

**Guidance for tenured and tenure track faculty evaluation letters:  
Information for department chairs, peer committees, and deans  
regarding 3<sup>rd</sup> year review, tenure review, and promotion to full professor.**

Summer 2012

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**Overview:** Effective evaluation letters in the faculty review process is critically important to insuring RIT has a system of faculty evaluation that supports sound decision-making with fair and consistent practices. Towards this objective, the following guidance is provided for effective evaluation letters. While this guidance is directed at department chairs, committees, and deans, the same guidance applies to academic unit colleagues who, according to policy, also provide evaluative input in the process.

**Terms and definitions:**

1. Assessment or rating of faculty performance refers to the judgment rendered in the letter – typically guided by RIT policy E7.0; e.g., annual evaluations rate performance using words such as outstanding, very good, satisfactory, needs improvement, and unsatisfactory. Scholarly work, for example, may be assessed using the same key words as annual evaluations.
2. Criteria refer to any articulated standards for various levels of faculty performance. For example, a college may articulate that in order to be promoted to full professor, the scholarship of the candidate must have achieved a national reputation as demonstrated by papers published and cited by other authors, invited talks, federal grants awarded, etc. To provide maximal flexibility, criteria might be framed with sufficient examples to give the reader a sense of the standards. In particular, standards embedded in criteria provide guidance for making an assessment of faculty work—they typically address both a quantitative and qualitative dimension. In addition, RIT’s scholarship policy criteria, included in RIT Policy E4.0, must be referenced and all scholarship or creative work must be peer-reviewed, documented and disseminated.
3. Evidence refers to the documentation and facts that support the assessment or rating. For example, multiple forms of evidence is required for an adequate assessment of teaching effectiveness—student ratings of teaching, peer-evaluation of teaching, curriculum development, etc. In particular, letters must reference the evidence used to formulate the judgment or assessment.

4. Evaluation refers to the totality of the judgment: the criteria used, the evidence considered and cited, the analysis, and the assessment of work.
5. Scholarship at RIT refers to a body of work that is peer-reviewed, documented, and disseminated.

**General guidance for all letters:**

1. Letters considered for tenure and promotion are summative; they are rendering a judgment as to whether or not the candidate should be tenured or promoted. Letters considered for mid-tenure review and for promotion to Professor are summative and formative; summative to render a judgment about the faculty work to date and formative in the sense that the letters are to provide the faculty member with suggestions for real ways of improving his or her performance.
2. The chair, the college committee, and the dean must provide a thorough and careful evaluation of the applicant in the three areas of teaching, research/creative work, and service. The role is to evaluate, not to advocate for, the candidate. It is essential that these evaluations carefully and thoroughly assess the applicant's strengths and weaknesses in relation to the established standards and criteria. Negative comments or votes must be explained. A statement such as "we do/do not recommend reappointment" is not sufficient. Each letter must explain clearly and with evidence the reasons for its recommendation. Each letter must specifically address how the candidate's record of teaching, research, and service meets or does not meet the primary unit's standards and criteria and the criteria and standards in university policy.
3. All letters should evaluate the faculty on the basis of known criteria, using evidence provided in the faculty dossier, showing an analysis of the evidence, and making an assessment based on the criteria. Typically, the evaluation is conducted in parts – teaching, research or scholarship, and service (including the ability to effectively contribute to the functioning of the unit) – with a capstone assessment culminating in the final evaluation.
4. There must be multiple forms of evidence to support teaching effectiveness. While student ratings of teaching are one form of evidence that can be used to assess teaching, other forms are needed to provide the complete and holistic assessment of teaching effectiveness. Effective forms of evidence to support teaching assessment include:
  - a. Student ratings of teaching;
  - b. Collegial peer review of teaching pedagogy;

- c. Collegial peer review of the candidate's courseware, e.g.:
    - i. Syllabi and assignments
    - ii. Text and other materials
    - iii. Graded work
    - iv. Exams
  - d. Collegial peer outcomes assessment, e.g., student preparedness for and success in subsequent courses;
  - e. Assessment results that demonstrate student learning of course outcomes;
  - f. Teaching awards and other recognitions, either internal or external;
  - g. Alumni evaluations/feedback;
  - h. Development of curriculum and/or instructional materials;
  - i. Innovations in teaching;
  - j. Quality and effectiveness of mentoring graduate students on projects, MS theses and PhD theses;
  - k. Student advising assessment;
  - l. Student performance on standard professional examination;
  - m. Student project supervision;
  - n. Demonstrated effectiveness in teaching courses that are understood to be the most challenging from an instructional viewpoint;
  - o. Enrollment in elective courses—i.e., a willingness to teach undesirable courses; and
  - p. Active interest in and concern for student welfare.
5. Evidence to support scholarship assessment can have many forms just as the scholarship itself can have many forms. Evaluating scholarship contributions should address the significance, impact and attention of the scholar's work to the university's mission. Note that the amount of scholarship is a function of workload and many colleges have established specific expectations through the plan of work. Regardless of amount, the assessment of scholarship quality is an expectation in all letters. Examples of evidence that can be referenced for the assessment of scholarship include:
- a. External peer evaluations of published or exhibited scholarship/creative work, generally captured from external letters;
  - b. External funding in support of scholarship, research, and creative work;
  - c. Invention disclosures, patents or licensing agreements that demonstrate the technology transfer of ideas;
  - d. Professional reputation or standing of presses (publications), journals, shows, exhibits, conferences, etc., through which the scholarship has been disseminated;
  - e. Citations by other professionals of the candidate's disseminated scholarship;
  - f. Quantity of disseminated, peer-reviewed, and documented scholarship;

- g. Development of research laboratories;
  - h. Invited seminars, presentations, exhibits, or other displays of work; and
  - i. Presentation of conference papers at national and international professional meetings.
6. Contributions in the area of service work can vary according to the needs of the college or university, the interest of the faculty member, the discipline, or professional society. The evaluator typically considers all these factors, as well as the quality and impact of the work, in assessing the service component of the faculty member.

**Department chair letter:** The role of the department chair evaluation letter is critical because it reflects the evaluation of a peer who is closest to the work of the candidate and because it captures the disciplinary nuances for other evaluators to consider.

**Committee letter:** Since external evaluations of the candidate's scholarship are the purview of the college committee, the committee letter must provide information regarding how the external letters were solicited, how were the evaluators chosen, and which letters were submitted as official letters. The committee letter should provide an analysis of the external letters, indicating which ones give strong support for the candidate and which ones do not. Quotes taken from external letters provide evidence in support of the analysis.

**Dean's letter:** The letter from the dean must reflect on the committee and the chair letters as well as provide his or her own evaluation of the candidate's work using criteria, evidence, analysis, and an assessment.

**Mid-tenure evaluation:** In addition to having a summative evaluation, each letter for the mid-tenure evaluation must include formative language for the faculty member to use for improvement. This guidance and the subsequent faculty performance will be considered at the time of the tenure review.