

# EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE APPROVED POLICIES

## Section III.2

### GUIDELINES CONCERNING CASES FOR PROMOTION AND TENURE

Endorsed by the Executive Committee  
Approved by the Dean May 14, 1992

These guidelines are supplementary to Communications [No. 9](#) and [No. 10](#) from the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. They are meant to provide advice concerning factors that the Executive Committee and the Dean regard as especially important in the consideration of a case for promotion or tenure in the units of the College, and in the presentation of that case for review at higher levels. This document is addressed principally to executive officers, but others involved in the review and preparation of promotion cases will find it useful.

1. **General Comments.** When you begin a mandated review of an assistant professor (i.e. one having tenure code 6), you should furnish him or her with copies of Communication No. 9 and this document. By so doing, you can ensure that everyone has a clear view of procedures and the grounds for decisions. A review undertaken before the candidate's tenure code reaches 6 may be handled less formally. See Section 7 below.

By College policy, any associate professor will receive, upon request, a full review of his or her case for promotion, if more than six years have elapsed since the time of the last full review. Each department is urged to consider the records of its associate professors in a systematic fashion, so that members are not left unjustly in rank simply from inaction.

2. **Requests for Outside Letters.** In soliciting letters of evaluation from authorities outside the University, please avoid any commentary that suggests a desired response. You may make an initial contact by telephone to ask if the referee is available to undertake the evaluation, but you may not indicate any local disposition regarding the case to the referee, and you may not pursue any line of conversation that leads toward a judgment of the reviewee's achievements and personal qualities. The same is true of the letter that you use to make the formal request for an evaluation from anyone outside the campus.

Each unit is permitted to develop its own language for this letter, although two inclusions are now required by the College.

- a. The following sentence must be included at a convenient point in your text:

The Dean of our college requests that you provide, in addition to your own

comments about this case, the names of two or three other authorities who might be consulted about it.

- b. The following paragraph must be included to address our position on confidentiality:

The policy of the University of Illinois is to hold in confidence all letters of evaluation from persons outside the institution. Only the committees and administrative officers directly responsible for the decision of concern here will have access to your letter. It will not be provided to the person on whom you comment unless we are required specifically and legally to do so.

A copy of your standard letter requesting external evaluations must be included with the papers supporting any recommendation for promotion or tenure. This requirement is a part of VCAA Communication No. 9.

Please make it clear in your letter of request that a primary concern is the progress of the candidate in the recent past. For an assistant professor, this period ordinarily coincides with the time of appointment to our faculty, but it might encompass a few earlier years, if, for example, we had hired the candidate, from a faculty position elsewhere, only a year or two before the evaluation. In the case of an associate professor who is evaluated for promotion, the focus should be on progress since the granting of tenure. If the review requires that each reviewer comment on particular written material, please send the material to the reviewer together with your letter of charge. Do not wait for the reviewer to request the material. We have often received reviews that have focused on the distant past, because the reviewer was sent nothing specific and concentrated subsequently on what he or she could recall easily.

Your letter of request should be accompanied by a fresh CV and publication list for the candidate. Reviewers also seem to find useful a brief summary of the candidate's view of his or her major accomplishments in research, so the College recommends that you ask the candidate to prepare such a statement in time for inclusion with these mailings. The same statement can be used later as the candidate's evaluative statement of research in the promotion papers. In the case of an "early" evaluation of an assistant professor, it may be unnecessary or undesirable to ask the candidate to prepare such a statement for inclusion with the letter of request. Reasons for this variation are provided in Section 7.

In requesting external evaluations, please provide enough lead time for the reviewers to examine the written materials with appropriate care.

3. **Conflicts of Interest.** An important principle in preparing a case for review is to avoid conflicts of interest. Opportunities for conflict frequently present themselves in the selection of external reviewers. To reinforce the Vice

Chancellor's language on this point, the following passage from Communication No. 9 is reproduced here:

Letters from colleagues/collaborators, former professors, mentors, and by persons of lower rank than the recommended rank of the candidate will very likely be discounted by the Committee on Promotions and Tenure as containing bias. Letters from such individuals are discouraged.

