External Letters of Reference

External letters of reference are required for all reviews of tenure system faculty involving the granting of tenure or promotion. External letters of reference are required in order to ensure that individuals recommended have an achievement and performance level that is comparable with faculties of peer institutions. It is recognized that practices and procedures in units may vary; however, the process of soliciting external letters of reference must incorporate the following principles and procedures, which must be applied uniformly to all faculty in the unit. Any exception to these principles must be approved by the Office of the Provost prior to implementation.

1. External letters of reference must be submitted by regular mail on institutional letterhead and carry the evaluator’s signature. When timing is critical, a letter may be submitted electronically, but must be followed by a mailed original.

2. All external letters of reference solicited and received must be included in the review materials. Unsolicited letters will not be included in the review materials.

3. If an external letter of reference is solicited and the referee fails to or declines to submit a letter of evaluation, this information shall become part of the candidate’s review materials. If a reason is provided in writing, it shall become part of the candidate’s review materials unless precluded by an agreement on confidentiality.

4. College/department/school procedures will specify the minimum number of external letters (with a recommended minimum of four).

5. The department chairperson/school director/dean of a non-departmentally organized college shall form a list of external referees. Department/school/non-departmentally organized college procedures will specify the number of evaluators to be suggested by the candidate, to which the department chairperson/school director/dean of a non-departmentally organized college (and others as provided by department/school/ college procedures) will add names. In accordance with college/department/school procedures, the chairperson/director/dean will determine which of the potential external referees will be asked to provide letters of reference. College/department/school procedures will specify a proportion or number of external letters of reference to be solicited from persons suggested by the candidate.

6. Candidates must not discuss their case with prospective or actual external evaluators at any stage of the review process, except as provided by department/school/ college procedures. Soliciting external letters of reference and providing materials to the referees is solely the responsibility of the department chairperson/school director/dean of a non-departmentally organized college.
7. External referees must be professionally capable to evaluate the candidate’s scholarly work objectively and to comment on its significance in the discipline. Letters must predominantly represent persons other than collaborators and in no case faculty formerly serving on the equivalent of the candidate’s guidance committee when the candidate was a graduate student.

8. College/department/school procedures will specify the materials sent to external referees.

9. The unit administrator’s request to an external referee must include:
   a) the unit’s statement on confidentiality, which must be consistent with the University’s statement as contained in the policy “Confidentiality of Letters of Reference for Reappointment, Promotion and Tenure Recommendations”
   b) a request to disclose any potential conflicts of interest

10. For each external referee, the unit administrator shall provide:
    a) Name, rank/title, institutional affiliation.
    b) Brief summary of the referee’s qualifications or CV
    c) Name of the person who recommended the evaluator, e.g., candidate, chairperson/director/dean, or other (specified).
    d) An assessment of the evaluator’s relationship to the candidate, including potential conflicts of interest.

Endorsed by the University Committee on Faculty Affairs on March 14, 2006 and by University Committee on Faculty Tenure on February 8, 2006