

## **Dean's Statement on Expectations for the Annual Performance Review Process**

**Introduction.** I intend this to be a periodically updated version of my perspectives on the annual review process. It should look familiar, since it's modeled very closely on Dean Christian's statement. I hope this will make clear the key principles that I believe should guide this process. I'm writing it mostly with newer faculty members in mind, as well as new Department Chairs and new Department Personnel Committee (DPC) Chairs. But it can also act as a reminder and resource to continuing faculty members.

Members of the Instructional Academic Staff (IAS) are also subject to regular performance review, and generally speaking, this document does not directly address our expectations for them. That's because specific expectations for IAS members' performance are less complicated and less extensive than those required for faculty, and yet tend to vary more widely from one context to another. For these reasons, the best overall guidance I can offer all members of the IAS within the College is to suggest that you adhere to the general principles of successful performance outlined here for faculty, and to consult your own department's specific guidance for members of the IAS. On those matters where separate principles distinctly apply for IAS pretty much across the College, however, I will add a special note to that effect.

**Summary:** This document elaborates upon the following major points:

- Peer review as both a method of evaluation and a hallmark of professional quality
- Frank, honest analysis and full disclosure are essential for truly formative evaluation
- Building a case for a personnel action (say, retention) requires the faculty candidate to assemble all relevant evidence
- Building the case requires the DPC and Chair to analyze the evidence and draw an informed conclusion, to make a judgment about performance and progress
- Integrity of the process is ensured if all observe transparency and openness in communication (without compromising confidentiality)
- The Departmental Evaluation Plan establishes the criteria by which each candidate's performance shall be judged.
- Tenure and promotion are separate actions with separate criteria; all parties must understand this distinction as well as the criteria for any action.
- Voting procedures are important and, often, specifically prescribed

**A Broader Context for Peer Review:** In academic conversations about the role of peer review, I believe that we often understand this duty in too narrow a sense. That is, we tend to understand it strictly in an instrumental sense, as a tool we use for a specific evaluative purpose. We restrict it to processes surrounding the "vetting" scholarly or creative work, wherein we judge that work's value as a contribution to our knowledge, warranting its dissemination to a broader audience. In the sciences, for example, the term typically refers to peer review of proposals for grant funding to support research, or of

articles for publication in journals. In the arts, peer review may include peer judgment in selecting works to enter in exhibitions or shows, or after-the-fact feedback from reviews of performances and presentations. Appropriately, most faculty evaluation plans include this relatively strict understanding of peer review as a primary criterion in judging the quality of research, scholarship, and creative work. And, if we take the concept any further, we may have extended our thinking about peer review to see it as a key element in the assessment of teaching effectiveness.

But I believe that the concept of peer review has a broader meaning that relates directly to the periodic evaluation of faculty and IAS. By means of our review processes, we have accepted responsibility for maintaining the academy's standards of professionalism – in other words, for policing our own ranks. Society has delegated to our profession (and only a small handful of other professions) primary authority and responsibility for admitting and approving its own members. In turn, within our own university, we further delegate much authority and responsibility for performance evaluation to a small and expert group of disciplinary colleagues. The recommendations for personnel actions that grow out of our annual evaluation processes, as well as their influence on the professional development of our colleagues throughout their careers, have direct and important consequences for individuals and the institution. Less directly but just as important, they have consequences for the professional status of the whole academic enterprise. Thus we must take this work very seriously.

