

CLAS Guidelines for External Review Letters [rev. 7-25-24]

Outside review letters are crucial to the success of the promotion application. The review letters provide an independent, expert assessment of a candidate's scholarship and standing in the discipline.

Suggested timeline

April / early May

- The candidate must review their tenure and promotion guidelines, or MOU if applicable, and talk to their chair and peer committee chair to determine the usual procedure in their own unit. If the candidate has a joint appointment, they must be sure to talk to the chair or director in each unit, preferably together.
- The Dean's Office recommends that the candidate and the peer committee (and/or department chair) work together to generate names of potential external reviewers.
- The candidate must review the proposed list of reviewers to identify any conflicts of interest.
- The final list of prospective reviewers must be "at arm's length," or further, from the candidate.
- Three letters are required. Candidates typically have 4-7 letters, and it's safest to have additional names on hand just in case.
 - The evaluator should hold at least the rank for which the candidate is being considered.
 - The evaluator should be professionally recognized within the discipline and be affiliated with an institution at least comparable to UMaine in reputation.
 - The evaluator's objectivity should not be open to challenge because of a relationship to the candidate. Avoid asking former mentors and classmates, close collaborators, colleagues at previous institutions, personal friends, or others who might give the appearance of less than complete objectivity. More on this below.
 - Generally, evaluators should not be retired/emeritus.

Late April / May

- Chair (ordinarily) or peer committee chair contacts reviewers.
 - Department chairs have access to sample invitation letters on the AG Sharepoint site.
 - Evaluators must be notified that the review letters are not confidential and will be shared with the candidate.
 - Evaluators should be given specific information regarding the University of Maine tenure and promotion guidelines that apply to the candidate (most chairs include the guidelines or MOU). They should be reminded not to apply their own institution's standard.
 - Letters must be on university letterhead and signed (digital is fine).
 - It is best to give evaluators a deadline earlier than required (say, September 15).
- The candidate should prepare the materials to be shared with reviewers (typically publications, CV, research narrative). Scholarly work from prior to the period under review should not be part of the reviewers' evaluation and for this reason should not be provided to the reviewers.
- The T&P application you will create using the UMS form need not be shared with reviewers.
- If external evaluators are expected to comment on teaching, include a teaching narrative, sample syllabi, peer assessments, and a quantitative summary of student evaluations.
- If external evaluators are expected to comment on administrative duties or service, include a clear description of this role and relevant documentation of activities and accomplishments in this area.

Late May / early June

- Materials should be provided to reviewers to give them ample time to prepare a letter. Generally this is done electronically, either by giving reviewers access to a Google folder or via emailed PDFs.

Be aware that if the decision is made to share a single Google folder with multiple reviewers, their identities will be disclosed to one another. Sharing a link rather than the folder itself avoids this disclosure.

- Ideally, the reviewers will have 10-12 weeks to read the material and compose a detailed assessment of the candidate's published work, overall research program, stature in the field, and potential for future impact.

July-September

- The chair should stay on top of which letters are in and should send reminders to evaluators if necessary.

October

- As soon the deadline for the candidate to complete their application has passed, the chair or peer committee chair uploads all letters received to the appropriate location in the candidate's Google folder. The letters must be uploaded by the end of the first business day after the T&P deadline. The candidate retains viewing access to the folder and will be able to see the letters.
- The candidate must update their application to exclude the names of any external reviewers who did not provide letters, and also to identify the three letters that will accompany a tenure application to UMS and the Board of Trustees. This must be completed on or before the day that the chair sends their recommendation to the dean.

Candidates' FAQ on External Review Letters

1. *What exactly do you mean by an "arm's length" relationship to my external reviewers?*

Your external reviewers cannot be close collaborators or former advisers. You may have sat on the same panel at a conference with a potential evaluator, but you shouldn't have co-organized that panel. You may both have published pieces in a special issue of a journal, but you shouldn't have co-authored an article or co-edited that issue. They should have nothing to gain or lose through their assessment of your work. Here's one way to think of it: the reviewer should not be personally invested in your tenure and/or promotion case. They should be acting out of a sense of their own professionalism and duty of service to the profession, not out of any perceived pressure from or personal obligation to you, or from possible benefit or risk to their own reputation.

2. *My field is very small. I know everyone well. What do I do?*

Consider how you are defining "my field." Can you broaden it a little? It is probably better to take the risk of asking someone slightly adjacent to your field, than of asking someone whose letter might be viewed with suspicion or rejected due to a conflict of interest. At the very least, you will need to clearly state your relationship to your reviewers in the cover sheet. And be aware that external evaluators themselves are usually upfront about any existing relationship in the letter itself.

3. *I have a good publication record, but I have not done a great job of networking. Can my external reviewers include people whom I have never met?*

Yes, absolutely.

4. *I have a really wide range of research interests. How am I ever going to find reviewers capable of evaluating all of it?*

Think of your review letters holistically. Not every individual reviewer has to be an expert on/speak to your every area of research, but together, the letters should address the full range of your scholarly productivity. Consider asking reviewers from each of your areas of research, or reviewers whose work overlaps with two of your areas of expertise.

5. *I have an unusual academic position. What if this confuses reviewers?*

If your responsibilities are atypical in any way (for example, you have a specific administrative assignment), speak with whoever is soliciting letters about how these unusual circumstances will be communicated to evaluators. You might also consider how to describe your role in your CV so that it is clear to evaluators.

6. *I have some questions that are not addressed here.*

The CLAS Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs and Administration will be happy to help!