

**Proposed change to solicitation for external letter writers
October 2020**

Proposed changes and rationale:

1. To revise language included in the solicitation letter to external letter writers so as to make clear the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on candidates.

Revised language will instruct them to consider this in their evaluation (see proposed language change below).

The rationale for this is the significant negative impact of COVID-19 on scholarly productivity, which should not be used against the candidate.

2. To revise language included in the solicitation letter to external letter writers so as to make clear the time frame for which they are expected to evaluate the candidate.

Revised language will alert them to any “clock-stop” or extension circumstances (for COVID-19 or any other reason).

The rationale for this is that the COACHE tenure/promotion subcommittees noted the tendency for evaluators in various capacities to judge candidates' records on the basis of number of years in rank rather than on countable years. This was viewed as unfair for candidates.

As it relates specifically to COVID, faculty were automatically given an extension to apply to tenure. For faculty who did not opt out of this extension – i.e., faculty who received the extension – this needs to be made clear in the letters.

Specific changes to the PTC Guidelines:

Section 2.4.5.4 – Current text:

2.4.5.4 The letters sent by the chairperson or the chair of the ad hoc committee to solicit the referees' opinions should be accompanied by the candidate's curriculum vitae as well as by reprints and/or preprints selected by the candidate. The soliciting letter should contain all the substantive points included in the sample provided in section 8.2.

It should request the referee:

- a) to include specific evaluation of the candidate's scholarly or professional achievements, especially with reference to the candidate's most recent work (rather than merely to comment on the general character or promise of the candidate),
- b) to compare the candidate's scholarly or professional contributions with those of national or international leaders in the candidate's field who are at a comparable career stage,
- c) to supply information when possible about the candidate's teaching effectiveness,

d) to comment on whether the candidate would be granted tenure and/or promotion in the reviewer's own institution.

e) to indicate whether his/her letter of evaluation is to be held confidential or whether the candidate may read it either as it stands or with all identification of source and writer expunged. Prospective writers must be told that confidentiality will be maintained to the extent possible under current legal principles unless they explicitly specify otherwise.

Section 2.4.5.4 – New text (changes in bold):

2.4.5.4 The letters sent by the chairperson or the chair of the ad hoc committee to solicit the referees' opinions should be accompanied by the candidate's curriculum vitae as well as by reprints and/or preprints selected by the candidate. The **solicitation** letter should contain all the substantive points included in the sample provided in section 8.2.

It should request the referee:

a) to include specific evaluation of the candidate's scholarly or professional achievements, especially with reference to the candidate's most recent work (rather than merely to comment on the general character or promise of the candidate),

b) to compare the candidate's scholarly or professional contributions with those of national or international leaders in the candidate's field who are at a comparable career stage,

c) to evaluate the candidate's scholarly or professional achievements for a specific time period (specific years noted) should the candidate have been given a "clock-stop" or extension,

d) to evaluate the candidate's scholarly or professional achievements in the context of the impact of COVID-19 (beginning Spring 2020 and ~~until relevant~~ for as long as is appropriate/necessary),

e) to supply information when possible about the candidate's teaching effectiveness,

f) to comment on whether the candidate would be granted tenure and/or promotion in the reviewer's own institution.

g) to indicate whether his/her letter of evaluation is to be held confidential or whether the candidate may read it either as it stands or with all identification of source and writer expunged. Prospective writers must be told that confidentiality will be maintained to the extent possible under current legal principles unless they explicitly specify otherwise.

APPENDIX

8.2 Sample letter of solicitation for promotion and/or continuing appointment – Current text:

Dear Professor _____:

We are considering the promotion of _____ from (rank) _____ to (rank) _____ with/without tenure. In order to help us reach a decision, we would appreciate your

candid assessment of Dr. _____'s professional achievements and standing in the field of _____. For your convenience a current curriculum vitae and representative sample of publications are enclosed. Please indicate to what extent you have had occasion to interact personally with the candidate.

We would especially value your expert opinion on the quality, originality and importance of the candidate's research and your estimation of how she/he compares in professional accomplishments with others at similar stages in their career or holding comparable academic rank. It would also be useful to know whether a candidate of Dr. _____'s qualifications would probably be promoted/receive tenure at your institution. Any other information you can supply regarding the candidate's effectiveness in teaching or her/his national or international reputation in her/his field of research would be greatly appreciated.

To the extent possible under current legal principles, the candidate will not have access to your letter of reference unless you give us specific permission, in writing, to provide a copy to him/her. Such a written statement of permission from you must specify whether the candidate may see your letter in its entirety, as written, or only with all identification of source or authorship deleted. Thank you for your collegial assistance in helping us to reach an informed decision in this matter. My colleagues and I appreciate the time and care which you devote to this evaluation.

Sincerely yours,

APPENDIX

8.2 Sample letter of solicitation for promotion and/or continuing appointment – New text (changes in bold):

Dear Professor _____:

We are considering the promotion of _____ from (rank) _____ to

(rank) _____ with/without tenure. In order to help us reach a decision, we would appreciate your candid assessment of Dr. _____'s professional achievements and standing in the field of _____. For your convenience a current curriculum vitae and representative sample of publications are enclosed. Please indicate to what extent you have had occasion to interact personally with the candidate.

We would especially value your expert opinion on the quality, originality and importance of the candidate's research and your estimation of how she/he compares in professional accomplishments with others at similar stages in their career or holding comparable academic rank. It would also be useful to know whether a candidate of Dr. _____'s qualifications would probably be promoted/receive tenure at your institution. Any other information you can supply regarding the candidate's effectiveness in teaching or her/his national or international reputation in her/his field of research would be greatly appreciated.

[Optional if appropriate] We ask that you evaluate the candidate on their achievements and contributions during the following time frame: _____. This reflects... [a clock-stop

that was granted to the candidate during which expectations for productivity were relaxed – OR – an extension that was given to the candidate due to the impact of _____].

In addition, beginning in the Spring 2020 semester, faculty across the University experienced a significant disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In Spring 2020, as a result of the health crisis, all faculty rapidly moved their courses online; research facilities including labs, national facilities, archives, and libraries were closed; and travel was suspended, limiting opportunities for professional visibility and service. In conjunction with the disruptions experienced on-campus, many faculty were working out of their homes while simultaneously providing childcare due to closures of daycare facilities and K-12 schooling. With Stony Brook University being at the initial epicenter in the US, several faculty also dealt with personal grief and/or illness of themselves, family members, friends, and students. Research disruptions, significant shifts in teaching modalities, limited childcare, and remote work has persisted. We ask that you take this unprecedented event into consideration when evaluating work performed since spring 2020.

To the extent possible under current legal principles, the candidate will not have access to your letter of reference unless you give us specific permission, in writing, to provide a copy to him/her. Such a written statement of permission from you must specify whether the candidate may see your letter in its entirety, as written, or only with all identification of source or authorship deleted. If you are willing to grant the candidate access to your letter, please include one of the statements below at the end of your letter, following your signature and title:

_____ The candidate may NOT read my letter of recommendation.

_____ The candidate may read my letter of recommendation only if all identification as to its source is deleted.

_____ The candidate may read my letter of recommendation as it stands.

If you do not include any of these statements, the candidate will not be granted access to your letter.

Thank you for your collegial assistance in helping us to reach an informed decision in this matter. My colleagues and I appreciate the time and care which you devote to this evaluation.

Sincerely yours,