



Office of
Academic Affairs

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Tenure and Promotion Guidelines

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 who have expertise in the candidate's field of study.*

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. (Note: Colleges may require external letters for fixed-term rolling-contract/promotion reviews depending on college and department policy.)

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 the custom of a department or college and the availability of external reviewers. However, “earlier is better than later” is a good rule of thumb. Note: hard deadlines are identified in the schedule in bold.

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. Department heads should note the following observations.

Composition of External Review Panel

1. A tenure or promotion packet should contain *at least four letters* from referees who preferably have no personal or professional connection with the candidate. Keep in mind that these external reviews are assessments of the scholarship dossier, not personal recommendations. As such, candidates should avoid recommending those with whom they have worked closely in the past or with whom they have a relationship (e.g., dissertation advisor or advisee, previous or pending co-authorship, sharing of research funding, friend, and family relationships). If it is the case that the candidate's area of inquiry or creative endeavor consists of such a small group of scholars/artists that avoiding referees who are their collaborators in research/creative activity is virtually impossible, then include that justification in the explanation of your selection of reviewers.
2. Many departments solicit eight or more letters, both to make sure that the final packet contains at least four letters and to gain a broad professional perspective.
3. When possible, avoid selecting academic referees who are not tenured and/or who do not hold rank at or above Associate Professor. The ideal external review panel will include scholars who hold national and international reputations in their discipline. There may be instances where these scholars hold senior level research positions in entities other than universities, such as national and federal laboratories and research centers. Similarly, an appropriate referee may be

without an academic background but have preeminent standing within a particular area of endeavor (e.g., a prominent musician or artist). There may be circumstances such as when a candidate's scholarly or creative research field is so narrow or new that the pool of willing referees is small. In each of these circumstances, the strongest review panel will be comprised mostly of professors who hold the same or higher rank as the one for which the candidate is reviewed. Department heads at other institutions can be a good source for these referees.

4. The ideal external review panel will include experts from multiple institutions and will not include multiple reviewers from the same institution.
5. As a Carnegie R1 classified institution, UW's expectations for the scholarly accomplishments of our faculty should be comparable to other R1 institutions. It is therefore recommended that most of the reviewers come from universities that hold Carnegie R1 research classification.

Timeline for Initiating External Review

1. Because department reviews begin shortly after the fall semester begins, the process for selecting the review panel should be completed before the conclusion of the previous spring semester.
2. It is recommended that unit heads contact and secure prospective reviewers before the end of summer, ensuring that the reviewers have at least six weeks to complete their review.
3. The recommended deadline for uploading all materials to the WyoFolio case file, including the external reviews, is specified in the review schedule. With that date in mind, there may be discipline-specific reasons for adjusting deadlines for department reviews to allow for more time to receive external reviews. Regardless, the deadline for colleges to complete their reviews and forward the cases to Academic Affairs will not change.

Protocol for Determining External Review Panel

1. The candidate and the unit head shall both make a list of at least six possible reviewers.
2. The candidate may delete up to one-third of the names on the department/unit list.
3. The unit head shall choose an equal number from both lists (excluding the names deleted by the candidate) for a minimum of four potential reviewers. Deans have the authority to review and approve reviewers if they choose to do so.
4. In the event the unit head is the candidate, the dean shall identify a delegate to complete this process.
5. During the preliminary meeting, the department head and candidate should discuss whether the candidate will waive their right to see the letters. A written statement must be included in the candidate's WyoFolio case file that specifies if this right has been waived. It is important to note that external reviewers will be informed that the candidate has or has not waived their right to review letters. Reviewers may be reluctant or unwilling to provide a review letter if they don't have assurance that their letter will be kept confidential. This in turn may make it difficult to obtain the minimum number of letters required.
 - a. If a candidate waives their right to see the content of the letters, they may not see any part of the letters directly, even in redacted form.
 - b. A candidate may instead waive their right to see identifying characteristics while not waiving their right to see the content of the letters. In this case, they may see a redacted letter -- all identifiers, including letterhead and identifying text, must be removed.

