

# Guidelines for Writing Annual Evaluation Letters for Faculty Members<sup>1</sup>

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These guidelines are intended to help department chairs write effective annual evaluation letters for faculty members that include appropriate information in a consistent format. Providing a common format for these faculty evaluation letters can make it easier to find the information necessary for completing peer and administration reviews of faculty work.

The template included in these guidelines provides *only* a starting point for preparing an evaluation letter. Department chairs should create letters that are congruent with their own understanding of annual evaluations, as well as their own approach to writing evaluative letters. However, the letters must also take into account departmental evaluative criteria and procedures to maintain compliance with the Collective Bargaining Agreement.<sup>4</sup>

## Purposes of the Department Chair Letter

The department chair letter provides important feedback on a faculty member's performance and provides suggestions for future work in teaching, research and original creative work, and service. These letters also provide faculty with an assessment of their progress towards promotion and/or tenure, as well as contextual information needed by faculty and administrators who make recommendations about promotion and tenure.

## Characteristics of an Effective Department Chair Letter

An effective evaluation letter written by a department chair has the following characteristics:

- Evaluates faculty members based upon their Assignment of Responsibility (AOR). *The Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Florida State University Board of Trustees and the United Faculty of Florida 2007-2010* states, "Annual performance evaluations shall be based upon the assignments of responsibility, as described in Article 9, for the period under evaluation, and shall take into account the duties and nature of the assignments" [Article 10.1 (a)] (<http://dof.fsu.edu/content/download/22639/145884>).

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is intended to be used along with *Successful Faculty Performance in Teaching, Research and Original Creative Work, and Service; Using Personal Statements in Faculty Evaluations; Guidelines for Writing Promotion and Tenure Letters for Faculty Members*, and *Creating Effective Faculty Improvement Plans*. (The citations for these documents are available in the reference section of this paper.)

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<sup>4</sup> Refer to Article 10 (Performance Evaluations) in the Collective Bargaining Agreement between The Florida State University Board of Trustees and The United Faculty of Florida, 2007-2010 (<http://dof.fsu.edu/forms/2007-2010CBApdf.pdf>).

- Presents the most relevant elements of a faculty member's work to highlight his or her performance.
- Articulates a clear analysis of the elements of a faculty member's performance in teaching, research and original creative work, and service.
- Provides clear supporting evidence of the nature of faculty performance, including identifying any discrepancies between planned and actual faculty performance.
- Provides an evaluation of annual faculty performance that is congruent with the analysis and evidence included in the letter.
- Comments on any change in direction in a faculty member's teaching, research and original creative work, and service.
- Comments on any assigned work in teaching, research and original creative work, and service that has not been completed, including any appropriate recommendations for next year's AOR.
- Incorporates relevant information from previous annual department chair evaluation letters.
- Provides recommendations regarding continuing or improving progress towards promotion to associate professor, promotion to professor, or granting of tenure that is consistent with the analysis and evidence included in the letter, as required by *the Collective Bargaining Agreement between Florida State University Board of Trustees and the United Faculty of Florida 2007-2010*, Article 10.5 (a)(3) and (4):
  - "...each faculty member eligible for tenure shall be apprised annually in writing of the faculty member's progress toward tenure, in order to provide assistance and counseling to the faculty member" [Article 10.5 (a) (3)].
  - Annual letters of evaluation, including the faculty member's progress toward tenure (if eligible for tenure) and/or promotion (if eligible for promotion) shall be attached to the Annual Faculty Evaluation Summary Form in order to provide specific feedback to the faculty member [Article 10.5 (a) (4)].
- Provides specific recommendations for improvement if faculty members are having difficulty in their teaching, research and original creative work, service, or some combination of these tasks, also referred to as an informal improvement plan (Sampson, Wager, Driscoll, & Carroll, 2010).
- References and attaches a formal performance improvement plan when a faculty member's performance in a particular area is rated below "satisfactory" to assist the faculty member in achieving at least a "satisfactory" rating the following year.<sup>5</sup>

### **Organization and Content of a Department Chair Letter**

The five sections of the department chair letter include the following content.

