

12/9/09

EXTERNAL LETTERS

Background

The academic review process requires external assessments at a number of points in an individual's career. It is important that departments follow the best practices in the solicitation of letters. Following are campus guidelines outlining 1) how to identify reviewers; and 2) solicit letters and utilize them fully in the review process. To ensure a fair process, it is important that departments document their review practices, including the process for identifying external reviewers and what materials are to be sent to them.

Guidelines for the Solicitation and Use of External Letters

The goal is to receive a minimum of 3-7 letters depending on the type of case, with the majority coming from the department's list.

Number of Letters Required

ACTION	SERIES/ RANK	NUMBER LETTERS	LIST (of those received)
Appointment	Asst Prof	3-5	May all be from Candidates List
Appointment	Assoc/Ful 1	Min. of 7	At least half from Department List
Tenure	Associate	Min. of 7	At least half from Department List
Promotion	Full	Min. of 7	At least half from Department List
Step VI*	Full	Min. of 3	At least half from Department List
Advance to A/S	Full	Min. of 5	At least half from Department List
Promotion	Research	Min. of 5	At least half from Department List

*letters are optional for Professor reviews, a departmental committee report is required

Identifying Reviewers

Department

Departments should have a written description of their process for identifying individuals who should be solicited. This might be the role of a search committee (for new appointments), the departmental ad hoc review committee, the department chair, advisory committees for new initiatives, or senior faculty in the candidate's area of expertise. In cases of inter-and multi-disciplinary work, it is important to ensure that the process also includes input from individuals across the spectrum of the candidate's research.

The departmental list should be compiled independently before reviewing the list of possible reviewers submitted by the candidate. Should the department and the candidate independently submit the same name, this should be reflected on the code key. The campus reviewers will consider any such reviewers as coming from the department's list.

Letters should be solicited from persons who are demonstrably in a position to respond knowledgably to the specific evaluative task put before them. As a rule of thumb, the campus prefers letters from full professors at peer institutions or from peer departments. Letters should be solicited from individuals who can provide an independent assessment of a candidate's qualifications and accomplishments.

Letters from thesis or postdoctoral advisors or co-authors can also be solicited if these individuals are asked to comment about the candidate's independence or about contributions to co-authored publications (see sample letters). If such letters are included, they must be in addition to the minimum required number of letters.

Candidate

In addition to compiling the departmental list of possible reviewers, you also must ask the candidate for a list of possible reviewers. Give the candidate guidance on what we are looking for: assessment of their contributions; impact on the field; and trajectory. You might also suggest that they list individuals other than their mentors, former colleagues, collaborators or co-authors. Stress the goal is to obtain letters from individuals that can provide an independent assessment on the candidate's accomplishments and trajectory. For the names they provide, they should indicate what relationship they may have, if any, and why they suggested them.

Indicate they have the right to identify individuals who should not be solicited and why (in writing). If you do decide to solicit from any individual who the candidate has requested not be contacted, you will need to explain in the departmental recommendation why you were compelled to seek their input (e.g., best or most knowledgeable in the field).

In the case where the candidate works in an inter-/multi-disciplinary area, it is important that you also ask the candidate to include individuals who can address the spectrum of the research.

Solicitation

External reviewers should be solicited with a letter describing clearly the action under consideration and specifying the types of information sought. The departmental solicitation letters should ask reviewers to be evaluative and address the research contributions and its quality; teaching, if known; professional reputation and activities; and, where appropriate, university service. For tenure decisions it is advisable to send the complete packet of publications. For promotion to Full Professor and advancements to Step VI (if soliciting outside letters) and Above Scale, the department and candidate should discuss whether all or selective publications should be sent. If departmental practice is to send selected publications, ask the candidate for input on what publications might be sent. Different publications may be sent to different reviewers depending on the reviewer's expertise. Along with the solicitation letter, you should send publications, a CV, and self-statement, if any.

1. Departmental solicitation letters for tenured appointments and promotion to tenure should ask for a review of the candidate's body of work to date and give reviewers sufficient supplementary material to do so. Departmental solicitation letters for

promotion to the rank of Full Professor should ask for a review of the candidate's body of work since receiving tenure, and the supplementary material provided should allow the reviewer to do so. Finally, departmental solicitation letters for advancement to Professor Above Scale should ask for a review of the candidate's entire body of work with a focus on accomplishments within the rank of Full Professor, and again, make sure the supplementary material provided allow the reviewer to do so.

