

Faculty Senate Ad Hoc Committee for External Review Letters

Committee members consist of Carl Keller, Perry Mears, James Sottile, Vadim Putzu, and Tiffany Havlin (chair). Mike Hudson was also a participant for procedural guidance.

The specific charge is as follows:

To recommend to the Faculty Senate the following:

- Whether external reviews should be mandated in the Faculty Handbook, specifically considering the language in 4.6.4.2 and 4.6.5.2 that mandates external reviews.
- Revised language (if applicable) to 4.8.2.2.

Actions

This committee took several approaches in deciding upon recommendations. These actions included looking at sections of the Faculty Handbook that mentioned external reviews, looking at T&P guidelines from academic units, sending out a survey to all tenure-track faculty, and looking at R2 institutions that are MSU's benchmark institutions.

Faculty Handbook

Our survey of the Faculty Handbook revealed that more sections than those indicated in this Committee's charge make reference to external review of faculty research. The relevant sections are the following:

4.2.2.2. Goals and Criteria for Evaluating Research

The following goals and criteria are the basis of evaluating faculty members' Research for tenure and promotion and for required performance reviews. Item 1 below is of paramount importance on this list, and any faculty member, in order to succeed in the area of Research at Missouri State University and attain tenure and promotions, must succeed in Item 1. Although Items 2, 3, and 4 are not individually prescriptive, they are inclusive of Research and may be considered. Success in one or more of these areas (2-4) is required to attain tenure and promotion from Assistant Professor to Associate Professor. Sustained success in one or more of these areas is required for promotion from Associate Professor to Professor. Evaluation of research effectiveness must include some level of formal documented review by faculty external to the home unit of the faculty being evaluated.

4.6.2. Specific Procedures for Annual Review of Probationary Faculty and for the Tenure/Promotion Reviews

Each application for annual review of probationary faculty and for tenure and/or promotion review follows a similar series of steps as described below.

- For tenure and/or promotion applications that require letters from external evaluators, these are requested in accordance with guidelines issued by the Office of the Provost and discipline-specific standards. These letters will not be available to the applicant until the process is completed (up to the initial recommendation by the Provost).

4.6.4.2. Application process and Review (re: promotion from Assistant to Associate Professor)

The faculty member prepares all application and review materials according to guidelines provided by the Provost and the faculty member's academic unit (in the case of conflict between these documents, the Provost's guidelines supersede academic unit guidelines) and submits them for evaluation. The promotion materials will include external reviews gathered according to unit guidelines based on guidelines from the Provost and added by the Academic Unit Leader. The process for tenure/promotions review follows the steps outlined in Section 4.6.2.

4.6.5.2. Application Process and Review (re. promotion from Associate to Full Professor)

The faculty member prepares all application and review materials according to guidelines provided by the Provost and submits them for evaluation. The promotion materials will include external reviews gathered according to unit guidelines based on guidelines from the Provost and added by the Academic Unit Leader. The process for promotion review follows the steps outlined in Section 4.6.2.

4.8.2.2. Responsibilities for External Reviews

For tenure track actions, external reviews, based on criteria provided in departmental guidelines, will be solicited by the AUL to aid each tenure/promotion or promotion decision. External reviewers will normally be selected from comparable institutions, as defined in the glossary; however, individuals whose expertise make them specifically suitable to serve as reviewers may also be selected with approval of the Dean (see the Provost's website for specific qualifications). Academic units must, in their policy documents, define the role of the Personnel Committee in this process: the committee's role may range from formal input on the selection process and approval of the reviewer list to availability for advice and consulting at the request of either the AUL or the candidate. Four external reviewers will be identified collaboratively by the faculty member, the AUL, and, to the extent specified in the academic unit's governance documents, the academic unit Personnel Committee. If the faculty member and AUL cannot agree on the list of four reviewers, each shall select two. The list of reviewers will be submitted to the Dean who will certify that the selection process has followed guidelines. Reviewers may then be contacted.

The AUL is responsible for obtaining a sufficient number of reviewers. The AUL should contact selected reviewers early in the process to determine if they would be willing to provide reviews; when a timely review appears unlikely, an alternate reviewer should then be

identified. Faculty and AULs will follow the external review process in accordance with the Evaluation Calendar as published by the Office of the Provost. The absence of review will not be allowed to prejudice the tenure or promotion candidacy of the faculty member. Subsequently, reviewer statements that are inconsistent with Academic unit criteria for Tenure and/or Promotion or Reviewer Instructions shall not prejudice the tenure and promotion candidacy.