- Introduction

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<sup>5</sup> Refer to Article 10.5 Annual Evaluation Reporting Procedures (b) Discussion (3) in *the Collective Bargaining Agreement between The Florida State University Board of Trustees and The United Faculty of Florida, 2007-2010*

- Teaching
- Research and Original Creative Work
- Service
- Conclusion

Headings may be used to quickly identify section content. The sections on teaching, research and original creative work, and service should include:

- Elements of faculty performance with supporting evidence.
- An evaluative statement on the level of accomplishment expected for faculty members with similar assignments, experience, and length of service at FSU.

The following template includes a wide range of faculty tasks in teaching, research and original creative work, and service. It is unlikely that all of the evaluation elements included in this template would apply to any one faculty member in a given year. The examples included are *not* intended to be rigid requirements, but rather a stimulus to help department chairs write their own letters. A fictitious “Dr. Maria Ortega” is used in this template. A checklist for elements of faculty annual evaluations is provided on the last page of this document.

### Introduction

The introduction to the letter confirms the purpose of the letter. One example of an introduction is as follows.

“I am writing this letter to provide an evaluation of \_\_\_\_\_’s performance in teaching, research and original creative work, and service as part of his/her annual review.”

“I am writing this letter to provide an evaluation of Dr. Maria Ortega’s performance in teaching, research, and service as part of her annual evaluation.”

The introduction also summarizes and may comment on the nature of the faculty member’s Assignment of Responsibility for the calendar year under review. For example, a statement could read:

“For the \_\_\_ calendar year, Dr. \_\_\_\_\_’s faculty assignment has been \_\_\_% in teaching, \_\_\_% in research and original creative work, and \_\_\_% in service.” [An optional comment on the nature of the assignment of responsibility can be added here.]

“For the \_\_\_ calendar year, Dr. Ortega’s faculty assignment was 55% in teaching, 40% in research, and 5% in service. The policy in our department is for tenure-earning assistant professors to focus their research efforts on publications instead of large teaching loads, as well as limiting their role in service, especially college and university service.”

“For the \_\_\_ calendar year, Dr. Ortega’s faculty assignment was 20% in teaching, 70% in research, and 10% in service. Since Dr. Ortega was recruited to FSU to provide leadership in research, a large portion of her assignment has been devoted to developing two interdisciplinary research teams with faculty in the College of Education and the College of Arts and Sciences.”

## Teaching

Elements and evidence of faculty performance in teaching can include any relevant materials submitted by the faculty member. Required and optional elements are as follows.

### Required Elements

- Effectiveness of Course Delivery
  - Potential sources of evidence include (a) student ratings of effectiveness in teaching, including being on the Provost's 90% or 30% list; (b) faculty peer evaluations from classroom observations; and (c) nominations for teaching awards. For faculty members with initially low student ratings of classroom performance, include the extent of improvement in instruction. Any inconsistencies among student ratings should be noted. Also, any inconsistencies between peer observations of teaching and student rating of teaching effectiveness need to be explained.
- Quality of Course Content
  - Potential sources of evidence include (a) faculty peer review of course syllabi, (b) faculty peer review of course Blackboard sites, and (c) unsolicited student compliments and complaints.
- Effectiveness of Academic Advising
  - Potential sources of evidence include (a) faculty personal statement and (b) unsolicited compliments or complaints from advisees.
- Problems Related to Faculty Performance in Teaching
  - Specific problems related to a faculty member's teaching are noted in the annual evaluation letter. Such problems might include poor instruction, inappropriate interactions with a student, unavailability or ineffectiveness in academic advising or research supervision. The letter will also note any action taken by the university, such as a counseling letter, reprimand, leave without pay, or withdrawal of doctoral directive status. If the identified problem contributed to a rating of "official concern" or "unsatisfactory" on a faculty member's Annual Faculty Evaluation Summary Form, this will also be noted. Finally, recommendations for improving performance will be described or a reference will be made to a formal performance improvement plan. Unwillingness or ineffectiveness in completing a performance improvement plan will also be described.

