

Guidelines for Writing Promotion and Tenure Letters for Faculty Members¹

James P. Sampson, Jr., Marcy P. Driscoll, and Pamela S. Carroll²

Dean of the Faculties Office
Florida State University³

April 26, 2010

These guidelines are intended to help department chairs write effective promotion and tenure 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 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 promotion and tenure, as well as their own approach to writing evaluative letters. However, the letters must also take into account departmental promotion and tenure criteria and procedures to maintain compliance with the Collective Bargaining Agreement.⁴

Purposes of the Department Chair Letter

The department chair letter provides an analysis of a faculty member's performance in relation to departmental standards for promotion and tenure. These letters provide contextual information needed by faculty serving on review committees 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:⁵
 - Annual evaluations.
 - Annual assignments of responsibility (AOR). Evaluation for promotion and tenure is based upon faculty members' AOR for the period under evaluation.

¹ 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; and Guidelines for Writing Annual Evaluation Letters for Faculty Members.*" (The citations for these documents are available in the reference section of this paper.)

² Author information is provided at the end of this document.

³ 314 Westcott Building, 222 S. Copeland Avenue, Tallahassee, FL 32306-1480, (850) 644-6876, <http://dof.fsu.edu/>

⁴ 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>).

⁵ See Articles 14.2d Promotion/Promotion Criteria/Basis for Promotion Decision and 15.3d Tenure/Criteria and Procedures for Tenure/Basis for Tenure Decision of *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>).

- Fulfillment of the department's written promotion and tenure criteria as related to the candidate's assignments.
- Articulates a clear analysis of the elements of a faculty member's performance in teaching, research and original creative work, and service.
- Presents the most relevant elements of a faculty member's work to highlight his or her performance.
- 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.
- Explains any unusual circumstances related to a faculty member's work that has had an impact on his or her performance.
- Comments on the extent of a faculty member's success in completing any performance improvement plans resulting from prior annual, third-year, or teaching evaluations.
- Incorporates relevant information from previous annual department chair evaluation letters.
- Incorporates relevant information from outside letters solicited by the department chair.
- Complements information presented in the candidate's personal statements for teaching, research and original creative work, and service.
 - Personal statements provide an opportunity for candidates to state their goals for teaching, research and original creative work, and service, as well as the strategies they used to achieve these goals. The chair letter can then include evidence include of the extent to which they achieved their goals, with the understanding that the chair will decide if and how the information would be used in the candidate's evaluation letter. Department chairs should encourage faculty members to provide any data that might provide evidence of their accomplishments.

Organization and Content of a Department Chair Letter

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

- Introduction
- 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 promotion and tenure letters 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 application for promotion to _____ professor with tenure at FSU.”

“I am writing this letter to provide an evaluation of Dr. Maria Ortega’s performance in teaching, research and original creative work, and service as part of her application for promotion to associate professor with tenure at FSU.”

The introduction also summarizes, and may comment on, the nature of the faculty members’ Assignment of Responsibility for the period of the present review. In addition to noting percentages in the assignment, an optional comment on the nature of the assignment of responsibility can be added. For example, a statement could read:

“For the past _____ years, Dr. _____’s average faculty assignment has been ___% in teaching, ___% in research and original creative work, and ___% in service.”

“For the past five years, Dr. Ortega’s average faculty assignment has been 55% in teaching, 40% in research and original creative work, and 5% in service. The policy in our department is for tenure-earning assistant professors to focus their research and original creative work efforts on publications instead of large grant applications, as well as limiting their role in service, especially college and university service.”

“For the past year, Dr. Ortega’s faculty assignment has been 20% in teaching, 70% in research and original creative work, 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 the following required and optional elements.

Required Elements

- Effectiveness of Course Delivery
 - Potential sources of evidence include (a) student ratings of effectiveness in teaching and (b) faculty peer evaluations from classroom observations (including the extent of improvement in instruction for faculty members with initially low student ratings of classroom performance. 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 peer review of course syllabi.
- Effectiveness of Academic Advising
 - Potential sources of evidence include (a) personal statement and (b) unsolicited statements from advisees.

Optional Elements

- Quality of Course Development⁶
 - Potential sources of evidence include peer review of course proposals developed by the faculty member.
- 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 in faculty publications, contacts and grants, and presentations, (b) faculty personal statement, and (c) unsolicited student feedback.

⁶ 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.

- 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.

Two examples of a summative evaluation statement for teaching are presented below.

“Dr. Ortega has clearly excelled in teaching. There is ample evidence that she is an excellent instructor and curriculum designer.”

“While Dr. Ortega has worked diligently, 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.