2. Departmental solicitation letters for tenured appointments and promotion to tenure should request specifically that the external reviewer provide a cohort comparison. Either the departmental solicitation letter should indicate the cohort or ask the reviewer to name the cohort. Further, in tenure cases, the departmental solicitation letter should include the question of whether this individual would receive tenure at the external reviewer's institution.
3. If applicable, the departmental solicitation letter should include language explaining a tenure clock stoppage, such as: *Dr. X has received an extension of the tenure clock per University policy. UC policy states that faculty members shall not be disadvantaged in their promotion because they have elected to "stop the clock" in accordance with University policy. Please evaluate Dr. X's work as if the work were done in the normal period of service.*
4. If applicable, the departmental solicitation letter should include language on evaluating multi-disciplinary research, such as: *Dr. X is engaged in interdisciplinary research. S/he holds a joint appointment in the departments/units of X and Y. We invite your consideration of the interdisciplinary nature of Dr. X's work, while recognizing you may be best qualified to review only a portion of his/her scholarly work based on your own area of expertise.*
5. If the department is soliciting letters for a Step VI case, it should include language explaining this benchmark to non-UC reviewers, such as: *Professor X is being considered for advancement to Professor, Step VI on the University of California's salary scale. Please note that Professor X already holds the rank of Professor, having been promoted to that rank in YEAR. Steps VI and above (there are nine in all) on the University's salary scale are reserved for faculty who have attained "great distinction, recognized nationally or internationally, in scholarship or teaching."*
6. If the department is soliciting letters for a case to Above Scale status, it should include language such as the following: *Professor X is being considered for a special advancement to a salary that exceeds the highest step of the University of California's salary scale. Advancement to this "above-scale" status is reserved for scholars and teachers of the highest distinction whose work has been internationally recognized and acclaimed and whose teaching performance is excellent.*
7. If a candidate's co-author and/or mentor is solicited for a letter, the department should ask such a reviewer to clearly explain the candidate's contribution to the work and comment on the candidate's level of independence.

Process

To save time, potential reviewers may be contacted in advance of sending materials to determine if they are available to provide an assessment. If they are unable or unwilling to respond, their name and reason for declining should be reflected in the code key.

Requests can be made and responses received by electronic mail. Sample letters are attached.

Explanation/Assessment

It is the chair/dean's responsibility to assess the letters received, put the letters in context of the case and to explain any anomalies. For example, suppose all but one of the letters are overwhelmingly positive. The chair might want to point out possible reasons for the non-positive response so that reviewers at the higher levels do not make inappropriate assumptions.

The code key should list all letters solicited, including those not received. For the latter, there should be an explanation as to why there was no letter, e.g., reviewer declined because of other commitments. It should not be assumed that non-response means non-support for the faculty member. The professional background of the external reviewers and/or the reason for choosing a specific individual who has an atypical background should be reflected in the code key.

Unsolicited Letters

Unsolicited letters (other than those submitted by the candidate, which are not considered confidential) shall not be part of the case discussion nor placed in the review file for appointment, merit, promotion, or advancement cases. However, in rare instances where unsolicited letters contain information about misconduct or improper activities by the candidate, they shall be reviewed by the Vice Provost on a case-by-case basis.

Attachments: Sample letters
Code Key

APPENDIX A: Sample Solicitation Letter for promotion to tenure

DATE

Dear Dr. **last name**:

I write to ask your assistance in evaluating **Dr. X**, currently an **Assistant Professor** at the University of California at Berkeley, Department of **XXX**. **Dr. X** is being considered for promotion to Associate Professor, with tenure, effective July 1, **2010**. The promotion from Assistant Professor to Associate Professor is a milestone in the University of California system that requires us to solicit outside letters from experts in **his/her** field of research. We value your candid assessment of **Dr. X's** research, service, and teaching accomplishments, in the areas in which you have knowledge, as well as **his/her** future promise. Your scholarly and professional judgments will play an important role in our evaluation of **Dr. X** for promotion.

TENURE CLOCK (if applicable): **Dr. X** has received an extension of the tenure clock per University policy. UC policy states that faculty members shall not be disadvantaged in their promotion because they have elected to “stop the clock” in accordance with University policy. Please evaluate **Dr. X's** work as if the work were done in the normal period of service.

INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH (if applicable): **Dr. X** is engaged in interdisciplinary research. **S/he** holds a joint appointment in the departments/units of **X** and **Y**. We invite your consideration of the interdisciplinary nature of **Dr. X's** work, while recognizing you may be best qualified to review only a portion of **his/her** scholarly work based on your own area of expertise.

CO-AUTHOR AND/OR MENTOR (if applicable): Please explain **Dr. X's** contribution to your co-authored work(s) and comment on **her/his** level of independence.

