





To: College Deans
Department Heads, Chairs, and School Directors
Department P&T Committee Chairs

From: Ron Fricker, Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs 
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Date: May 1, 2024

Subject: Guidelines and Requirements for Collegiate Faculty External Letters

1. **Purpose.** To provide guidance to departments about letters to external letter writers for candidates for promotion in the collegiate faculty series.
2. **Guidance Documents.** General requirements for promotion are contained in [section 5.1.5 of the Faculty Handbook](#), guidelines are available on the [provost's website](#). Requirements for dossier preparation are provided in the Collegiate Faculty Series Dossier Guidelines which is updated annually. This memo provides excerpts from that document focused specifically on external letters.
3. **External Reviewer Requirements.** Collegiate faculty seeking promotion to associate professor or professor are required to have four letters from external reviewers. The reviewers and their letters should focus primarily on the candidate's contributions to and success in pedagogy and only secondarily and briefly on their scholarship contributions. To that end, departments and schools should provide reviewers with appropriate artifacts of the candidate's teaching so that they can make an informed and appropriate assessment. These artifacts may include:
 - a. **Course Syllabi and Lesson Plans:** Detailed outlines of instructional activities, objectives, assessments, and materials used in a single class session or unit. They can be used by the external reviewer to gain insight into the candidate's planning skills and their course alignment with learning goals.
 - b. **Student Work Samples:** Examples of completed assignments, projects, or assessments demonstrating students' understanding and application of concepts. They can be used by the external reviewer to assess the candidate's effectiveness in facilitating and evaluating student learning.
 - c. **Assessments and Rubrics:** Various types of assessments (e.g., quizzes, tests, essays) and corresponding rubrics used to evaluate student performance. They can be used by the external reviewer to assess the candidate's ability to design fair and rigorous assessments aligned with learning objectives.
 - d. **Teaching Materials:** Resources such as handouts, presentations, multimedia

materials, and supplementary resources used to support instruction. They can be used by the external reviewer to evaluate the candidate's creativity in engaging students and delivering content effectively.

- e. **Classroom Observations:** Formal or informal observations of teaching conducted by administrators, peers, or instructional coaches. They can be used to help the external evaluator assess the candidate's instructional strategies, classroom management abilities, and rapport with students.
- f. **Professional Development Records:** Documentation of workshops, courses, conferences, or seminars attended by the teacher to enhance their teaching skills and knowledge. They can be used by the external reviewer to evaluate the candidate's commitment to continuous improvement.
- g. **Student Feedback:** Surveys, questionnaires, or reflections soliciting feedback from students about their learning experiences and perceptions of the candidate's effectiveness. They can be used by external evaluators to help them understand the candidate's performance from the student perspective.
- h. **Professional Accomplishments:** Awards, certifications, publications, or presentations related to teaching and education. They can be used by reviewers as evidence of external recognition of the candidate's expertise, contributions to the field, and recognition by peers or professional organizations.

Per the Collegiate Faculty Series Dossier Guidelines, "External reviewers should be accomplished senior academics and senior contributors to the appropriate discipline(s) and/or areas of scholarship, preferably at peer universities. However, due to the distinctive responsibilities of collegiate professors, outside reviewers from less research-intensive colleges and universities may be appropriate."

- a. A list of Virginia Tech's SCHEV-approved peer institutions is available at <https://aie.vt.edu/strategic-analysis/peer-institutions.html>
- b. If the best person to evaluate the work is at a university below peer level, *explain and justify that choice in the department head letter.*

4. **Required Text.** The following text is required for all candidates.

- a. Ask the reviewer to self-disclose their relationship with the candidate and any disqualifying relationships:

"As part of your letter, please describe your relationship with the candidate. This should include how long you have known the candidate, whether you have a personal or professional relationship with the candidate, and, in general, whether there is potential for conflict of interest. The university guidelines state that our external reviewers should not include former advisors, post-doctoral supervisors, co-investigators on grants, or co-authors on recent publications, or should not have other relationships that may be perceived as being too close to the candidate. We ask that you self-disqualify if you meet any of these criteria."

- b. Include the following statement on confidentiality:

“The policy of Virginia Tech is to hold in confidence all letters of evaluation from persons outside the institution. Only the committees and administrative officers directly responsible for the decision of concern here will have access to your letter. It will not be provided to the candidate unless we are required specifically to do so by law.”

5. **Suggested Text.** Letters to external reviewers should contain the following information.

a. Describe Virginia Tech’s collegiate faculty series. Some examples:

The Collegiate Professor series at Virginia Tech provides for short- or long-term, full- or part-time, nontenure-track faculty appointments for individuals who bring specialized expertise to the instructional programs of the university, thereby complementing the qualifications and contributions of tenure-track faculty.

