be limited to providing context regarding the teaching load and resources offered to the candidate within that department and including information on unintentional biases.
- Collaborate with faculty to standardize procedures for selecting external reviewers, encouraging a random selection process from a diverse pool to minimize representational bias.

Recommendation: Limit External Evaluation Scope

- Direct external reviewers to focus solely on assessing scholarship and professional service at the national or international level.
- Explicitly instruct external reviewers to comment on teaching aspects only if they have firsthand experience or have directly observed the candidate's teaching.

Recommendation: Provide Institutional Context and Explicit Expectations

- Include the institutional context for promotion and tenure expectations, typical teaching assignments, support structures, availability of research facilities, grant writing support, seed money, and more.
- Ask reviewers to avoid comparing the candidate to other scholars or assessing their likelihood of earning tenure at the reviewer's institution.

Recommendation: Inform Reviewers about Bias in Academia

- Inform external reviewers about unintentional biases and offer specific methods to minimize bias.
- Reference research findings on biases in student evaluations, language disparities, tenure clock stoppages, and perceptions of caregiving responsibilities.
- Integrate gender-neutral pronouns in external review request templates to prevent subconscious gender bias and ensure a more inclusive evaluation process.

Recommendation: Explicitly ask to exclude extension year(s)

- Explicitly request exclusion of tenure clock extension year(s) and guidance to ensure uniform and equitable assessment of candidates.

Recommendation: Communicate the Impact of Recent Events

- Acknowledge the differential impact of events like the COVID-19 pandemic and post-George Floyd occurrences on faculty productivity, especially those with family caregiving responsibilities and faculty of color.

Based on: Cervato, C., Bilen-Green, C., Cockrell, M., Johnson, C.A., Koretsky, C. & Minerick, A. (2024). External Review Letters in Promotion and Tenure: Recommendations for Department Chairs. *The Department Chair*, Spring 2024, 14-16.

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