Based upon the enclosed materials and any other knowledge you have of **his/her** work, we would like your candid evaluation of **Dr. X's** written and scholarly contributions with a focus on addressing the following points:

- How long and in what capacity do you know **Dr. X**? (as this would potentially identify you, please give a brief statement below your signature block so it can be redacted)
- What are your impressions about the quality, quantity, focus, and scholarly impact of the writings?
- Which, if any, of the publications do you consider to be outstanding and why?
- How would you estimate **Dr. X's** standing in relation to others in **his/her** peer group who are working in the same field? (Either list cohort or ask reviewer to identify cohort.)
- Would **Dr. X** receive tenure at your institution?
- How would you evaluate **Dr. X's** service contributions to the discipline; that is **his/her** work on professional committees, as a reviewer of proposals or papers, or similar activities?
- How would you evaluate **Dr. X's** teaching – perhaps based on lectures you have heard **him/her** give – or on any role **s/he** has played in the scientific community?

I have included below some legal information on the confidentiality of letters at UCB. There is one important point to note. At UCB, we are required by policy to make the full text of all letters (without the letterhead or signature block) available to the candidate upon request, so please refrain from making any statement within your formal letter that identifies you.

We request that you return your review to us by **DATE**. We realize that your schedule is full and this may be a time-consuming task; however, we will be most grateful for your assistance. We have selected you because of your expertise in this area. If you need further information, please contact **NAME** at **PHONE/EMAIL**.

Sincerely,

NAME, Professor and Chair
Department of XXX

Encl: *Curriculum Vitae*
Review of Research, Teaching and Service/Research Summary
X research articles

Under University of California policy, the identity of authors of letters of evaluation which are included in the personnel review files will be held in confidence. A candidate may, upon request and at certain prescribed stages of the academic personnel review process, be provided access to such letters in redacted form. Redaction is defined as the removal of identifying information (including name, title, institutional affiliation, and relationship to the candidate) contained either at the top of the letterhead or within and below the signature block of the letter of evaluation.

The full text of the body of your letter will therefore be provided to the candidate if so requested. Thus, if you provide any information that tends to identify you in the body of the letter, that information may become available to the candidate. **If you wish, you may provide a brief factual statement regarding your relationship to the candidate at the end of your letter but below the signature block.** This brief statement will be subject to redaction and will not be made available to the candidate.

Although we cannot guarantee that at some future time a court or governmental agency will not require the disclosure of the source of confidential evaluations in University of California personnel files, we can assure you that the University will endeavor to protect the identity of authors of letters of evaluation to the fullest extent allowable under the law.

APPENDIX B: Sample Solicitation Letter for a Step VI merit case (OPTIONAL)

DATE

Dear **lastname**:

Professor **X** is being considered for advancement to Professor, Step VI on the University of California's salary scale. Please note that Professor **X** already holds the rank of Professor, having been promoted to that rank in **YEAR**. Steps VI and above (there are nine in all) on the University's salary scale are reserved for faculty who have attained "great distinction, recognized nationally or internationally, in scholarship or teaching." I hope you can provide a brief evaluation of Professor **X**'s achievements, especially on the quality of **his** scholarship and its influence. A comparison with other prominent scholars at **his** career stage would also be helpful.

I have included Dr. **X**'s *curriculum vitae*, a **review of his research, teaching, and service/research summary**, and several of **his** recent papers, selected by the candidate, with this letter. I know that writing such a document is time-consuming and that your time is limited, but I would be grateful to receive your reply **by DATE**. If you are unable to help in this matter, please let me know immediately so that we can contact another reviewer.

INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH (if applicable): Dr. **X** is engaged in interdisciplinary research. **S/he** holds a joint appointment in the departments/units of **X** and **Y**. We invite your consideration of the interdisciplinary nature of Dr. **X**'s work, while recognizing you may be best qualified to review only a portion of **his/her** scholarly work based on your own area of expertise.

CO-AUTHOR AND/OR MENTOR (if applicable): Please explain Dr. **X**'s contribution to your co-authored work(s) and comment on **her/his** level of independence.

I have included below some legal information on the confidentiality of letters at UCB. There is one important point to note. At UCB, we are required by policy to make the full text of all letters (without the letterhead or signature block) available to the candidate, so please refrain from making any statement within your formal letter that identifies you.

On behalf of the Department of **XXX**, I thank you in advance for your assistance with this important matter.

Sincerely yours,

NAME, Professor and Chair
Department of XXX

Encl: *Curriculum Vitae*
Review of Research, Teaching and Service/Research Summary
X research articles

Under University of California policy, the identity of authors of letters of evaluation which are included in the personnel review files will be held in confidence. A candidate may, upon request and at certain prescribed stages of the academic personnel review process, be provided access to such letters in redacted form. Redaction is defined as the removal of identifying information (including name, title, institutional affiliation, and relationship to the candidate) contained either at the top of the letterhead or within and below the signature block of the letter of evaluation.

The full text of the body of your letter will therefore be provided to the candidate if so requested. Thus, if you provide any information that tends to identify you in the body of the letter, that information may become available to the candidate. If you wish, you may provide a brief factual statement regarding your relationship to the candidate at the end of your letter but below the signature block. This brief statement will be subject to redaction and will not be made available to the candidate.