Collegiate professors have a major commitment to the instructional missions of their department. The involvement of collegiate professors can include classroom and online teaching, curricular updates, course transformations, and the adoption/integration of innovative and inclusive pedagogy. Working in collaboration with the department’s other faculty, collegiate faculty may take a lead role in enhancing the curricula and promoting teaching excellence.

Collegiate faculty are effective teachers of their discipline and are expected to understand and evaluate the research that applies to their field and to teach it to students. Collegiate professor faculty members may conduct research on the scholarship of teaching and learning related to their field and/or on disciplinary topics in their field and present their findings in professional venues, but there are no expectations for an extensive research program as is typical of tenure-track faculty appointments.

b. Describe Virginia Tech’s criteria for collegiate faculty promotion. Some examples:

Collegiate Faculty are expected to focus on excellence in teaching and student learning which could include pedagogical innovation, curricular reform, promotion of teaching excellence beyond themselves, or contributions to more holistic student development initiatives. Collegiate faculty must engage in scholarship of teaching and learning and/or disciplinary research, however, their scholarship is defined more broadly than for teaching and research faculty. This faculty track is also expected to participate in service and/or outreach and should maintain a connection to their professional discipline. Collegiate Faculty are not expected to develop an extensive externally-funded research program.

The candidate for promotion to Collegiate Associate Professor should demonstrate excellent teaching and impactful contributions to pedagogy, curriculum, co-curricular student activities, and/or promotion of teaching excellence with potential for greater impact in the future. The candidate must have produced scholarship and must have strong contributions to service. The cumulative record should indicate that a high level of teaching potential has been achieved and the candidate’s scholarship should have achieved at least regional or impact.

c. Request a review of teaching performance and scholarship contributions. Some

examples:

Please provide an evaluation of the candidate's teaching ability and their contributions to education of students (whether curricular or co-curricular). To that end, I have enclosed / provided links to the following artefacts of the candidate's teaching to assist you in your evaluation:

- *Course syllabi and lesson plans*
- *Student work examples*
- *Assessments and rubrics*
- *Teaching materials*
- *Classroom observations*
- *Professional development records*
- *Student Feedback*
- *Professional accomplishments*

We would specifically appreciate your overall assessment of the candidate's excellence in teaching and student learning, including their pedagogical innovation, curricular reform, promotion of teaching excellence, and/or contributions to more holistic student development initiatives. In addition, though secondarily, we would also appreciate your comments on their pedagogical or disciplinary scholarship within the bounds of the collegiate faculty series expectations previously described.

It would be helpful in your evaluation to rate the candidate's accomplishments in comparison with other individuals who are working in similar fields at other universities. Is the work of high quality? Does it reflect increasing maturity and depth? Is the candidate on a trajectory that suggests subsequent successful promotion to collegiate professor?

- d. Minimize asking about research/scholarship and university service; focus on professional service. Some examples:

Our decision will be based on several kinds of evidence, including a candidate's contributions to the teaching, scholarship, and service/outreach missions of the university. Your evaluation of the candidate's teaching and pedagogical innovation contributions is the primary focus of this review and will form an important component in the dossier. Review of the candidate's scholarship contributions are also important, though not to the extent of a tenure-track assessment, and within the scope of collegiate faculty expectations.

We do not expect you to comment extensively on the candidate's research and university service activities. While their contributions to research and service will certainly enter into our decision, we primarily seek your help in evaluating the candidate's teaching contributions.

6. **Things NOT to do.** Please do not do the following in the letter.

- a. Please DO NOT ask about “promotability” at the reviewer’s home institution.
Some examples of what *not* to do:

Would the candidate's record align with the expectations of the promotion of teaching faculty at your institution?

Please indicate whether a candidate with a similar teaching, research, and service record would be promoted at your university.

- b. Please DO NOT use statements such as:

Your letter will be kept strictly confidential, and at no time become part of a file to which the Freedom of Information Act would apply.

The reference to the Freedom of Information Act in this statement is confusing and such letters are already exempt from FOIA. The only time that Virginia Tech is required to provide an external review letter to a candidate is if the document is under court-ordered subpoena.

The candidate has relinquished his or her right of access to evaluations supplied by reviewers.

Candidates don't have a right to access outside evaluations. This statement seems to imply that a candidate may choose to see the external evaluations.

We will maintain strict confidentiality and destroy your letter when the evaluation process is complete.

This statement leads the external reviewer to believe that all copies of his/her letter will be destroyed. The Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost is required to maintain the P&T records for 5 years after the promotion or tenure decision.