The definition of "colleagues/collaborators" is open to some uncertainty. The guiding principle is to avoid recourse if the reviewer stands to benefit from the success of the reviewee. In general, one could expect that this would be true if the two shared a common grant, were close collaborators on a common project, had coauthored articles or books, or the like. This phrase is not meant to exclude colleagues who have knowledge of the reviewee from ordinary professional contact in a community of scholars.

It is not appropriate to argue that a person cannot be evaluated except by a very small community, all of whom have a demonstrable conflict of interest of the kind described here. Scholarship of the quality that is to be recognized by promotion and tenure in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is expected to have substantial impact; thus it must affect a community substantially larger than this sort of argument can admit.

4. Choice of referees from peer institutions. Communication No. 9 from the VCAA indicates that

The outside evaluators should be chosen from institutions the department uses as peer institutions for other reviews such as salary comparisons. If the evaluator is not from such an institution, please explain why not in the description of the evaluator.

In the College and campus committees, this matter is taken seriously. There are very good reasons for choosing evaluators from peer (or better) institutions, the principal ones being that such persons are more likely than others to share our standards for promotion and tenure and to understand the environment for scholarship that exists here. If the evaluator's institution is not obviously a peer or better, please address the basis for your selection clearly in the manner requested in Communication No. 9.

The use of evaluators from industry or commerce, government agencies, or national laboratories is discouraged for the reasons that underlie this provision. If such a person is used, his or her letter should not be part of the minimal group of three required in VCAA Communication No. 9, and a clear statement should be made in the statement of his or her qualifications about the evaluator's knowledge of academic institutions.

5. **Role of the Candidate in Selecting Outside Reviewers.** Within the provisions of Communication No. 9, the candidate is granted the privilege of suggesting names of qualified external evaluators. He or she should be advised of the points covered here in Sections 3 and 4 before his or her suggestions are furnished to the department.

The candidate's list must include enough names to guarantee some degree of privacy to the external evaluators. That is, the names must not be so few, or the list so structured, that the candidate can, in effect, direct the inquiry toward particular individuals. College policy requires that a majority of the external evaluations come from the department's, rather than the candidate's, nominations. These provisions suggest, in combination, that the unit request four to eight names from the candidate, that it solicit opinions from two or three of the candidate's choices, and that it obtain a slightly larger number of opinions from others

Communication No. 9 is silent on the candidate's privilege of vetoing external reviewers. College policy is that the candidate may not be granted such a privilege unconditionally. Some units allow the candidate to indicate individuals whom he or she believes to be irrationally biased. This practice is permitted, although the candidate cannot reasonably request avoidance of more than one or two individuals. It is the unit's responsibility to consider each such request seriously, but the unit is not bound to honor the request. If the questioned evaluator's opinion is deemed particularly relevant to the case, the unit may solicit an opinion.

6. **Evaluation of Teaching.** The evaluation of teaching continues to present difficulty, and it will probably give rise to further revisions in the relevant sections of VCAA Communication No. 9 as techniques for approaching it become better refined. Experience to date suggests that the most useful evaluative statement is one prepared by a team of two or three able teachers who have examined the reviewee's teaching materials and have attended some classes. This mode of evaluation, already used in some departments, is encouraged further.

In any case, the evaluation of teaching must be made with appropriate breadth and depth. Not useful are a few selected quotations from the backs of ICES forms. The reviewing committees have no basis for judging the frequency of favorable remarks or the degree to which they might be counterbalanced, or even overwhelmed, by critical comments. It is important to include some judgment from the faculty, not students alone. Moreover, this judgment should be based on reviews of particular aspects of teaching performance, not hearsay.

Please pay careful attention to the structure of your responses on teaching. Section III.A. is meant to be a simple description (without evaluation) of the candidate's teaching activities. Section III. B. is intended to include evaluative statements. The relationship between these sections is parallel with that between Sections II and V, which deal with research and scholarship.

