External Letter Procedures for Promotion with Tenure Review

The department of the candidate for promotion with tenure must obtain at least six letters from reviewers external to the University. At least three of the six letters are to be from a list of six referees proposed by the candidate. The remaining letters (a minimum of three—and preferably more than three) are solicited from a list of external reviewers selected by the department’s review committee.

The reviewers should be selected not only on the basis of their credentials, but also because their reviews would be expected to be unbiased. The reviewers should have no professional or personal interest in the candidate’s promotion, as might be expected of a dissertation or thesis advisor, co-investigator on a grant, co-author, classmate, former colleague, a person who has supplied a letter of recommendation for the candidate, etc.

Normally, external reviewers will be full professors from distinguished universities with exemplary programs or faculty in the relevant field, preferably from those in the top 25 in that field. If exceptions to this guideline are proposed, they must be justified in the initial request to the Dean.

Please follow the following steps:

1. Obtain from the candidate the names, titles, brief biosketches, and contact information for six prospective external reviewers. Although the University is obligated to use names from the candidate’s list, the reviewers s/he suggests will be most credible if they meet the above guidelines. The review committee needs to give the candidate a specific deadline for completion of this step.

2. With the candidate’s list in hand, the review committee identifies at least six additional prospective external reviewers and prepares a brief biosketch for each. The candidate’s list and the committee’s list must not overlap.

3. The candidate’s list, the committee’s list, and all biosketches are submitted to the Dean. This material must be in the form of a hardcopy memorandum in which the source of each name (i.e., candidate or committee) is identified. If any exceptions to the guidelines (full professor from an exemplary program in a distinguished university) are proposed, please justify them.

4. When the Dean’s written approval has been received, the department chair then will contact prospective reviewers by electronic mail or telephone to ascertain their willingness to assist. Copies of electronic mail messages and notes of telephone conversations must be retained for inclusion in the promotion dossier.
IMPORTANT: Please note that all contacts with prospective reviewers, including reminders and the like, must be made by the department chair rather than the review committee.

The committee decides which reviewers to contact; however, to assure receiving at least the required number of usable letters soon enough for use in the review, more than four letters from each category (candidate-proposed and committee-proposed) should be solicited at the beginning of the process.

5. The standard template (posted on the Peabody policies website and available from the Dean’s Office) must be used for the preparation of letters to individuals who agree to serve as external reviewers.

6. All external letters received prior to review of the dossier by tenured faculty of the department must be placed in the dossier and thus made available for their review.

Please note the following Vanderbilt University policy: “The names of external reviewers who were asked to write letters, the names of those who wrote letters, and the letters themselves are confidential, and shall not be revealed to the candidate.”