

MEMORANDUM

External Consultation for Applications for Tenure or Promotion to Ordinary Professor

Appendices:

1. Sample letter of solicitation of external reviewers
2. Suggested time line for the solicitation process
3. Policy Online Review of CAP applications and access to external review letters

Background

The external assessment of candidate qualifications is required for cases of tenure and promotion to ordinary professor, and is optional in other cases. The CUA *Faculty Handbook* (II-C-11. 125) describes consultation with external reviewers in cases of tenure and promotion as follows:

Reviewing bodies considering a full-time tenure-track faculty member or full-time contract faculty-member for appointment or promotion to Ordinary Professor or for appointment with continuous tenure must establish the candidate's standing within the field in which the proposed appointment is to be held. For this purpose, a careful evaluation of the candidate's achievements will be undertaken in consultation with specialists outside as well as within the University. Such consultation should include the candidate's publications and professional activity and, where pertinent, the candidate's teaching and service record elsewhere. The extern specialists should include Faculty members from academic institutions of distinguished reputation. External consultation should be sought by the University only when an appointment or promotion is associated with full-time tenure-track faculty or full-time contract faculty and not for cases of part-time faculty or "non-permanent" full-time faculty.

This memo reflects the discussion of the CAP Implementation Committee (the "Committee") and is based in part on a memorandum written by Professor L.R. Poos, former Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences, following a 2004 Deans' Conference. The concern then, as now, relates to clarifying what is being asked of the external reviewers and how their reviews should be evaluated by those who actually vote on CUA tenure and promotion cases.

The suggestions contained herein strive to arrive at a consensus regarding a best-practice procedure, but should not be considered a rigid template. The procedures recommended also do not supplant anything contained in the *Faculty Handbook*.

The charge given to externs

The CUA *Faculty Handbook* (II-C-11. 125) as quoted above makes it clear that the principal task

of external reviewers is to serve as expert witnesses regarding the applicant's professional activities and published research (or its equivalent, in fields where publication is not the primary vehicle for research-equivalent work). With that task in view, and in keeping with longstanding practice, the CAP Implementation Committee agreed that letters of solicitation for external reviews should invite externs to comment on the quality, originality, and significance of the applicant's work.

In order that they be able to offer an adequately comprehensive assessment of the candidate's merits, extern reviewers should receive the complete dossier of works included by the candidate in the tenure or promotion application, together with a copy of the candidate's *curriculum vitae*. Where it is appropriate that extern reviewers be asked to review in detail only a representative sample of the candidate's work, the solicitation letter should also clearly request an overall assessment of the candidate's "standing in the field" and "achievements." For applications for promotion, or for applications for tenure conjoint with application to promotion, the comprehensive extern assessment, though based on the candidate's entire body of work, should pay particular attention to work done since the last appointment or promotion.

For disciplines in which the publication of some or all of the work pertinent to the candidate's application does not take printed form (as for example, a musical composition or performance), externs should be provided with copies of that work whenever possible (as an audio or video file, for example). Such work should be evaluated by the extern in a manner analogous to that employed in the evaluation of publications.

As part of the comprehensive assessment, the extern should also be asked to assess the candidate's standing in comparison with other persons in the particular field of research at a comparable stage of their academic careers. Should the candidate's record include teaching and service at some other institution, the extern may be invited to include reference to that portion of the candidate's record in his or her assessment, in which case the extern should also describe the circumstances under which he or she was enabled to appraise the candidate's teaching and service elsewhere.

The solicitation letters should ***not*** ask the reviewer to make a determination as to whether the candidate would receive promotion and/or tenure at the extern's institution or at another comparable institution. While such a judgment would undoubtedly reflect the reviewer's overall appraisal of the candidate, it would be entirely hypothetical, and for that reason should not be treated as in any way dispositive, which would be tantamount to giving the extern a proxy vote in the review process. On the other hand, the solicitation letter should also ***not*** explicitly prohibit a reviewer from making such a judgment. Otherwise stated, ***unsolicited*** speculation as to whether the candidate would or would not receive promotion or tenure at the extern's institution or another comparable institution is acceptable in an extern evaluation.

The competence and qualifications of the externs

It is expected that externs are qualified in the candidate's field. Externs must also be of equal or higher academic rank to that for which the candidate is applying, and, as stated in the *Faculty Handbook*, at least some should be tenured at "academic institutions of distinguished reputation." In cases where the extern does not have an academic appointment, his or her standing must be comparable to the academic rank to which the applicant seeks promotion. If the extern does not meet these qualifications, the cognizant departmental Chair or Dean must provide clear and compelling written justification for that extern's inclusion among those providing external reviews. It also is the responsibility of the Chair or Dean to ascertain that every extern being asked to review a candidate's qualification, including those proposed by the candidate, fulfills the requirements stated above. When the extern's academic status is not clearly evident from his or her professional title and affiliation, the Chair or Dean should request a curriculum vitae from the reviewer along with the review letter.

