

March 16, 2021

Thomas Poon, Ph.D.  
Executive Vice President and Provost,  
University Hall, Suite 4820

#### COMMENTS ON RANK AND TENURE PROCESS

Dear Provost Poon,

Having completed the review of applications for tenure and promotion for the 2020-21 academic year, the Committee on Rank and Tenure (CRT) would like to take the opportunity to comment on a few issues that arose during our review.

#### **“Collegiality”**

There were a small number of cases where either the chair or some department members took issue with the collegiality of the applicant. While these concerns were sometimes expressed in ways that perhaps impacted the “service” component of the application, in other cases it appeared to the CRT that “collegiality” was being conflated with “congeniality”. While the CRT understands that a lack of collegiality can be disruptive, we recommend that such issues be dealt with through processes other than the tenure and promotion process.

#### **External Evaluators**

According to the Faculty Handbook, an application for promotion will “normally” include five external review letters, though the application is considered complete if at least three arrive by the submission deadline. Of the five, three are selected from a list submitted by the candidate, the other two by the chair. The candidate is “encouraged to exclude evaluators who are former professors, former students, and anyone whose opinion might be compromised by a current or former professional relationship (e.g. co-authors, co-workers, mentors, etc.).”

The past two years have seen an improvement in the proportion of applications that have five letters. The experience of the CRT is that five letters continues to be optimal and we recommend that department chairs continue to be encouraged to procure a full complement of five external letters. We believe that the following recommendations from last year’s CRT continue to be useful advice to chairs:

The chairs can:

- Continue to work to secure at least 5 external reviewers, as a cushion against those who do not submit letters in a timely fashion, or provide letters that do not usefully evaluate the candidate.
- Try to ensure, at an early stage, that reviewers do not have a personal connection with the candidate that would create a conflict of interest (beyond the usual social and professional encounters at professional meetings). When the chair sends the initial request for an external evaluation, it would be a good practice at that time to inquire what previous relationship the evaluator has with the candidate. If it is too close, the chair can move on to a different evaluator.
- Provide additional rationale in the event that there is an important reason to include a reviewer who may be viewed as having a conflict of interest, and be sure there are at least three others who do not present such a conflict.
- Provide additional rationale in the event that multiple letters come from scholars working in other disciplines. This may be appropriate, especially for candidates working in interdisciplinary fields, but again merits a rationale on the part of the chair.

## **Departmental Summaries**

The summary of the departmental discussion is one of the most important elements of the candidate's file. The candidate's colleagues in the Department are the best situated to evaluate the candidate's teaching, advising, scholarship/creative work and service with regards to the Departmental Standards. While the external reviews are important for evaluating a candidate's scholarship and/or creative work, it is equally important for the Department to interpret those reviews in the context of LMU, and to provide its own assessment of whether the scholarship meets the Department Standards.

Some departments have language in the Departmental Standards regarding expectations for future productivity in scholarship and/or creative work; this language is often imprecise. When it is present, departments should address how and whether the candidate meets these expectations. (This begs a larger question of whether the university should try to make such expectations more consistent across departments.) Similarly, the CRT recommends that when departments include "impact" of an applicant's scholarship as part of their tenure and

promotion standards, they specify what measures should be used in evaluating such impact.

In addition, there were some more minor comments about the Departmental summaries:

- Departments should include the name of the scribe in the Departmental Summary.
- When faculty are not present, a reason should be noted, if possible (sabbatical, travel, etc.) The CRT noted significant improvement here. There were very few cases this year in which there were a large number of unexplained absences from the Department vote.



## **Chairs**

In addition to arranging external evaluators, the chairs have many responsibilities both during the promotion process and earlier. When there are procedural difficulties (such as difficulties finding external evaluators, or letters of dissent), the chair is uniquely placed to explain any irregularities. And in the years prior to promotion, the chair has a responsibility to work with their faculty to ensure that anyone coming up for promotion is prepared for the process. In particular:

- Chairs should ensure that any issues with teaching and service that might impact promotion are pointed out to the candidates in their annual Faculty Service Reviews, so that faculty have an opportunity to address them before coming up for promotion.
- While peer observations of teaching are not required in the Faculty Handbook, it is the norm for candidates to have at least a couple of observations since their last promotion. We encourage the Provost to work with the Faculty Senate to clarify standards for peer review of teaching. Issues may include whether such reviews are required, who arranges for them, whether any standard format is required, and how many are recommended and over what period of time.

- In a small number of cases in the present cycle, the peer teaching evaluations did not involve an actual observation of the applicant's teaching. They read more like general letters of recommendation. The CRT recommends that all peer teaching evaluations include observation of the applicant's teaching.

### **Miscellaneous**

A few additional issues are worth mentioning.

- Curriculum vitae should clearly indicate the dates of dissemination for scholarly and creative work, the dates and levels of service activities (department, college, university, etc.), and similar details.
- The CRT's work would be better facilitated if the format of the application materials allowed for "CTRL F" searches and other functions for the purpose of committee notetaking.

Thank you very much for your consideration of these comments and recommendations. We would be happy to meet with you to discuss them and answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

  
[Evan Gerstmann \(Mar 18, 2021 13:04 PDT\)](#)


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