**Candor and Openness are Key:** One of the overriding principles of fair treatment of all employees is to give honest feedback about performance, while offering opportunities to rectify any deficiencies in that performance and providing clear guidelines for doing so. This means that we view the annual evaluation process as primarily formative, aimed ultimately at helping us to retain early-stage probationary faculty. While the review process is also an important part of our shared responsibility mentioned above – to assure that the faculty we retain, promote, and tenure (and the IAS we retain and promote) genuinely meet the standards needed to advance the long-term quality and welfare of our academic programs and mission – we do not view it primarily as a summative process, serving only a “gatekeeper” function. Its distinctly formative elements are meant to foster development of faculty capability during the probationary period. Indeed, during the earlier years of a faculty member's career, the formative assessment should predominate. The approach and attitude of the DPC and its members should be almost entirely formative and helpful at this stage, and as a result, we would only rarely expect to see votes against retention in a first-year reappointment recommendation. Later on, as a probationary faculty member progresses towards promotion and tenure, the dominance of the formative aims will diminish and the inferences drawn from summative assessments should become more influential. In these later stages, in other words, our work should increasingly emphasize our judgment about achievements that are the basis of major career advancements such as tenure and promotion.

These overall goals are best achieved when we provide evaluations and assessments that are frank, honest, and complete. Concerns or negative assessments of faculty performance should be identified and explained in writing along with explicit remedies.

Unfortunately, rather than taking the admittedly difficult direct approach, DPCs and Chairs unwilling to be straightforward about candidates' perceived shortcomings have often chosen either of two unproductive paths: 1) ignoring the negatives in hopes that they will disappear on their own (which doesn't often happen) or 2) addressing performance deficiencies in informal conversations purely within the department, electing not to put them in writing lest they tip off decision-makers "up the line." These alternative paths are in fact harmful both to individuals and to the institution. They are probably the chief cause of the "surprises" at promotion/tenure time that none of us wants (see **Communication** below). Furthermore, such approaches prevent the Dean from assisting in any formative steps or from addressing serious issues early enough to do the most good.

Perhaps we've all heard about the reluctance of some DPCs or Chairs to record even relatively minor concerns in documents sent to the Dean. It is essential for all concerned that we move beyond those concerns. This office is not interested in playing "gotcha" with DPCs or probationary candidates; we want to help you retain the candidates in whom you've already invested so much effort and resources. The simple principle here is that we need to be candid and direct with one another. If a concern is truly minor, please provide the context that helps me understand this assessment. Both the candidate and I will want to see this written assurance that the concerns in question are not grave ones. And besides, some concerns that may be regarded as minor in the first or second year of a faculty member's probationary period may amount to some very serious deficiencies in performance if they continue into the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> year. Had they been noted and recorded at the first observation, along with suggested remedies, they would probably have been addressed productively. Without such a record, however, the faculty member will not have been given formal notification of the concern, and your tracking of the concern will not have been established. Meanwhile, in the unfortunate (and rare) instance that the response of a faculty member to feedback proves inadequate, clear and early documentation of the performance issues is enormously helpful, giving the institution's representatives the factual information necessary to support difficult decisions. Typically, however, the candidate responds productively, and as a result, I will be quite happy to join the department in commending him or her for having overcome a previously noted performance issue, or in noting that significant improvement is in progress.

The above comments focus on addressing concerns about inadequate performance or contribution precisely because this is an uncomfortable and troublesome part of the evaluation process, and one in which it is easy to falter. But I want to make certain that I add one obvious point: the evaluation process also should be used to showcase and acknowledge praiseworthy faculty achievements and excellent work. Given an opportunity to show appreciation, I try to do so, and I encourage Chairs and DPCs to do the same.

**Building the Case: the Faculty Role.** The faculty candidate needs to assume primary responsibility for making his or her case. This is best accomplished with prior advice and mentoring from the Chair and DPC, of course, but the candidate must shoulder the

burden of providing sufficient evidence and information to build a strong case for his or her favorable review. The candidate should be encouraged to develop, organize, and submit materials that document strengths and achievements in each area of faculty responsibility. In fact, the assembling of documentation is pretty straightforward if the candidate thinks of the case as a matter of claims and support; each area of performance generates a claim of achievement whose support requires documentary evidence. This kind of documentation, which need not be either voluminous or exhaustive, must conform to departmental standards and expectations, and should be thoughtfully and carefully selected to document, illuminate, or support particular assertions about strengths in performance. It is usually counterproductive to include lengthy documentation or archival material not directly linked to arguments in the recommendation, which can obscure its true strengths.