Summary:

4.6.2 uses a different language. It implies that letters may or may not be required. It says it's policy, but it is procedural.

4.6.5.2 says what's included, but not what the policy is regarding getting letters

4.8.2.2 is procedural, not a policy. It is procedure for the academic unit

R2 Universities

We wanted to see what other R2 institutions were requiring if MSU changed to an R2 University. We found that 11 institutions are MSU's benchmark institutions. Our findings showed no consistency in external review requirements from these institutions. The wording for Faculty Handbooks ranged from not required to providing a list if required to having a specific number of reviewers.

Survey

A survey was sent to all tenure-track faculty. We wanted to get faculty opinions and only had 177 responses. Here are the findings based on College responses:

Q1. In your opinion, is the information required to be provided in a T&P file sufficient without the external letters?

Very Insufficient	22
Insufficient	51
Neutral	21
Sufficient	44
Very Sufficient	39

Q2. Are you confident that the process of selecting/contacting reviewers for the external review is fair?

Very Unfair	12
Unfair	23
Neutral	65
Fair	55

Q3. How difficult is it to get expert reviewers (academics at schools with Carnegie Research rankings at the same level as MSU or higher) who are willing to provide external letters in your field?

Very Difficult	35
Difficult	41
Neutral	51
Easy	41
Very Easy	9

Q4. Should the policy on external letters be decided at the University level, or should the decision on whether to require external letters be made by the college or department?

College	38
Department	65
University	73

Q5. On a scale of 1 (no value) to 10 (extreme value), how much value/weight do you put on the external letters when you judge a T&P file?

Average weight based on responses: 5.64

T & P Documents

We looked at T & P documents from units across the university to compare requirements. We found that the requirements are not consistent. Here are some examples:

COE: Special Education, Leadership, and Professional Studies

- Information about External Reviewers is mostly confined to order of operations and the calendar
- Places the responsibility for the external review process on the pre-tenure faculty
- Indicates that External Letters may “potentially” be included
- No specifics on number of reviews that must be received, only how many to be sent (4)

DARR

- Five external reviewers (instead of 4)
- Candidate selects all five (no previous students, coworkers, or supervisors)
- Goal is to have 2-4 returned

- Necessary for tenure and for promotion to full professor

McQueary Mental Health and Behavioral Sciences (Psychology)

- No Mention of External Reviews or Reviewers
- Notes that faculty handbook takes precedence over school handbook

McQueary Mental Health and Behavioral Sciences (Social Work)

- “The tenure/promotion dossier will include external reviews.”
- Very specific process for selecting the four reviewers to be solicited. Must go through AUL, Personnel Committee and the Dean before the requests can be sent to the potential reviewers.
- AUL is responsible for obtaining enough reviews (but “enough” is not qualified).
- “The absence of a review will not be allowed to prejudice the tenure or promotion.”

CNAS- Computer Science

- Lists of qualifications of external reviewers
- States to refer to the FH for responsibilities for external reviewers
- No real specifics given

RCASH -Art & Design

- 3 letters required
- Chosen in collaboration between candidate, AUL and Personnel Committee
- Reviewers solicited by AUL, but timely return of letters is the responsibility of all three

RCASH- Music

- No specific number of letters required
- Chosen in collaboration between candidate, AUL and Personnel Committee
- Proviso about differing reviewers’ opinions, given individual taste and competition in the arts

RCASH-History

- No mention of external review

RCASH- Languages, Cultures, and Religions

- At least 2 letters, 3 preferred
- No details about line of responsibility

LIBRARY

- No mention of external review

COB- Finance, Economics, Risk Management

- Four required external reviews

- DH responsible for obtaining sufficient reviewers with collaborative input with faculty candidate
- Timeline is in conjunction with the Provost's calendar

COB- Information Technology and Cybersecurity

- DH is responsible for obtaining four external reviews
- External reviews become part of the T & P packet and the departmental personnel committee “can use them as deemed appropriate”

COB- Marketing

- “the FH requires four external peer reviews...with the DH responsible for obtaining sufficient reviewers in collaboration with the candidate”

Findings

We found that academic units are making their own interpretations of external review. We also found that there are inconsistencies in all levels of administration in upholding the policy in the Faculty Handbook. Finally, we found that there is language that could be inconsistent in the Faculty Handbook regarding external reviews.

Conclusion

We would like to propose these considerations for resolving these issues:

1. The language from “will/shall” be changed to “may”.
2. The decision for external review letters should be at the unit level.
3. There should be a clearer policy statement before 4.6.2. and a statement in the research section.