Letters of solicitation should ***not*** request the extern to summarize his or her qualifications to serve as a reviewer. This very question suggests that the requester has not done due diligence in determining that the extern is qualified and this would conflict with the common opening paragraph.

Factors influencing the extern's evaluation

That a possible extern may have some personal acquaintance with a candidate is certainly not an argument against his or her contributing an evaluation of the candidate's work. Nevertheless, it cannot be ruled out that a prior acquaintance with the candidate will compromise the extern's ability to provide an impartial evaluation, especially if the fact that they know one another is not openly acknowledged. In order to maximize the probative value of external reviews, externs should be asked, accordingly, to describe any acquaintance they may have with the candidate.

Other factors that bear upon the appraisal of scholarly work

The time available for faculty members to devote to scholarly pursuits varies significantly among institutions and across academic fields. Letters soliciting external reviews should therefore specify the candidate's *actual* teaching load and any administrative duties that the candidate has assumed during the period under review.

The *Faculty Handbook* (II-D-4, -5, -6) discusses the application of criteria to certain disciplines (including, but not limited to, fine arts, music, architecture, drama) that are pertinent to those disciplines. These criteria serve as the equivalent to evaluating published research for the purposes of determining merit at tenure and/or promotion. Some of these disciplines also have professional associations that publish their own guidelines for tenure review. Letters soliciting

review by externs should make clear whether the department or school in question abides by those standards.

The number of external reviews

Having a small number of reviewers means that any given case may turn on potentially idiosyncratic reviews. On the other hand, it can be quite difficult to secure a sufficiently large number of reviewers in any given case to derive a consensus picture of the candidate from the external consultation. This, in turn, is related to the consistency of the reviews. Should there be either a negative or a less than enthusiastic review, it is obviously preferable to have a larger number of letters.

Related to the question of number is the distinction between those externs nominated by the candidate and externs selected by the department chair or school dean. The *Faculty Handbook* (II C-11.127) stipulates the right of each candidate “to propose a limited number of names of externs for consideration,” though the department Chair or school Dean will draw up the final list of external reviewers.

In compiling the list of externs to be invited to review the case, the Chair or the Dean or a duly authorized Faculty member should consult other members of the Faculty, especially those with expertise in the pertinent area of research and scholarship. An effort must be made to receive the same number of evaluations from those externs recommended by the candidate and those chosen by the School or Department, and that the submitted list makes clear the origin of each extern’s inclusion.

Based on previous experience, the minimum number of letters should be six, with three (3) reviewers chosen by the department or school, and three (3) chosen by the candidate. Ideally, the number should range between six (6) and eight (8) external letters, although more can be provided.

In some academic fields, ideological or methodological divisions have been known to affect the tenor of external reviewer letters, and it is certainly incumbent upon department Chairs and school Deans to be aware of such in selecting externs. Therefore, it is good practice that chairs and deans ask the candidate whether there are prominent scholars or academic professionals in the field by whom the applicant would not want to be evaluated, in the knowledge that scholars approaching promotion and tenure may be conducting research that contradicts positions held by more well-established academics in the given field. On the other hand, Chairs or Deans should not themselves provide any indication of the names of potential externs whom they are considering.

It is sometimes the case in the extern process that a very negative review is received, one that would be considered by the Chair or Dean and all others in the candidate's area to be an outlier. Despite this fact, absolutely all reviews that are received must be included in the application to safeguard standards of academic integrity.

Recommended components of the solicitation letter for external review

A typical solicitation letter that incorporates the elements described above would consist of the following components:

1. The reason for the communication.
2. Background information about the candidate in terms of typical (and actual) teaching and administrative duties.
3. Request that the extern describe any personal acquaintance with the candidate.
4. The charges for assessment (*a careful evaluation of the candidate's achievements that includes the candidate's publications and professional activity and, where pertinent, the candidate's teaching and service record*).
5. Where pertinent, request for assessment of specific scholarly products submitted by the candidate as part of the promotion/tenure application.
6. Deadline for the receipt of the evaluation.
7. Expression of gratitude for the review and conclusion.
8. ATTACHMENTS:
 - i. A copy of the candidate's c.v., including a complete list of publications or other scholarly or artistic contributions submitted by the candidate as part of the promotion/tenure application.
 - ii. Section II-C-11. 125 from the *Faculty Handbook* for requirement and charges for the external consultation;
 - iii. Relevant sections from the *Faculty Handbook* that provide the criteria for the rank of associate or ordinary professor and/or tenure;
 - iv. Relevant sections from the *Faculty Handbook* for alternative criteria in areas in which productions are not necessarily the principal scholarly output.

APPENDIX 1

Example Letter Incorporating Suggested Elements

Dear Professor Jones:

Reason for Communication:

Dr. Jean Smith, an assistant professor in our School of _____, will submit her application for appointment with continuous tenure in late August, at which time she will also apply for promotion to the rank of associate professor. Her tenure application requires external evaluation of her scholarly work.