7. **Consideration of Assistant Professors with Tenure Code Less Than 6.** The "early" consideration of assistant professors for promotion and tenure presents some hazards and must be carried out with delicacy. The term "early" here is meant only to designate a review that occurs before it is actually mandated by the University's regulations; it does not imply a reluctance by the College or the campus to consider such a case.

The hazards arise from the fact that the early consideration of a candidate will produce a picture of scholarship and teaching that is necessarily less complete than a review conducted at a later stage. In some instances, the case may be compelling even at the early stage. In others, the reviewing committees can judge that the decision to grant promotion and tenure is best deferred. If this judgment is reached after involving the candidate emotionally in the process, it can lead to disappointment and disaffection that ultimately damages a department's interests. It is particularly egregious to incur this problem with an early promotion case, because a department normally undertakes the review only when it regards the candidate as especially meritorious. Thus a highly valued member becomes alienated, if the process is not handled carefully.

Any department undertaking a review of this kind must recognize that it cannot forfeit its freedom to defer the case simply out of fear of offending the candidate, nor can it expect the College and campus committees to forfeit their duty to conduct a serious review of actions in the department or school. Therefore, the department owes to itself the avoidance of any inappropriate implication of success to the candidate.

A case for early promotion may be developed in a manner identical to that used where the review is mandated. On the other hand, such a case should be compelling; therefore it ought to be sustainable on the basis of information collected without extensive involvement of the candidate. The department may begin its review with discreet requests for external letters without seeking names of reviewers from the candidate. If the results are encouraging toward the promotion, the department may involve the candidate by asking for his or her suggestions of reviewers in the usual manner, so that additional reviews may be obtained. If promotion papers are eventually assembled for consideration at the College and campus levels, the candidate should be invited to contribute the usual statements on teaching and research.

There may be revisions of this advice from time to time. For the present, a most important point is to avoid raising inappropriate expectations. If the candidate is deeply involved in the process, it will be necessary to caution him or her that the granting of tenure implies a very sizable commitment of resources by the University and will therefore be considered seriously at all levels.

8. **Criteria and Votes.** Communication No. 9 contains a general discussion on the criteria for promotion and tenure. One of the purposes of this section is to focus attention on principal issues for the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

Tenure has consequences of long life and great magnitude, and it should be awarded only when it is clearly in the best interest of the University of Illinois to do so. This is the overriding criterion. Several questions ought to be asked in making the test. First is whether the candidate would improve the overall quality of the unit's tenured staff. Second is whether the unit is better able to improve itself by granting promotion and tenure or by hiring afresh. Third is whether the candidate is likely to maintain his or her quality and his or her contributions to the unit (or improve them) over the long period typically involved in a tenured appointment. The department, the College, and the University ought not accept a lifetime obligation if there is substantial doubt on these points.

Votes on tenure often seem to be based on uncertain criteria, because the meaning and implications of the vote frequently remain unstated in specific terms. To sharpen the issues in a tenure case, you are urged to pose the following specific affirmation as the basis for the vote:

The candidate has made contributions of appropriate magnitude and quality in research and teaching, and has demonstrated a high likelihood of sustaining contributions to the field and to the department; therefore the granting of indefinite tenure is judged to be in the best interest of the University of Illinois.

A vote on promotion of an associate professor should be based on a similar affirmation:

Since the last promotion, the candidate has made contributions of appropriate magnitude and quality in research and teaching, and has demonstrated the ability to sustain contributions to the field and to the department; therefore the granting of promotion is in the best interest of the University of Illinois.

The required vote of record must not be taken until all evaluative materials involved in a case have been received and considered by the voting members. Normally, those voting on the case should have access to the names and qualifications of the outside evaluators and to complete, unedited copies of their letters.

Any member of the College who reads these letters is obligated by our clearly stated pledge to maintain confidentiality. (See Section 2 above.) It is unethical to disclose to the candidate, or to any person not directly involved in the decision concerning promotion, any material that can reveal the identity of any evaluator. The executive officer is responsible for reminding members within a unit of their obligations in this respect, and the Dean is responsible for reminding participants in the review at the College level.