### Optional Elements

- Quality of Course Development<sup>6</sup>
  - Potential sources of evidence include faculty peer review of course proposals developed by the faculty member.

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<sup>6</sup> The meaning of some of the terminology used in this paper has been clarified in the additional information section of this paper. These terms include course development, curriculum development, managing multiple course sections, research, original creative work, program of research, focus of original creative work, and academic program.

- Quality of Curriculum Development
  - Potential sources of evidence include faculty peer review of curriculum developed by the faculty member. For faculty members in departments with professional degrees (such as education, law, medicine, nursing, psychology, and social work), additional evidence could include the accreditation or re-accreditation of a degree program.
- Effectiveness in Managing Multiple Course Sections
  - Potential sources of evidence include comments from faculty members and graduate students teaching sections of the course.
- Effectiveness in Mentoring Students
  - Potential sources of evidence include (a) the extent of student involvement as exhibited in the Faculty Vita in faculty publications, contracts and grants, and presentations; (b) faculty personal statement; and (c) unsolicited student compliments or complaints.
- Effectiveness in Serving as Chair of Master’s Thesis or Doctoral Dissertation Supervisory Committees
  - Potential sources of evidence include (a) number of graduates, (b) recognition of student research and original creative work by professional associations or other groups, and (c) unsolicited student compliments and complaints.
- Recognition of Teaching
  - Potential sources of evidence include faculty Vita, including recognition related to visiting professorships, honors and awards, etc.
- Use of Research and Original Creative Work and/or Service to Enhance Teaching
  - Potential sources of evidence include faculty personal statement. (Not all faculty members are able to incorporate their research and original creative work and service into their teaching.)

#### Sample Evaluation Statement for Effective Teaching

“Dr. Ortega has clearly excelled in Teaching during the \_\_\_\_ calendar year. There is ample evidence include that she is an excellent instructor, academic advisor, and course developer.”

#### Sample Evaluation Statement for Ineffective Teaching

“While Dr. Ortega has worked diligently during the \_\_\_\_ calendar year she has been unable to improve her teaching effectiveness as shown in her teaching ratings and classroom observations by several faculty members in our department.”

## Research and Original Creative Work

Elements and evidence of faculty performance in research and original creative work can include the following required and optional elements.

### Required Elements

- Quality of Research and Original Creative Work
  - Potential sources of evidence include (a) faculty Vita, (b) success in obtaining external contract and grant funding, (c) publications, and (d) supplemental data on the nature of scholarly or creative activities. (Supplemental data can be used by faculty review committees and administrators to evaluate the quality of faculty performance in comparison with other faculty members. Types of supplemental data include, but are not limited to, journal ranking, acceptance rates and impact ratings, as well as how many times a publication has been cited in other publications.)
- Productivity in Research and Original Creative Work
  - Potential sources of evidence include faculty Vita. (The chair letter should comment on the typical role the faculty member has played in his or her publications; e.g., percentage of sole and senior authored publications. Similar role evidence include should be examined for presentations and external funding. A comment on trajectory in relation to productivity can also be helpful.)
- Programmatic Nature of Research or Focus of Original Creative Work
  - Potential sources of evidence include (a) outside letters, (b) faculty Vita, and (c) faculty personal statement.
- Sustainability of Research and Original Creative Work
  - Potential sources of evidence include (a) outside letters, (b) the ability of a faculty member to publish and to obtain external funding over time as shown in their Vita, and (c) faculty personal statement. (For tenure-earning assistant professors, the chair letter should comment on whether or not the faculty member is on a trajectory that is likely to result in developing a sustainable program of research or focus of original creative work.)
- Problems Related to Faculty Performance in Research and Original Creative Work
  - Specific problems related to a faculty member's research and original creative work are noted in the annual evaluation letter. Such problems might include poor quality of research and creative work, limited productivity, lack of a programmatic approach to research or focus of original creative work, inability to obtain external funding when funding is readily available, as well as mismanagement of contract and grant funding, misrepresentation of authorship or publication, misuse of research data, and substantive violation of a human subjects agreement. The letter will also note any action taken by the university, such as a counseling letter, reprimand, leave without pay, or withdrawal of doctoral directive status. If the identified problem contributed to a rating of "official concern" or "unsatisfactory" on a faculty member's Annual Faculty Evaluation Summary Form, this will also be noted. Finally, recommendations for improving performance will be described, or a reference will be made to a formal performance improvement plan.