Although we cannot guarantee that at some future time a court or governmental agency will not require the disclosure of the source of confidential evaluations in University of California personnel files, we can assure you that the University will endeavor to protect the identity of authors of letters of evaluation to the fullest extent allowable under the law.

APPENDIX C: Sample Solicitation Letter for an Above Scale advancement case (formatted as email with web link to candidate's material)

Dear **lastname**:

Professor **X** is being considered for a special advancement to a salary that exceeds the highest step of the University of California's salary scale. Advancement to this "above-scale" status is reserved for scholars and teachers of the highest distinction whose work has been internationally recognized and acclaimed and whose teaching performance is excellent. I hope you can provide a brief evaluation of Professor **X**'s achievements and **his** scholarly influence. A comparison with other leading scholars in **his** discipline would also be helpful.

On the following web site Dr. **XX**'s *curriculum vitae*, a complete publications list, a **summary of his service, teaching, and research**, and several recent reprints are available for review:
<http://INSERT URL>

INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH (if applicable): Dr. **X** is engaged in interdisciplinary research. **S/he** holds a joint appointment in the departments/units of **X** and **Y**. We invite your consideration of the interdisciplinary nature of Dr. **X**'s work, while recognizing you may be best qualified to review only a portion of **his/her** scholarly work based on your own area of expertise.

CO-AUTHOR AND/OR MENTOR (if applicable): Please explain Dr. **X**'s contribution to your co-authored work(s) and comment on **her/his** level of independence.

I know that writing such a document is time-consuming and that your time is limited, but I would be grateful to receive your reply **by October 10**. If you are unable to help in this matter, please let me know immediately so that we can contact another reviewer.

I have included below some legal information on the confidentiality of letters at UCB. There is one important point to note. At UCB, we are required by policy to make the full text of all letters (without the letterhead or signature block) available to the candidate, so please refrain from making any statement within your formal letter that identifies you.

On behalf of the Department of **XXX**, I thank you in advance for your assistance with this important matter.

Sincerely yours,
NAME, Chair
Department of XXX

Under University of California policy, the identity of authors of letters of evaluation which are included in the personnel review files will be held in confidence. A candidate may, upon request and at certain prescribed stages of the academic personnel review process, be provided access to such letters in redacted form. Redaction is defined as the removal of identifying information (including name, title, institutional affiliation, and relationship to the candidate) contained either at the top of the letterhead or within and below the signature block of the letter of evaluation.

The full text of the body of your letter will therefore be provided to the candidate if so requested. Thus, if you provide any information that tends to identify you in the body of the letter, that information may become available to the candidate. If you wish, you may provide a brief factual statement regarding your relationship to the candidate at the end of your letter but below the signature block. This brief statement will be subject to redaction and will not be made available to the candidate.

Although we cannot guarantee that at some future time a court or governmental agency will not require the disclosure of the source of confidential evaluations in University of California personnel files, we can assure you that the University will endeavor to protect the identity of authors of letters of evaluation to the fullest extent allowable under the law.

APPENDIX D: Sample Request to Serve as External Reviewer

Dear Dr. **lastname**,

Dr. **X** is a candidate for promotion to Full Professor in our department. You have been identified as one of the leading professionals in the field and I am writing to ask if you would be willing to provide us with an evaluation of his research and its impact on the field.

If you are willing to provide us with this assistance, we will send you a copy of Dr. **X**'s curriculum vitae, self-statement, and copies of **his/her** publications. We will ask you to indicate how you feel **his/her** work compares with that of others in the field and the degree to which **his/her** record is appropriate for the rank of Full Professor.

We recognize that, as a leading scholar in your field, you are already very busy. We assume that you also recognize how important it is for the integrity of the institution of academia that this type of promotion decision have input from highly qualified individuals such as yourself. I therefore, hope that you will be willing to provide us with this assistance. If you are willing, we will then send you the materials and will request that you return your evaluation with a four week time period.

Thank you for considering performing this important service to our university and the field. Please let me know if I can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,
NAME, Chair
Department of XXX

APPENDIX E: Sample Code Key

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

LIST OF INDIVIDUALS FROM WHOM LETTERS WERE SOLICITED WITH REGARD TO THE
PROMOTION CASE OF ASSISTANT PROFESSOR FIRSTNAME LASTNAME

<u>Reviewer Code</u>	<u>Name and Affiliation</u> (include all solicited reviewers, whether or not letter is received)	<u>Reviewer Standing and Relationship to Candidate</u> (one line, include rank of reviewer)	<u>Letter Received?</u> (indicate yes or no; if no, give reason if known)	<u>Suggested by</u>
A				Department
B				Candidate
C				
D				
E				
F				
G				
H				

DEPARTMENT AD HOC COMMITTEE:

(list names of members)

John Doe, Professor

Jane Doe, Professor

James Doe, Professor (Chair)