

**Rank and Tenure Committee  
Saint Mary's College**

**Suggestions for Conducting Departmental Evaluations  
and Preparing Chairs' Letters**

The Rank and Tenure Committee has prepared this sheet to support chairs and program directors in preparing departmental reviews of probationary candidates who are undergoing interim reviews or reviews for promotion and/or tenure. These reviews are governed by *Faculty Handbook* Sections 2.6.2.2.2 and 2.6.2.2.3, so please review those sections carefully before you begin to plan for your reviews.

The Committee consulted widely in preparing these suggestions. They reflect the judgments of committee members past and present, as well as chairs and directors who have considerable experience in conducting departmental reviews

1. The Overall Process:

- As chair, meet early with the candidate to discuss the R & T process and assist the candidate to develop a strategy for successfully completing the process.
- If appropriate, assign a mentor to the candidate—either within or outside the department—to help the candidate with the R & T process.
- Ensure that the candidate's classrooms are *regularly* visited by peers for evaluation of teaching and feedback. Multiple observations are a must; you might even assign a peer to observe the candidate three times through a semester to record progress.
- Consistently review student evaluations with the faculty member to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement.
- Review the candidate's *Form A*, offering guidance and feedback on the self-study.
- Identify what categories of faculty the department wishes to consult regarding the review, e.g., ranked faculty only, ranked faculty plus lecturers, etc. Be clear in the departmental letter about who was consulted, and if votes were taken, who participated in the vote and the result of the vote. Be sure to represent as accurately as possible the range of views of all faculty members consulted.
- Follow up with the candidate after a Rank and Tenure review is completed and the Committee's letter is in hand. Review the letter with the candidate and discuss next steps.

2. Problems Identified with Chairs' Letters:

- Insufficient attention to deficiencies that are apparent in the file.
- Similarly, letters that overlook the formative nature of the R & T process by focusing almost exclusively on strengths. We all have something(s) to work on. Be candid about areas that need improvement.

- The letter primarily reiterates what the candidate has written in the *Form A* without additional insight or comment. DO NOT repeat sections of the *Form A*. We have it, and we don't need to read it twice.
- The letter quotes large sections of peer teaching observations, which are in the file in their entirety. Until the movement of peer teaching observations is standardized by the Senate, departments need to decide how observations get to us—in some departments, candidates submit them; in others, the peer observer submits them, and in still others, the chair submits them. We think in some departments, no one submits them.
- The letter offers numerous conclusions and general observations but lacks supportive information (evidence) and documentation.
- Failure to assist the R&T Committee by providing appropriate judgments of the merit and quality of the candidate's scholarly work. In recent year, this includes reporting incorrect numbers of conference presentations, incorrect reporting on review processes, and inflating the importance of the candidate's scholarship. If a candidate publishes an article that will be useful to high school teachers in the candidate's discipline, say that. Do not claim, as we have seen, that the article will change the way top scholars in the field think. More candidates are publishing in conference proceedings—is it a competitive publication? Which conferences are competitive? What is the acceptance rate of a journal in which the candidate has published? In other words, honestly let us in on your discipline's scholarship.
- Failure to distinguish between the department's evaluation of the candidate and the chair's individual evaluation if disagreement appears to be present. *If there is a difference, the chair should express his or her view in the departmental letter rather than a letter submitted to the candidate's confidential file. Chairs are no longer permitted to submit letters to the candidate's confidential file.*

### 3. Other Characteristics of Effective Letters:

- The letter covers all the *Faculty Handbook* standards thoroughly, including the special criteria that are associated with tenure and promotion even *for interim reviews*.
- The letter makes clear that a variety of materials such as student evaluations, self-assessment, peer evaluation, syllabi, and scholarly products have informed the evaluation.
- The letter is balanced and even-handed, addressing both the candidate's strengths and areas for improvement with equal care and attention. Concerns raised in earlier reviews are addressed.
- Available comparative data is used to support the letter's conclusions.
- Less is more.