Unwillingness or ineffectiveness in completing a performance improvement plan will also be described.

#### Optional Elements

- Recognition of Research and Original Creative Work
  - Potential sources of evidence include faculty Vita, including recognition related to visiting professorships, fellowships, and honors and awards.
- Use of Teaching and/or Service to Enhance Research and Original Creative Work
  - Potential sources of evidence include faculty personal statement. (Not all faculty members are able to use their teaching and service to enhance their research and original creative work.)

#### Sample Evaluation Statement for Effective Research and Original Creative Work

“Dr. Ortega has clearly excelled in research during the \_\_\_\_ calendar year. There is ample evidence include of her well-established program of research and the quality of her work.”

#### Sample Evaluation Statement for Ineffective Research and Original Creative Work

“Dr. Ortega has found it difficult to establish herself as a researcher during the \_\_\_\_ calendar year. She has produced few refereed journal articles, no grant proposals (when opportunities were available), and only one conference presentation proposal (which was not accepted). In my judgment, Dr. Ortega is finding it difficult to establish a clear program of research.

### Service

Elements and evidence of faculty performance in service can include the following required and optional elements.

#### Required Elements

- Service to the Institution (University, College, Department, and Program)
  - Potential sources of evidence include (a) faculty Vita and (b) faculty personal statement.
- Service to the Profession
  - Potential sources of evidence include (a) outside letters, (b) faculty Vita, and (c) faculty personal statement.
- Problems Related to Faculty Performance in Service
  - Specific problems related to a faculty member’s service are noted in the annual evaluation letter. Such problems might include an unwillingness to follow through with a service or incompetence in completing an assignment. The letter will also note any action taken by the university, such as a counseling letter, reprimand, leave without pay, or withdrawal of doctoral directive status. If the identified problem contributed to a rating of “official concern” or “unsatisfactory” on a faculty member’s Annual Faculty Evaluation Summary Form, this will also be noted. Finally, recommendations for improving

performance will be described, or a reference will be made to a formal performance improvement plan. Unwillingness or ineffectiveness in completing a performance improvement plan will also be described.

### Optional Elements

- Service as a Faculty Mentor to Tenure-Earning Faculty
  - Potential sources of evidence include (a) verbal feedback from his or her mentee and (b) faculty perceptions of the mentoring experience, including any plans for improvement as a mentor in the next academic year.
- Service to Society through Consultation
  - Potential sources of evidence include (a) outside letters, (b) faculty Vita, and (c) faculty personal statement.
- Recognition of Service
  - Potential sources of evidence include faculty Vita, including recognition related to honors and awards.
- Use of Teaching and/or Research and Original Creative Work to Enhance Service
  - Potential sources of evidence include faculty personal statement. (Not all faculty members are able to use their teaching and research and original creative work to enhance their service.)

### Sample Evaluation Statement for Effective Service

“As an assistant professor, Dr. Ortega has been given a limited service role in her assignment of responsibility during the \_\_\_\_ calendar year. The service tasks in her program that she has been assigned, or volunteered for, have been completed in an effective and timely manner.”

### Sample Evaluation Statement for Ineffective Service

“Dr. Ortega has completed a variety of service activities as part of her assignment of responsibility during the \_\_\_\_ calendar year. However, her performance has not involved the leadership activities we would expect for a faculty member at the rank of professor in our department.”