- c. Finally, a candidate may choose to not waive their right to see the letters. In that case, candidates will be allowed to see both the contents and identifying information..

Procedures for Soliciting Reviews

1. Department heads will work with their college/unit coordinator (i.e., Interfolio lead) to ensure that all materials are uploaded into WyoFolio and invitations to serve as external reviewers are sent via WyoFolio.
2. The candidate is responsible for having their activities up to date in WyoVita so that a current and comprehensive curriculum vita (CV) can be generated for the case file in WyoFolio. Depending on unit custom, the department head may also ask the candidate for a printed or electronic copy of the CV. The candidate is also responsible for providing the department head representative examples of recent scholarly and/or creative contributions by the deadline established in the department protocol.
3. *First communication:* The department head's first contact with the prospective reviewer should briefly introduce the candidate and respectfully request a candid review, with a frank statement of when the letter is needed. Some department heads prefer to make this contact outside of the WyoFolio system.
 - a. As a courtesy to referees, departments should solicit letters early and allow at least six 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.
4. *Formal solicitation letter:* Once the potential reviewer has tentatively agreed to provide a review, department heads should send a formal solicitation through WyoFolio. Be careful to refrain from the use of any biased or leading language in your letter. This letter shall request an evaluation by the reviewer of the scholarly and/or creative contributions of the candidate. Teaching, service, extension, and other elements of the candidate's job description are outside the scope of the external review. Letters should include:
 - a. Description of your relationship to the candidate (e.g., department head, dean, director, etc.).
 - b. A description of the reviewer's relationship to the candidate, if any, and a disclosure of any potential conflicts of interest.
 - c. A description of the University of Wyoming (sample below):

Established as a land-grant institution in 1886 when Wyoming was still a territory, UW has since grown to nearly 200 areas of study, drawing 12,500 students from all 50 states and 90 countries. Throughout its existence, UW has been the only four-year university in the state of Wyoming. Its global impact begins with innovative undergraduate and graduate research opportunities and extends through numerous state and federal partnerships. UW has been designated Carnegie Foundation Community Engaged university and is expected to be recognized as a Carnegie R1 university in 2025 when the new American Council on Education criteria take effect.
 - d. An accurate description of the unit, including number of faculty and degrees offered.
 - e. A statement indicating whether the candidate has waived or has not waived the right to see the letter or its contents.

- f. Instruction to referees to base their evaluation of the candidate on the scholarly contributions of the candidate. Do not ask referees to state whether the candidate would receive tenure or promotion at their institution.
 - g. Instructions to the referee on how to complete their recommendation via WyoFolio, including links to support documents.
 - h. A request that the reviewer upload, as a separate document, their current CV.
5. *Attachments*. Included in the materials sent to the reviewers through WyoFolio are:
- a. A cover letter that indicates if the candidate has waived the right to see the letters or their contents and the degree of confidentiality of the response.
 - b. Curriculum vita.
 - c. Representative examples of recent scholarly and/or creative contributions.
 - d. 4-step guide for external reviewers to assist with using Wyofolio. (This document may be provided to the reviewer outside of the WyoFolio system.)
 - e. (Optional) Relevant university, college, and/or unit policies, including department expectations.

Steps in soliciting review in WyoFolio (Note: AA will provide the UW-Interfolio leads with a comprehensive quick-reference guide.)

- a. On the case page of the candidate, scroll down to the External Evaluations section and click "Request Evaluation"
- b. Under "External Evaluation Information," enter the name and email of each external evaluator
- c. In the "Subject" line, please use a variation of "Tenure [or Promotion] Review for University of Wyoming Department of ..."
- d. Enter the email message to the evaluators. The request can include a personal message to the evaluator and documents to aid the evaluator in their review. Once completed, evaluators submit their review through Interfolio's secure delivery system. The system allows you to send the same message to multiple reviewers. See the Quick Reference Guide for External Evaluation provided by AA.
- e. Select the files that the reviewer will see. You can select any file that has already been uploaded as part of the evaluations. At minimum, these must include:
 - i. Candidate CV.
 - ii. A sample of the candidate's scholarly or creative work.
 - iii. 4-Step Reference Guide for Reviewers (provided by AA).
 - iv. (Optional) The standards under which the candidate is to be evaluated.
- f. If your unit protocol is to provide additional documents, including but not limited to university regulations, policies, and/or Pythian papers, they should be added here as well.
- g. Click "Preview Email" to see how the request email will appear to the external evaluator.
- h. Set Response Settings. A deadline of September 1 is strongly encouraged unless you want them earlier. This date can be changed if necessary. Also, check the "Yes, allow the evaluator to submit additional files" button, and do not change "Access," which is set by

default to “Administrators & Entire Committee.”

