

Guidelines for Unit Leaders for Soliciting External Letters of Evaluation

External letters for evaluation are an important component of the tenure and promotion process. A sample template solicitation letter is provided by IFAS. This template includes the core items that should be addressed by external evaluations and may be customized as appropriate for your unit. Solicitations for external evaluation should include a copy of the UF and IFAS tenure and promotion criteria (Section 8 of the T&P packet). External letters for tenure-track faculty should be solicited according to the UF guidelines, which are repeated here (reference document is posted at: <http://www.aa.ufl.edu/tenure>).

1. Those from whom letters of evaluation are solicited must be notified of the possibility that a copy of the letter will be sent to the faculty member unless s/he has executed a written waiver. NOTE: Language related to this is provided in the IFAS template.
2. All solicited letters that have been received must be included in the packet.
3. University reviewers consider conflict of interest when assessing the weight given to a letter of evaluation and it is therefore important that the candidate and unit administrators realize that the quality and independence of the letters and their writers play an important role in tenure and promotion decisions. Letters from individuals who have or have had a personal, professional or mentoring relationship with the candidate could create a conflict of interest. The guiding principle is whether the individual stands to benefit from the success of the candidate, either professionally or personally. In general, this includes those who have shared a common grant or coauthored a publication within the previous 5 years, or those who served as dissertation advisor or post-doctoral supervisor, or were close collaborators. This is not meant to exclude individuals who have a familiarity with the candidate because of professional contact in a community of scholars.
NOTE: It is not appropriate to argue that a discipline or field is so small that everyone in that community presents a demonstrable conflict of interest and, would, therefore, be excluded by this approach. Scholarship of the quality that is commensurate with success in the promotion and tenure process should have a substantial impact, beyond any small community of scholars.
4. If a reviewer has a potential conflict of interest, the chair must explain the rationale for using that reviewer in the Chair's letter.
5. External letters should not be solicited from individuals currently employed by UF or those previously employed in the past 10 years whose term at UF overlapped with the candidate.
6. The focus of the letters of evaluation should be to present evidence of recognized contributions and not simply to support or recommend. Letters should evaluate the candidate's record holistically to determine if it supports the claim that the candidate's

work has made a substantial impact in the field, as well as being nationally or internationally recognized.

7. Outside letters should normally be written by faculty of higher rank than the candidate. Letters from faculty who are at the top of the candidate's field and at the very best institutions are particularly valued. The emphasis should not be on the number of letters solicited, but on the quality of the reviews.
8. The unit leader should work with the candidate to generate a list of potential outside evaluators. A sufficient number of outside evaluations should be sought so that the packet includes at least five letters of evaluation from outside the university.
9. A copy of a typical letter requesting the letters of evaluation should appear in the packet in Section 30.

Faculty in non-tenure-accruing titles whose assignments have been solely in teaching and service or whose promotion will be decided based almost solely on their performance in teaching and service may substitute letters of evaluation from within the University for the outside evaluations described above.

For tenure-track faculty with an Extension assignment, a letter of evaluation from a county Extension faculty (Extension Agent IV) is highly recommended. This letter would be in addition to the minimum five external letters described above.