**Building the Case: the Roles of the Chair and DPC.** The essential roles of the DPC and the Chair are to analyze, evaluate, and assess – honestly and professionally – the evidence or data (quantitative and/or qualitative) presented by the faculty candidate, and to reach specific conclusions about the faculty candidate’s performance in each major area of faculty responsibility. When done effectively, the assessment is clearly linked to stated criteria and expectations. I expect to be able to track assessments of performance back to identifiable elements in the candidate’s documents, and am skeptical of claims without support – assertions of performance (negative or positive) without evidence to prove them. Similarly, I am not much persuaded by votes for or against any action (promotion, tenure, reappointment) for which a case has not been made – for which I can find no clear basis in the documentation or evaluation.

In building their own case, of course, Chairs or DPCs may introduce additional evidence beyond that submitted by the candidate, but the source must be clearly identified and the candidate must be informed.

In the past, some departments have merely summarized the evidence presented. This is not the same as making the case for or against the action in question, and is not helpful for the Dean’s and Provost’s own evaluations. It is critical that you build a case, advance and defend a claim. That is, you need to apply **judgment** and reach conclusions about the performance of the candidate, showing how you link those conclusions to evidence and criteria. As DPC or Chair, you should provide your assessment of the extent and quality of a candidate’s performance in each major area (teaching, research/creative activity, advising, and service) as well as overall performance. And finally, it is important that you reach – and state explicitly – a conclusion as to whether a candidate’s performance meets departmental expectations.

A DPC report that simply states the array of courses Professor X taught, notes that she or he updated a particular course in a certain way, and received such and such scores on course evaluations, is not by itself very helpful. While a summary can work well as part of a fully developed case, alone it does not tell me whether that level of performance meets departmental expectations. Similarly, statements about improvement in performance must also note its relationship to departmental expectations. Has Professor

X's teaching improved to the degree that it is now meeting or exceeding departmental standards? Or has it improved but still remains well below departmental expectations? The reviews written by Chairs and DPCs need to convey such judgments.

It is helpful if you provide me with a disciplinary context so that I may understand the relevance of particular achievements, and how or why you view them as you do. This need not be overly complicated. You might simply note that a certain journal is regarded as the highest-impact quarterly in your field; or that a particular gallery showing is especially prestigious; or that a funding agency particularly supports those faculty who are nearing promotion to full professor rank; or that work in this particular scholarly area is especially challenging because...; publication rates in this sub-discipline tend to be low, because...; this journal has a 95% rejection rate; this level of achievement in this course is particularly noteworthy because...; and so on. This extra effort will enrich and strengthen the case you are making, might help clarify in your own minds whether a particular contribution is truly exceptional (or ordinary), and will reduce the chances of my misinterpreting a particular achievement.

Even though the evaluation by the Chair is independent of the one conducted by the DPC, the DPC's work should inform the Chair deliberations. Indeed, the DPC should regard its evaluation and recommendation as informing both the Chair and the Dean. As a matter of practice – and good procedure – each level of review should include thoughtful consideration of the prior levels' work. In large departments, some steps in the evaluation process may be conducted by subcommittee, and/or based on evaluations submitted by different sections or divisions within the department. In such cases it is essential that the final DPC report integrate those sub-reports. This allows both for a coherent report and for an accurate representation of departmental judgment. For example, if the full DPC disagrees with negative assessments provided in a sub-report, this should be stated and explained in the DPC report.

Similarly, DPC reports should take pains to reflect accurately any significant difference of opinion among the members regarding a candidate's performance. On occasion, a DPC report that seems to represent a consensus view will appear that way only because strong objecting views have been ignored. To avoid submitting such reports, or reports that are dominated by the individual opinion of the lead writer, other DPC members should review all performance evaluations and recommendations before they go to the Chair. I appreciate the time constraints under which DPC members do their work, but short deadlines should not force us to skimp on good practice, and at the very least, one or more other members of the DPC should review the document even if time does not allow the entire DPC to do so.