I am writing to ask you to serve as an external appraiser of her work in view of her application for tenure. Given your standing in the scholarly community, and your distinguished record of publication in the area of Dr. Smith's specialization, your assessment of her work would be extremely helpful to us in adjudicating a question of great importance.

The charge given to the extern:

Dr. Smith's scholarly work consists principally of a monograph on _____, a journal article on the same, and nine other journal articles on several other related matters. Dr. Smith was appointed in the area of _____. You are asked to provide a comprehensive appraisal of the candidate's publications, professional activity and, where pertinent, the candidate's teaching and service record elsewhere. If you provide any assessment of her teaching or service, please describe the circumstances that allowed you to speak to this part of her record. Your appraisal should also provide an idea of the candidate's standing within the field in which the proposed appointment is to be held.

Background information about the candidate in terms of typical teaching and administrative duties:

I would note that the standard teaching load for the members of our faculty is five three-credit courses per academic year, which consists of two semesters.

Factors influencing the extern's evaluation:

In order to maximize the probative value of external reviews, could you please describe any acquaintance you may have with the candidate.

Deadline for the receipt of the evaluation:

Were you to agree to this request, your written appraisal would need to reach this office *by the middle of November* at the very latest, since the University requires that the vote by the School's

tenured faculty on Dr. Smith's application be forwarded to the next reviewing body by the end of the fall semester. University policy requires that both your service as an extern appraiser and the contents of your appraisal be held in strictest confidence at every stage and by everyone involved in the review of Dr. Smith's application, even after a conclusion to all deliberations has been reached.

Information with this letter:

I attach with this letter her current *curriculum vitae* and a list of the publications that Dr. Smith's will include with her tenure application. A second attachment provides excerpts from the University's *Faculty Handbook* pertaining to the criteria for research and publication used by the university in reviewing applications for promotion and tenure. We seek extern evaluations based on these criteria.

Expression of gratitude for the review and conclusion:

We hope to have completed the first stage of Dr. Smith's tenure application by [early October for departmentalized Schools or early November for non-departmentalized Schools]. Were you to agree to provide an appraisal of her publications and professional activity, my office will send you copies of her publications as soon as we hear back from you.

It is, I know, no small thing that we are asking of you. Should you agree to this request, we would be greatly in your debt. But I am obliged to you even for considering it, for simply by writing to you I have imposed upon you the burden of replying. Whatever your disposition might be in this matter, please be so good as to inform me July 1.

With thanks for your consideration, and with my personal best wishes, I am,

Sincerely yours,

XY
Dean

Attachments:

- [1] Current *curriculum vitae*
- [2] List of publications on promotion and tenure forms
- [3] Excerpts regarding criteria for research and publication pertaining to the rank of associate professor and appointment with continuous tenure, *The Catholic University of America: Faculty Handbook*

APPENDIX 2

Suggested Time Line for Review Solicitation

March* (or earlier) - **Identification of prospective reviewers.** Chair of the department (in departmentalized schools) or the dean meets with the candidate to review possible names for external evaluators. Normally 10 to 16 individuals should be identified. The candidate may not suggest more than half of the names.

April (or earlier) - **First set of Solicitation Letters.** The chair or dean of the school writes to the prospective reviewers. The solicitation letter should follow the guidelines presented in this document and include the information about the candidate as described in the document. A response as to whether or not a prospective reviewer can accept the invitation and complete the review task is requested within two weeks. The deadline for the receipt of the review is September 15th.

May - **Second Set of Solicitation Letters.** A second set of prospective reviewers are contacted and sent the applicant's materials to compensate for those in the first set who decline. Deadline remains September 15th.

September 1 – First Reminder. If the external reviewer has not submitted his or her evaluation, the chair or dean reminds the reviewer of the September 15th deadline.

September 15 – Urgent Second Reminder. If the external reviewer has not submitted his or her evaluation, the chair or dean informs the reviewer of the importance of submitting a review, and the latest possible time that it can be submitted in order to meet the tenure vote timeline is September 30th.

December 15 – Submission of Application. The candidate's application for tenure and for promotion to associate professor (if necessary) must be submitted to the Office of the Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies. The application includes the entire application.

*The year for the month indicated refers to the year that the completed application is due for submission to the Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies by December 15th. Normally, this would be the sixth year of the probationary appointment, if service at other institutions is not considered.

APPENDIX 3
Online Review of CAP Applications and
Access to External Review Letters

Online Review

Review of tenure and promotion cases is through Google Drive and/or Blackboard.

Access to View External Review Letters

Only those faculty qualified to act on the matter may have access to view extramural consultation letters. In the case of concurrent applications for promotions to associate professor with appointment with continuous tenure, all senior faculty would have access, whether or not they are tenured.