9. **Preparation of Papers.** Effort in the preparation of papers should be devoted to the sections in which there is really something to say. Do not feel that sections must be occupied with persuasive language simply because they exist. In LAS, matters such as continuing education and even local service are frequently inapplicable to a given case. If so, leave the related sections blank or say little.

Among the items for which the unit is responsible, the Executive Committee of the College typically finds the following sections of greatest importance in the evaluation of a case:

- III.B. Research, Creative and Other Scholarly Activities  
(lists of publications, grants, fellowships, prizes, awards, editorships, and theses supervised)
- IV.A.1. Resident Instruction  
(particularly the description of teaching activities and the evaluation of effectiveness)
- IV.B. Research, Creative, or Other Scholarly Activities  
(evaluations of most significant publications and research accomplishments)
- VI. Names, affiliations, and qualifications of external evaluators
- VII. Special comments by the unit executive officer

Please take special care in the preparation of these sections. The evaluative statements should be economical and to the point.

Many sets of papers do not include adequate information in Item VI. This material is regarded as very important by review committees. Please attend carefully to it.

Item VII, the commentary by the unit executive officer, is read as a summary of the case. It should contain a brief restatement of strengths, and it should address forthrightly any negative features that make themselves obvious in the letters or elsewhere. If a subcommittee of the unit has reported formally on the case, the salient points of the report should be summarized. **If the recommendation involves the granting of tenure, this statement should indicate clearly why the department will be strengthened by such a commitment to the candidate and why the best interests of the University will be served.**

The College Executive Committee will welcome an explanatory note about conventions used to ascribe authorship in the candidate's field. The concern is in being able to distinguish the principal author, if one exists, in a string of authors, particularly for an article or chapter. Of course, the ultimate goal is to be able to discern the contributions of the candidate in collaborative works. If you can make useful comments about this point, please make them in Item VII.

The Executive Committee and the Dean agree that promotion recommendations

are typically far too long. Please do everything you can to confine comments from the candidate and the department to a reasonable length. A promotion that is truly warranted is readily justified in a few pages. Very long justifications suggest weakness and become counterproductive. Microscopic fonts earn a special disfavor. It is not necessary to anticipate and to address every conceivable question. If particular questions are raised at the College or campus levels, the unit will be given an opportunity to answer them.

10. **Checklist.** Promotion and tenure papers have a high official status, and very important decisions with legal consequence depend on them. As an institution, we must enforce a high standard of consistency in the preparation of these papers. Much effort is wasted each year because papers must be partly redone to conform with standard practice. Nearly all of it could be avoided. Attachment X to VCAA Communication No. 9 is a checklist for the preparation of papers. Please ask the person who prepares the papers in your unit to refer carefully to it at all stages in the process. If questions arise, please contact Paula Hays at 3-1350 before propagating an error through all copies of your papers.
11. **Sequence of Events Beyond the Unit's Decision.** All promotion and tenure cases are reviewed by the Executive Committee of the College before the middle of December. A formal vote will be taken by secret ballot on each of them. The Dean formulates his or her recommendation to the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs on the basis of the debate within the Executive Committee, over whose meetings he or she presides. By the end of December, all units will receive notice from the Dean on actions in the College. The executive officers of the units are encouraged to pass along notice of the action to the candidates, but together with a clear indication that further review at the campus level is required. That review is done in the spring semester and is normally not completed until late April. When the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs notifies the College, the Dean will in turn notify the executive officers of the Vice Chancellor's decision. Final action by the Board of Trustees comes in mid-summer.
12. **Negative Decisions at the Unit Level.** If a unit decides negatively in a tenure case, a very formal notification must be given to the candidate. Please refer carefully to VCAA Communication No. 10, if this happens in your unit. In addition, please notify the Dean informally before providing the formal letter to the candidate. If you have any questions about procedures, consult with the College office before acting.