

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Guidance on the Disclosure of P&T External Letters to candidates [3-31-24]

Background

This document provides guidance for members of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) on the disclosure of external letters to candidates for promotion and tenure. External reviewers must be notified that their letters are not confidential and will be shared with the candidate. Chairs/directors (or peer committee chairs, if they are managing the letters) are responsible for keeping track of which letters have been received, their placement in the application file, and sharing them with the candidate.

Rationale for providing guidance

Practices for candidates' access to view letters have varied by unit across the College, and sometimes by chair/director within units over time. Some candidates see letters as they come in and are able to address (implicitly or explicitly) any concerns the letter writers may have expressed. Conversely, other candidates are not permitted to view external letters until their application packet is complete and has been submitted. The process can also depend greatly upon when letters are received. For some candidates, letters may arrive prior to the deadline, whereas for others, they do not arrive until after the deadline by which the candidate is to submit their application. Inconsistent approaches may benefit candidates whose letter writers are prompt and whose chairs share the letters early, and may disadvantage those whose letters arrive late and/or whose chairs do not share them prior to the application being submitted.

Recommended practice

CLAS recommends that department chairs or peer committee chairs (depending on departmental practice) delay uploading or making available external letters until the candidate for promotion and/or tenure has completed and submitted their application. This will ensure that applications are not revised or tailored to one or more external letters that may have arrived prior to the candidate's submission deadline. This practice will foster a more consistent and fair approach across the College and within units, regardless of who serves as unit chair or director.

Once the letters have been uploaded into the candidates' application folders, candidates for tenure are responsible for providing to the Dean's Office (clas@maine.edu) the names of the three letter writers whose letters will accompany the application beyond campus-level review. The names should be conveyed before the dean completes their review. The addition of letters that arrive after the peer committee letter has been provided to the candidate shall be permitted only as described in Article 9.C.5.c of the UMS-AFUM collective bargaining agreement.

It is important to reiterate that candidates have two contractual opportunities to respond to evaluation materials after their application has been submitted. The first opportunity comes after the peer committee has completed its evaluation; candidates have one week to respond, in writing, to any aspect of the process up to that point, including external letters. Any response submitted by the candidate will move forward with the rest of the application packet for subsequent administrative and committee reviews. The second opportunity comes after the provost has completed their evaluation; again, candidates have one week to respond in writing. Any response given at this stage will also become part of the application packet.