External Reviews for Tenure and Promotion

The UND Faculty Handbook now requires that faculty seeking tenure and promotion include external reviews as part of the review process. According to Section I.V.3.D, “the purpose of external review is to provide evaluation and validation from outside the University of the candidate’s record in relation to generally accepted standards within a particular academic field.” Therefore, the external review process should be designed to ensure an objective evaluation of the candidate’s scholarship, at a minimum.

To support this effort, the following guidelines are provided to ensure that external reviews are both solicited and used in a uniform fashion across campus.

Selecting External Reviewers (See Faculty Handbook, I.V.3.D)

1. The selection of reviewers should include the faculty member, department chair, and other department members, as appropriate. Each college/school and/or department should consider how many external reviewers are required which should be reflected in college and/or department bylaws. Note that the UND Faculty Handbook assumes multiple reviewers.
2. The Department Chair will ultimately approve the external review list, and does have the option of selecting reviewers outside of the candidate’s suggestions.
3. The External Review Proposed List should include 4-8 possible reviewers to allow for the possibility that an external reviewer does not reply to a request.
   a. Please note the candidate can secure additional external review letters, which may be included in the promotion and tenure materials as permitted, but cannot be used as substitutes for the letters secured and evaluated as part of the external review process.
4. The list should be developed in April – May preceding the tenure/promotion application. Please use the form provided by the VPPA office.
5. External reviewers must meet the following criteria:
   a. At or above the rank to which the faculty member is being promoted.
   b. Tenured, if tenure is being sought.
   c. If practicing professional (rather than academic), professional credentials should be identified as commensurate with rank.
   d. Have sufficient expertise to offer objective evaluation of scholarly record.
   e. Must not be a family member, personal friend, former colleague, advisor, student, or mentor of the faculty candidate. Former co-authors MAY be allowed, if sufficient reason is available – for example, a unique shared scholarly area.
   f. Colleges must follow all of the above criteria, and can also add additional or more stringent criteria. Such additions must be applied consistently for all applicants for tenure and promotion.

Inviting the External Reviewers

Departments and Colleges can use an approach that works best for them. However, the same process should be used for all candidates and for all external reviewers, and the following considerations should be observed:

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1. Invite external reviews to provide a letter of evaluation, **NOT a letter of support.** This language is important, as support letters do not meet the requirements of the external review letter. (Note that candidates can submit letters of support, such as from previous students, with their folders, but these should not be used as external review information nor as evaluative information).

2. Be sure to notify external reviewers that their letter will not remain anonymous or confidential. At the very least, it will be seen by those voting on the tenure/promotion folder. It may also be viewed by the faculty candidate they are evaluating, consistent with North Dakota laws regarding open records and personnel files.

3. External reviewers should be contacted by the Department Chair, Associate Dean, or Dean, with a request that outlines the expectations and timeline of the review. Be sure to give the reviewer sufficient time – sending the request out in May is strongly advised, for a due date in July. Many potential reviewers are committed by June. This will also give you time to make additional requests if a reviewer who commits is subsequently unable to complete the review. A sample form letter is provided on the VPAA website.

4. The external review of scholarship is required by the UND Faculty Handbook. If the Department also wants an external review of teaching and/or service, that should be specified in the Departments Bylaws and should be consistent across all faculty candidates.

5. External reviewers should be provided a summary of departmental guidelines for tenure and/or promotion requirements.

**Using the External Reviews**

Please include the approved list of external reviewers and their qualifications (see form on the VPAA website) in the promotion and tenure packets preceding the external reviewers’ evaluation letters. The letters that are submitted by external reviewers can vary substantially, and it is important to identify the key factors from each that will assist in the evaluation of the tenure and promotion application. In order to organize the information, please use the following format in the evaluations prepared by the Chair and Dean, as well as committees that review the promotion/tenure packet:

1. Identify how many letters were received from approved external reviewers
2. Provide a statement describing how the external reviewers were qualified to offer the review
3. Offer a brief statement of the consensus across the reviewers
4. Describe briefly the main points of consensus or convergence across reviewers
5. Describe briefly how the reviewers diverged in their evaluation
6. Offer 2-3 illustrative quotes or specific examples related to the candidate’s impact on the profession
7. Offer your interpretation/conclusion of the external review feedback

**Example of a summary of the external review portion of the evaluation:**

I reviewed letters from 4 external reviewers of Dr. Smith’s tenure folder. Each of them currently hold the rank of Professor in XXXX or a closely related field, three of them are currently publishing in the same specialty area as Dr. Smith, and 2 of them hold federal grants in the area of XXXX. None of them have close or personal ties to Dr. Smith; 1 of the 4 has been a co-author on 2 papers, the most recent of which was written 3 years ago. Together, this group of external reviewers can offer expert and impartial feedback on Dr. Smith’s tenure and promotion.

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All four of the reviews concluded that Dr. Smith is a solid candidate for both tenure and promotion, and noted that she has made several important contributions to the field as an Assistant Professor. Three of the four pointed to the unique contribution of XXXXX, and all four noted that Dr. Smith’s expertise in XXXX has furthered the development of work in XXXXX. One reviewer pointed to a potential area of concern in that Dr. Smith is frequently second or third author; others noted that seems consistent with collaborative work. Given the priority of the Department of XXXX on forming interdisciplinary collaborative opportunities, I believe that this is appropriate, and it does not detract from my evaluation of Dr. Smith’s work.

The impact of Dr. Smith’s work is captured by one reviewer, who stated “Dr. Smith’s recent paper on XXX illustrated some previously overlooked implications of the XXX theory, and has potential to re-energize work in this important XXX.” Another pointed to Dr. Smith’s “strong grasp of methodology” and “incisive analytic skills” as particular strengths that would cut across a wide range of research applications.

In sum, the external reviews offer additional support that Dr. Smith is achieving at and above the level of her peers across the discipline.