- i. Click “Send Request” at the bottom of the page. If it is sent, you will return to the main case page.

Completing the External Review Process

1. 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 not allowed.
2. As part of the administrative support documents submitted with the case, the department head will include in the WyoFolio case file the completed External Referee Cover sheet including a short summary of how the external referees were selected, who selected the reviewer, what their professional credentials are, what their relationship to the candidate is, what their institution's Carnegie Research classification is, if their institution is domestic or international, and how their letters were solicited.
 - a. When explaining the rationale for selecting each reviewer, please provide specific reasons for choosing the reviewer (e.g., XXX is editor of a leading journal that publishes research in the candidate's field of study, XXX is an award-winning choreographer of numerous Broadway and Off-Broadway musicals, including”).
 - b. Where appropriate, the rationale should:
 - i. Address the inclusion of reviewers who have (or have had) a personal or professional relationship with the candidate, including a justification to show why the reviewer is appropriate and needed, and how an objective evaluation can be achieved.
 - ii. Explain why it is necessary to include more than one reviewer from the same institution.
 - iii. If half or more of reviewers are not from R1 institutions, explain why that is the case.
3. If extenuating circumstances require original letters to be provided outside of the WyoFolio system, unit heads should contact their college coordinator, who will check with Academic Affairs on additional procedures. At minimum, the letters 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.
4. All faculty members who vote on a case and all administrators who make recommendations should have access to the external letters.

Late or Missing Reviews

If the required number of letters has not been received by the deadline for uploading all materials to the case file, the candidate and department head will have a tough decision to make. By policy, a minimum of four letters of reference must be included in the candidate's case file. Failure to receive the required number of external letters may lead some members of the peer group and administrators to recommend against granting tenure or promotion. If there is no prospect of obtaining the minimum number of letters by the date when the case file is released for department review, and the case is for promotion only, the candidate may be better served by withdrawing the packet and resubmitting the following year.

There is less flexibility for candidates who are seeking tenure and promotion. In this case, the department head should explain in his or her review letter why they received fewer than four reviewers.

Discussing the External Letters with Candidate

As a matter of good practice and regardless of the candidate's choice about waiving their rights to see the content of the letters, the unit head may discuss their observations from the external letters with the candidate prior to the department review, without addressing specific information in the letters (e.g., all letters appeared to be positive and supportive, the degree to which external reviewers felt there was national or international impact seemed to be mixed, etc.). When doing this, it is paramount the unit head reminds the candidate that other reviewers (at the department, college, and university levels) will draw their own conclusions from the external letters.

Referencing the External Reviews in Letter/Comments

Using quotations or paraphrasing reviewers' comments in the administrative letter or faculty comments is appropriate. However, avoid inadvertently referencing any identifying information about the external reviewers in your written comments/review.

Solicited Reviews

Letters from individuals whom the department head did not specifically ask to write a review should not be included in the review materials.

Sample timeline for the external review cycle

Prior to April: Faculty member notifies department head or dean of their intent to seek tenure (if early) and/or promotion and begin planning for the submission of their materials.

April – May: Candidate and department head/dean generate list of potential external reviewers.

May through summer: Department head/dean solicits and receives external reviews via WyoFolio.

September 15: Recommended deadline for all materials, including external letters, to be complete and uploaded to case files in WyoFolio.

Important Links:

[General Information about Review Procedures and Resources](#)

[Information about WyoFolio and WyoVita](#)

[Standard Administrative Procedures for Reappointment, Tenure, and Promotion \(link to be added\)](#)

[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.](#)