### Conclusion

The evaluation letter should close with a summary evaluative statement on the level of accomplishment expected for faculty members with similar experience and opportunities. For faculty members who have not been granted tenure or have not yet been promoted to the rank of professor, a statement should be made on the relative progress towards these goals, as well as recommendations for enhancing or improving performance. The statement of progress should have three elements:

- Overall judgment of progress towards promotion and tenure



- Recommendations on elements of faculty teaching, research and original creative work, and service that should be maintained to continue progress toward promotion and tenure
- Recommendations on elements of faculty teaching, research and original creative work, and service that should change to improve progress toward promotion and tenure

The following examples are *not rigid templates*, but rather a stimulus to help department chairs write their own evaluative statement.<sup>7</sup>

#### Sample Evaluation Statements for Performance

“Your performance in teaching, research and original creative work, and service has been \_\_\_\_\_ during the \_\_\_\_ calendar year. My judgment is based on your \_\_\_\_\_ teaching, \_\_\_\_\_ research and original creative work, and \_\_\_\_\_ service. The faculty evaluation committee in our department rated your performance \_\_\_\_\_ in teaching, research and original creative work, and service. I concur/disagree with this judgment.”

#### Effective Performance:

“Your performance in teaching, research, and service, has been excellent during the \_\_\_\_ calendar year. My judgment is based on your excellence as an instructor, academic advisor, and course developer; your well-established program of research and strong national reputation, and consistently effective service to your program. The faculty evaluation committee in our department rated your performance highly in teaching, research, and service. I concur with this judgment. I have the following recommendations for continuing your excellent performance. I recommend that you continue involving your graduate students in your research. I recommend that you continue your program of research, especially given the trend in your field toward the use of mixed methods research designs. I would also continue your collaboration with Dr. Li, including resubmission of your grant proposal using the feedback you received from the funding agency.

#### Ineffective Performance:

“Considering your performance during the \_\_\_\_ calendar year, I must indicate ‘official concern’ on your Annual Faculty Evaluation Summary in the areas of teaching and research. My judgment is based on your lack of success in improving your performance in teaching, your limited productivity as a scholar, and inconsistent program of research. My recommendations for improving your performance in these areas are included previously in this letter.”

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<sup>7</sup> For other “Sample Progress Toward Promotion and/or Tenure Letters (Tenure-Track and Non-Tenure-Track)” see the Office of The Dean of the Faculties web site at: <http://dof.fsu.edu/facdevelopment.htm>

### Sample Evaluation Statements for Progress towards Promotion and Tenure

“Considering your performance in teaching, research and original creative work, and service during the \_\_\_\_ calendar year, I believe that you are making \_\_\_\_\_ progress towards promotion to \_\_\_\_\_ professor and tenure at FSU. My judgment is based on your \_\_\_\_\_ teaching, \_\_\_\_\_ research and original creative work, and \_\_\_\_\_ service.”

#### Adequate Progress:

“Considering your performance in teaching, research, and service during the \_\_\_\_ calendar year, I believe you are making excellent progress towards promotion to professor. My judgment is based on your excellence as an instructor, academic advisor, and curriculum designer; your well-established program of research and strong national reputation; your effective mentoring of tenure-earning faculty; and consistently effective service to your program.”

#### Inadequate Progress:

“Considering your performance in teaching, research, and service during the \_\_\_\_ calendar year, I believe you will have difficulty in being promoted to associate professor and being granted tenure. My judgment is based on your continued poor teaching effectiveness ratings, your inability to be available for academic advising of students, your limited productivity in scholarship, and lack of a coherent program of research.”

### Additional Information

#### *Course Development*

**Course development** refers to creating a new course or making substantive revisions, such as developing a distance learning component or Web-based learning resources.

#### *Curriculum Development*

**Curriculum development** includes designing new courses, distance learning programs, certificate programs, majors, and degree programs. Curriculum development does not include the normal ongoing development of an existing course.

#### *Management of Multiple Course Sections*

**Management of multiple course sections** involves coordinating the ongoing design, development, and delivery of instruction for a course having several sections that are taught by various faculty members, graduate students, or adjunct faculty. Responsibilities typically include leadership in development and/or selection of course materials, revision of course content based on evaluations, selection of instructors, and arrangement of instructional technology for the course. When the course is taught by graduate students or adjunct faculty members, regular supervision and evaluation of instructors may be involved.

