

June 4, 2008

To: IPFW Faculty, Chairs, and Deans

From: Susan B. Hannah, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

Subject: Best Practices for Soliciting and Using External Review Letters

The Office of Academic Affairs and the Campus Promotion and Tenure Subcommittee have shared a growing concern about the variation in departmental practices for soliciting and using external review letters in the promotion and tenure process. Accordingly, I asked Professor Elaine Blakemore to undertake a survey of departmental practices in soliciting and using external reviews as part of her duties as a 2006-08 Fellow in the Office of Academic Affairs. The purposes of this report are to present the results of Professor Blakemore's survey and to outline a standard set of best practices to guide the external review process for P&T at IPFW. These provisions will be incorporated into OAA Memo 99-1 as appropriate and are effective beginning with P&T cases submitted Fall 2009

The attached materials are organized into four sections: (1) a summary of the findings of the departmental survey; (2) a set of recommended and required practices for external review; (3) rationales for the recommendations; and (4) a set of templates for letters to be used by department chairs in this process, including one for soliciting external reviewers and the other to accompany the packets of materials sent to reviewers. These materials are also available on the OAA web page for P&T Resources ([www.ipfw.edu/vcaa/promotion/default.shtml](http://www.ipfw.edu/vcaa/promotion/default.shtml) .)

It is clear that some of the recommended and required best practices will vary from those that have been used in some departments for a long time. In particular, the now-to-be required practice for full disclosure of the reviews and the identities of the reviewers may cause concern in departments that have not previously shared either one with the candidate. I understand that it is often difficult to change a practice of long standing, especially if departments believe that it is based on strong conviction. It is not defensible, however, to have a variety of practices across the campus on such an important matter. Cases must reach the Campus Promotion and Tenure Subcommittee with candidates having had equivalent opportunities to have access to this information.

The case for openness is supported by the national AAUP statement on access to faculty personnel files, which concluded that "faculty members should, at all times, have access to their own files, including unredacted letters, both internal and external" on the grounds that

“such access promotes care and accuracy in evaluations, and also provides faculty members a fair opportunity to learn of and respond to critical evaluations” (*Access to Personnel Files*, in *AAUP Policy Documents and Reports*, 2006, p. 70).

Most importantly, the Indiana Access to Public Records Act mandates that personnel records in public institutions of higher education be open to the employee; the law does not permit people to waive this right. We are thus advised to make unredacted letters available to all candidates from the beginning.

Other recommended practices may also vary from those used by some departments in the past. Pay particular attention to the recommendation to solicit six external reviews for *any area* of excellence, and to the recommendation to solicit external review about scholarship or creative endeavor whenever either is an expected part of someone’s load, whether they are seeking to demonstrate excellence or competence in that domain.

#### Attachments

1. Survey Results Summary
2. Best Practices
3. Rationales
4. Letter Templates