



Office of  
Academic Affairs

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## Reappointment, Tenure and Promotion

### External letters of reference

*External letters of reference are critical in cases involving tenure or promotion or both.* Their purpose is to provide independent, convincing appraisals – from outside the University – of a candidate's national or international scholarly stature. It is in UW's clear long-range interest to insist on rigorous peer review by *nationally or internationally prominent referees.* College deans, faculty tenure and promotion committees, and administrators in Academic Affairs will insist on high standards in the evaluation of external letters. Unit heads and candidates should do so as well. Cases have failed for want of enough high-caliber letters.

It shall be the responsibility of the Provost to announce a reasonable deadline for the solicitation of these outside reviews. The timeline for soliciting external letters may vary, depending on department or college custom and availability of external reviewers. However, “earlier is better than later” is a good rule of thumb. Note: hard deadlines are in **bold**.

Colleges may require external letters for fixed-term reviews depending on college and department policy.

Because they help us gauge our own institutional expectations against those of our peer institutions, external letters play a significant role in the deliberations associated with any tenure or promotion case. Yet they are the subject of more widespread confusion than perhaps any other aspect of RT&P. Department heads should note the following observations.

1. A tenure or promotion packet should contain at least **four letters** from referees **who have no personal connection to the candidate.** Examples of personal connections are serving as a dissertation advisor or advisee, previous or pending co-authorship, sharing of research funding, and family relationships. Avoid selecting academic referees who are not tenured and/or who do not hold rank at or above Associate Professor or Professor.

Many departments solicit six or more, both to make sure that the final packet contains at least four and to gain a broad professional perspective. Unit heads should exercise diligence in soliciting enough letters. Failure to do so jeopardizes the candidate's case.

2. The protocol for determining the list of external letters is:

*The candidate and the unit head shall each make a list of at least six possible reviewers. The candidate may delete up to one-third of the names on the department/unit list. The unit shall choose an equal number from each list (excluding the names deleted by the candidate) for a minimum of four potential reviewers. In the event that the unit head is the candidate, the dean shall identify a delegate to complete this process.*

3. The candidate prepares a packet of materials, consisting of a resume/vita and representative examples of recent scholarly and/or creative contributions, plus any relevant university, college or unit policies or expectations documents.
4. The candidate may waive the right to see the letters, via a written statement to be included in the candidate's WyoFolio case file. If a candidate has waived his or her right to see the letters, he or she may see excerpts edited to preserve anonymity, including any headers/footers and/or stationary logos

that show personal or university information. By not doing so, candidates can feel blindsided when peers or administrators cite negative comments made by outside reviewers. Therefore, it is in the candidate's best interest to have seen the letters or excerpts before the review of the packet commences (i.e., before department level review).

5. The unit head is responsible for submitting materials to the reviewers, along with an accompanying cover letter to each of the selected reviewers. The cover letter shall indicate if the candidate has waived the right to see the letters, and will state the degree of confidentiality of the response. This letter shall request an evaluation by the reviewer of the scholarly and/or creative contributions of the candidate. It shall refrain from asking the reviewer to state whether the candidate would be tenured at the reviewer's institution.
6. In courtesy to referees, departments should solicit letters early and allow at least eight weeks for a thorough evaluation of the candidate's portfolio. It is important that the letter of solicitation, along with all other communications with referees, maintain a neutral tone.
7. Every external letter that a department solicits and receives in time must be included in the candidate's file **before the department level review and pre-department review in cases of joint or SER appointments**. Culling external letters is unacceptable.
8. It may be reasonable to have *additional* letters from referees who have some personal connection, so long as (1) these letters lend useful insights into the candidate's work and (2) it is clear to all reviewers that a personal connection exists. This matter is one requiring good judgment: will the inclusion of such letters advance the University's interests in promoting fair, rigorous academic standards? These letters should be tagged in such a way that faculty and administrators who review them will be able to differentiate them from the required external reference letters.
9. Department heads should include in the WyoFolio case file the completed External Referee Cover sheet including a short summary of how the external referees were selected, what their professional credentials are, and how their letters were solicited.
10. If original letters were provided outside of the WyoFolio system, they should be retained in the Department or College (depending on college protocol) once a copy has been uploaded to the faculty's case file. E-mailed letters are acceptable, provided there is some mechanism for ensuring their authenticity. For example, the referee can follow an e-mailed version with a mailed, signed version that arrives later.
11. All faculty members who vote on a case and all administrators who make recommendations should have access to the original copies of the external letters.

Links: [General Information about Review Procedures and Resources](#)  
[Information about WyoFolio and WyoVita](#)  
[Standard Administrative Procedures for Reappointment, Tenure, and Promotion](#)  
[University Regulation 2-7 \(Procedures for Reappointment, Tenure, Promotion and Fixed-Term\)](#)  
[Other University Regulations and Standard Administrative Policies and Procedures – Academic Personnel Related to Reappointment, Tenure, Promotion, and Fixed Term.](#)