*Research and Original Creative Work*

**Research** includes various scholarly efforts designed to examine questions of scientific, social, literary, or artistic importance by obtaining, analyzing, and interpreting data that can guide future research and in some cases lead to application of the findings and the refinement of public policy. Research contributions are most often made through publications and conference presentations. **Original creative work** includes various imaginative and innovative contributions that can have artistic, social, and economic value. Examples of original and creative work include novels and novellas, short stories, poems, scripts, screenplays, musical compositions, musical arrangements, choreography, performances, production and design for performances, visual art, interior design, apparel design, edited works, Internet Web site development, computer software development, and inventions.

*Program of Research or Focus of Original Creative Work*

A **program of research** involves a systematic investigation of related elements of a topic over a period of time. A **focus of original creative work** involves the exploration of related artistic themes or media of expression over a period of time. Having one or two clear and consistent programs of research or foci of original creative work makes it more likely that faculty members will achieve their goals and make substantive contributions to their field. The synergy inherent to programmatic research helps faculty members gain insights and specialized expertise that would not be possible if their research were conducted on a variety of unrelated topics. Programmatic research builds on the prior research of faculty members, as well as students and other researchers. Programmatic research also provides greater visibility for a faculty member as other researchers note the consistent contributions of the faculty member in publications and conference presentations. Similar advantages exist for having a thematic focus for original creative work. However, a program of research or focus of original creative work should not be restrictive. Serendipity resulting from new funding options, technology, or other developments may provide new opportunities that should not be ignored.

A faculty member typically has only one or two programs of research that typically evolve or change over time. The same is true for original creative work. The two can be distinct or related in various ways. A program of research statement or focus of creative work statement can reflect current work, past work, or both. A statement is typically no longer than one or two sentences. The following example shows a faculty member having a single program of research: “Examine the influence of extracognitive factors (beliefs, emotions, culture) in shaping the teaching and learning of science.” In this second example, the faculty member has two programs of research: “Examine the content and process of career decision making using a cognitive information processing approach, and then apply the knowledge gained to designing and delivering cost-effective career resources and services. Also, examine the design and appropriate use of information and communication technology in the delivery of assessment and information resources as well as counseling and guidance services.” An example of a focus of original creative work statement is as follows: “Explore the interaction among light, composition, and subject matter in expressing mood in still life photographs.”

*Program*

A **program** is a unit within a department responsible for specific degrees, majors, specializations, or certificate programs.

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**Checklist for Elements of Faculty Annual Evaluations**

Dean of the Faculties Office  
Florida State University

**Teaching**

*Required Elements*

- Effectiveness of Course Delivery
- Quality of Course Content
- Effectiveness of Academic Advising
- Problems Related to Faculty Performance in Teaching

*Optional Elements*

- Quality of Course Development
- Quality of Curriculum Development
- Effectiveness in Managing Multiple Course Sections
- Effectiveness in Mentoring Students
- Effectiveness in Serving as Chair of Master's Thesis or Doctoral Dissertation Supervisory Committees
- Recognition of Teaching
- Use of Research and Original Creative Work and/or Service to Enhance Teaching

**Research and Original Creative Work**

*Required Elements*

- Quality of Research and Original Creative Work
- Productivity in Research and Original Creative Work
- Programmatic Nature of Research or Focus of Original Creative Work
- Sustainability of Research and Original Creative Work
- Problems Related to Faculty Performance in Research and Original Creative Work

*Optional Elements*

- Recognition of Research and Original Creative Work
- Use of Teaching and/or Service to Enhance Research and Original Creative Work

**Service**

*Required Elements*

- Service to the Institution (University, College, Department, and Program)
- Service to the Profession
- Problems Related to Faculty Performance in Service

*Optional Elements*

- Service as a Faculty Mentor to Tenure-Earning Faculty
- Service to Society through Consultation
- Recognition of Service
- Use of Teaching and/or Research and Original Creative Work to Enhance Service