- Quality of Research and Original Creative Work
 - Potential sources of evidence include (a) outside letters, (b) faculty Vita, (c) success in obtaining external contract and grant funding, (d) outside letters, and (e) supplemental data on the nature of scholarly or creative activities. Using direct quotes from outside letters can be particularly useful in providing evidence related to the quality and impact of a faculty member’s research and original creative work. (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 acceptance rates and impact ratings, as well as how many times a publication has been cited in other publications. The letter should comment on faculty performance in relation to the nature of quality research and original creative work in a given field, such as the relative value of books versus journal articles or the value of conference presentations versus poster sessions.)
- 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. A comment on trajectory in relation to productivity can also be helpful. The letter should also comment on faculty performance in relation to typical productivity levels in a given field.)

- 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 his or her 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 resulting in a sustainable program of research or focus of original creative work.)

Optional Elements

- Recognition of Research and Original Creative Work
 - Potential sources of evidence include faculty Vita, including recognition related to visiting professorships, fellowships, honors and awards, etc.
- Use of Teaching and/or Service to Enhance Research and Original Creative Work
 - Potential sources of evidence include faculty personal statement.

Two examples of a summative evaluation statement for research and original creative work are as follows:

“Dr. Ortega has clearly excelled in research. There is ample evidence of her well established program of research and her strong national reputation as shown in her outside letters.”

“Dr. Ortega has found it difficult to establish herself as a researcher. Both her Vita and her outside letters show her limited productivity as a scholar and inconsistent 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. Using direct quotes from outside letters can be helpful in providing evidence related to the quality and impact of a faculty member’s service to professional associations.

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.

Two examples of a summative evaluation statement for service are as follows:

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

“Dr. Ortega has completed a variety of service activities as part of her assignment of responsibility. 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

Similar to the conclusion for each section on teaching, research and original creative work, and service, the evaluation letter should close with a summary evaluative statement on the level of accomplishment expected for faculty members to be promoted and tenured.

“Considering _____’s performance in teaching, research and original creative work, and service, I support his/her promotion to _____ professor and tenure at FSU. My judgment is based on _____’s _____ teaching, _____ research and original creative work, and _____ service.”

“Considering Dr. Ortega’s performance in teaching, research, and service, I strongly support her promotion to associate professor and tenure at FSU. My judgment is based on Dr. Ortega’s excellence as an instructor and curriculum designer, her well established program of research and strong national reputation, and consistently effective service to her department and the college.”

“Considering _____’s performance in teaching, research and original creative work, and service, I am not able to recommend his/her promotion to _____ professor and tenure at FSU. My judgment is based on _____’s _____ teaching, _____ research and original creative work, and _____ service.”

“Considering Dr. Ortega’s performance in teaching and research, I am not able to recommend her promotion to associate professor and tenure at FSU. My judgment is based on Dr. Ortega’s lack of success in improving her performance in teaching and her limited productivity as a scholar and inconsistent program of research.”

This final section should also indicate agreement or disagreement with the recommendation made by the departmental promotion and tenure committee. Examples of potential statements are as follows:

“My own judgment is consistent with the judgment of faculty on our departmental promotion and tenure committee. This consistency in evaluation clearly supports granting promotion and tenure to Dr. Ortega.”

“While I respect the judgment of the faculty on our departmental promotion and tenure committee, I do not concur with their majority vote to grant promotion to associate professor and tenure for Dr. Ortega, based on the evidence included in this letter.”

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 that of 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.

References

- Sampson, J. P., Jr., Driscoll, M. P., & Carroll, P. S. (2010). *Guidelines for writing annual evaluation letters for faculty members*. Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University, Office of the Dean of the Faculties.
- Sampson, J. P., Jr., Driscoll, M. P., Foulk, D. F., & Carroll, P. S. (2010). *Successful faculty performance in teaching, research and original creative work, and service*. Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University, Office of the Dean of the Faculties.

Sampson, J. P., Jr., Driscoll, M. P., Foulk, D. F., & Carroll, P. S. (2010). *Using personal statements in faculty evaluations*. Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University, Office of the Dean of the Faculties.

Author Information

James P. Sampson, Jr. is the Mode L. Stone Distinguished Professor of Counseling and Career Development and Associate Dean for Faculty Development and Administration at the College of Education at Florida State University. Marcy P. Driscoll is the Leslie J. Briggs Professor of Educational Research and Dean of the College of Education at the Florida State University. Pamela S. Carroll is the Dwight L. Burton Professor of English Education, the Mack and Effie Tyner Distinguished Professor of Education, and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at the College of Education at Florida State University. Correspondence should be directed to jsampson@fsu.edu, College of Education, 1114 W. Call Street, P.O. Box 3064450, Tallahassee, FL 32306-4450, (850) 644-6885. Helpful reviews of this paper were provided by Gloria Colvin, Elisabeth Musch, Bob Reardon, and Walt Wager.

Checklist for Elements of Promotion and Tenure Letters

Dean of the Faculties Office
Florida State University

Teaching

Required Elements

- Effectiveness of Course Delivery
- Quality of Course Content
- Effectiveness of Academic Advising

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

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

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