

Promotion and/or Tenure Guidance

#3: Selection of External Reviewers



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April 14, 2014
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This document 1) clarifies the requirements and expectations regarding the selection of external reviewers for promotion and/or tenure evaluations and 2) provides guidance for the process of identifying appropriate reviewers. This is arguably the most critical element in the preparation of promotion dossiers. As you prepare dossiers for the coming year, please make sure that your reviewer selection is consistent with these requirements. Experience shows that failure to do so can weaken otherwise compelling cases for (or against) promotion and/or tenure. In the extreme, the process can be significantly delayed if additional letters are called for by internal reviewers, review committees, and/or the Provost.

External Reviewers - Requirements

- The candidate may provide a list of suggested external reviewers. Encourage the candidate to suggest the most-qualified people in his/her field, including those that may not be obvious choices to non-specialists, while avoiding those with overly-close relationships.
- The department must independently create a list of possible external reviewers. If the candidate suggests a reviewer who independently appears on the department list, that reviewer is *NOT* considered to have been suggested by the candidate.
- Identify reviewers at or above the rank being sought, ideally at the rank of full professor, though an associate professor can serve as a reviewer for an assistant professor seeking promotion and tenure and even for a candidate for full professor, if that reviewer clearly represents an essential voice in the critical evaluation of the candidate's scholarship/creative practice.
- Identify reviewers at comparable institutions. Remember, the UO is an AAU university with very high research activity. That said, it is fully recognized that in some fields, the best reviewers may be at institutions that do not have the same profile.
- The department selects the external reviewers. While there is no obligation to include reviewers suggested by the candidate, it is highly advisable to do so unless the candidate has provided names only of individuals that appear to be inappropriate.
- A minimum of five substantive reviews is required for a file to move forward.

- Maintain a clear majority of reviewers 1) with no more than a professional knowledge of or relationship to the candidate, and 2) that were not suggested by the candidate.
 - If declinations to review or disclosure of overly-close relationships with the candidate result in less than a clear majority of letters fitting this description, then more letters should be sought immediately. *All* letters received must be included in the dossier, however.
 - What is an overly-close relationship? Relationships such as dissertation supervisor, research collaborator within the past five years, or co-author within the past five years should be viewed as disqualifying, just as they are under federal conflict of interest guidelines. Personal relationships – close friendship, for example – are also problematic. Many other relationships are generally acceptable, though prospective reviewers who express concern about their ability to present an unbiased evaluation or are uncomfortable playing the role of an evaluator should be excused. Further guidance will be provided upon request.
- The dossier must include brief biographical sketches for each external reviewer that provides a letter, identifying their rank and institution and providing a brief explanation of why they were selected. Any identified relationships with the candidate must also be explicitly stated here, regardless of whether they were unknown until after a letter was received {e.g., “While we were unaware of any relationship, Reviewer X ‘s letter of evaluation revealed that he co-authored a manuscript with the candidate, published in 2008.”}.
- The dossier must also include correspondence from any potential reviewers who were contacted but declined to serve. If the declination was received orally – in person or by telephone – a note to that effect should be included in the dossier.

Identifying expert reviewers

While identifying appropriate expert reviewers can be something of an art form, particularly in the context of all the preceding requirements, the Internet has greatly simplified the process, even if a candidate’s area of scholarship or creative practice is relatively foreign to you.

- Google! Type whatever words you think of as you study your colleague’s documents into an Internet search engine. (If the search results *don’t* seem to include the candidate’s contributions, consider whether you searched for the right terms.) This is guaranteed to provide interesting ideas for reviewers.
 - Let’s try to find reviewers for Ken Doxsee, a chemist who works on designing crystalline compounds in an area he commonly identifies as crystal engineering. A Google search for the string – designed solid-state crystal engineering – yields nearly 24 million hits, while adding the word chemistry to the string still delivers over 17 million hits – better but not very helpful. Adding the word professor drops the hit count to 3.5 million, and for the first time nearly all the hits are to professors of chemistry working in similar areas. Take your pick!

- If your colleague’s scholarship has appeared in the form of published documents (including books), examine the reference lists in these documents. Look in particular for scholars whose work is cited several times. If you don’t know the scholar, Google them to determine whether their scholarship is appropriately related to your colleague’s or only marginally so.
- Searching citation indices for published articles that cite your colleague’s work is also guaranteed to identify potential reviewers. Many such indices are available through the UO Library (<http://onsearch.uoregon.edu/databases/alphabetical>).
- What if your colleague’s work is so narrowly-defined that there are only a few potential reviewers worldwide, and they all seem to work together? While some input from this community is appropriate, it is wise to take a step away from the area, identifying “generalists” who can comment on the position of your colleague’s field more broadly. Perhaps your colleague is viewed as THE world expert in “area X” ... but perhaps the broader scholarly community no longer views “area X” as a legitimate endeavor. This context is very important to ascertain.
- Cross-check to avoid inadvertent conflicts, particularly in the form of co-authors, former mentors, or former students.
- Try to avoid asking your colleague’s close friends or former classmates to serve as reviewers, though it can be difficult to recognize such relationships *a priori*. Should a potential reviewer reveal such a relationship in advance of providing a letter of evaluation, it is best to excuse them from serving as an evaluator.
- Similarly, avoid asking those who may be biased due to academic or artistic competition, though again this can be difficult to anticipate in advance. One useful way to help avoid these situations is to invite your colleague to provide a short list of those that he/she would prefer *NOT* be used as external reviewers.
- Is the potential reviewer outside the US? In general, this is not a problem. While the reviewer may or may not be familiar with the tenure and promotion process or its requirements, the primary information you are seeking is a critical evaluation of your colleague’s scholarship or creative practice. The reviewer’s professional evaluation should be valid regardless of where he or she lives or works, and that evaluation is then weighed internally in the context of other evaluations received.

Guidance document #4 will address the solicitation of external reviewers.