

To: Anand Rao and Members of the UFC  
From: College of Arts and Sciences P&T Committee  
March 25, 2016  
Subject: UFC questions

The CAS Promotion and Tenure Committee has received your inquiries (listed below) and is pleased to provide you with our thoughts on the matter. Since your request took the form of two broad sets of questions, our response will follow that format. We are also assuming that both questions apply primarily to candidates who seek tenure and promotion to the rank of associate professor. Candidates for promotion to the rank of full professor are already required to submit three letters from external sources regarding the area of scholarly activity only (Faculty Handbook, Appendix I, Section I.1.3).

First, the committee was asked: 1) use of outside letters. How useful would outside letters be to the committee during promotion and tenure consideration? If the university were to include the use of outside letters, what should the letters comment on (limited to scholarly and professional activity, or include review of teaching and service), and how should outside reviewers be identified and selected?

When considering files for tenure and promotion to the rank of associate professor, the Committee follows carefully the guidelines in the Faculty Handbook, especially Appendix I, which provides expectations for candidates, as well as advice on the contents of promotion and tenure files. As it is currently drafted, Appendix I, Section I.4.3 already allows department chairs to seek, in addition to the mandatory evaluation letters of tenured department members, “a maximum of five additional letters from faculty members inside or outside the department.” While this language was included to allow UMW faculty members to comment on candidates’ fitness for promotion and tenure, we have noted that the overwhelming majority of files for promotion to the rank of associate professor already include letters from faculty at institutions beyond Mary Washington. We do not have hard data for the exact number of files that include such commentary by external reviewers, but we feel secure in stating that it occurs more often than not. The trend among recent candidates already points to an understanding that outside reviewers’ perspective can be helpful in framing a candidate’s effectiveness, and the outside letters tend to confine themselves to the candidate’s abilities in the area of scholarly and professional activity. Many of these letters also include a recognition of the UMW requirements for scholarly and professional activity, indicating that department chairs have shared Faculty Handbook language with the outside reviewers to assist them in understanding this area in context of the larger file.

The presence of these letters in files should not, however, lead to the presumption that adding language to the Faculty Handbook to require them would be automatically desirable. The P&T Committee considers these letters as part of an overall picture of a candidate’s effectiveness in three distinct and required areas—teaching, service, and professional activity. Candidates must meet the standards in all three areas, not two out of three. We rely heavily on documents and procedures internal to UMW, especially in the area of teaching, as we trust our colleagues, and in particular, departmental chairs, to understand fully the necessary expectation that teaching will be each candidate’s primary area of expertise and that the candidate’s peers are best equipped to assess the efficacy of teaching methods in their field. FAARs, APRs, and descriptions of

classroom visits would matter far more to the Committee than would the comments of a peer beyond UMW who has not witnessed the candidate “in action.”

The P&T Committee would also like to go on record as suggesting that changes to Promotion and Tenure procedures might best be postponed until the University has adequately addressed the faculty workload issue. Our candidates for tenure and promotion to the rank of associate professor must already commit themselves to a teaching load that many other institutions have long since consigned to the waste bin. We would also welcome a meeting with Provost Levin regarding this matter and his reasons for making this request now.

As to the second question regarding online teaching evaluations and their low response rates, the P&T Committee sent the attached letter of concern in May 2015 to the Dean of Arts and Sciences and CAS Academic Chairs. You will note that in it we mentioned at least two possible methods of addressing the shortfall in information from the online evaluations.

We hope that this letter begins to answer the questions you posed and that the UFC will work with the relevant committees (including CAS P&T, UFAC, and others) to discuss Provost Levin’s request further.

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