**Transparency and Open Communication:** Clear, full, and honest communication is essential to a sound evaluation process. The tone and content of every document given to a faculty member should match the tone and content of the documents written to the Dean. Indeed, there are few defensible arguments against simply sending the faculty member a copy of **any and all** written documents addressed to the Chair or Dean. I always provide a copy of my evaluation and the resulting recommendation to the faculty

member concerned. Additional features of a complete communication process include informal, early conversations about potentially negative evaluations, and discussions of any obvious issues or “red flags” in an upcoming case. Such informal conversations should take place as early as possible. And even if we haven’t spoken in advance, if I become concerned about a possible negative outcome in my initial reading of a Chair’s letter, I will probably try to speak with that Chair before proceeding. Similarly, if I am uncertain as to whether I’m correctly reading or interpreting the candidate’s record or the DPC or Chair performance reviews, I will get in touch with the writer and make sure I understand what’s being said. In turn, I urge DPCs, Chairs, and the candidates themselves to speak with me about anything I’ve written that falls short of clarifying the important issues and my conclusions about them.

But openness and transparency in communication must never be understood to permit a breach of confidentiality. Beyond those who have a direct role in the evaluation process, the candidate alone is entitled to full disclosure of his or her evaluation details, conclusions, and recommendations.

**Department Evaluation Plans:** As emphasized above, our evaluations of faculty performance must be based on criteria and processes spelled out in your Department Evaluation Plan (DEP). Deviation from those specifications in the course of any evaluation, whether written by the DPC, the Chair, or me, is a recipe for trouble. Accordingly I will read your evaluation and assess your recommendation of a faculty member in close conjunction with a reading of your DEP. Here we simply follow the letter and the spirit of procedures specified in the *Faculty and Academic Staff Handbook (FASH)*. It is critical that departments use a DEP accepted formally by the Dean and Provost, as required by the *FASH*, so that evaluations at the levels of Department, Dean, and Provost are based on consistent DEP specifications. Hence the administration’s frequent urging of DPCs to improve their DEP statements of expectations for tenure or promotion.

**Promotion and Tenure.** Recommendations on promotion and tenure are among the most significant outcomes of the evaluation process, and they present perhaps the greatest potential for conflict. These decisions also have serious long-term, cumulative effects on the caliber of our faculty and the academic welfare of the university, and – obviously – significant impact on the career paths of individual faculty. As noted above, honesty, courage, and forthrightness in prior-year evaluations set the stage for work during the decision-year that is fair to the individual candidate and that safeguards the institution.

Promotion to associate professor and tenure are formally separate considerations and actions. I generally regard promotion as basically “backward looking,” in recognizing what a faculty member has accomplished during the probationary period, while an award of tenure is basically “forward looking,” in predicting future activities and accomplishments. An award of tenure carries a prediction and promise of career-long contributions of increasing value to the university and one’s discipline. But we base that assessment on the record of accomplishment and implied trajectory that the candidate has established during the probationary period.

Thus, in most cases, the criteria for promotion to associate professor and for tenure will be quite similar. I caution against your using performance reviews and recommendations for promotion and tenure to send subtle messages – for example, recommending promotion in order to send a “vote of confidence” to a faculty member whose scholarly productivity may be lagging behind expectations for tenure; recommending promotion but not tenure as a way of conveying to a candidate that the DPC will be hesitant about a positive recommendation on tenure in the following year; recommending promotion but not tenure to send a signal to the Dean about reservations on a candidate’s performance. Each of these examples is drawn from past history at UW-EC. The confusion, ambiguity, and misunderstanding that may result from such messages do not serve individuals or the institution well.

I regard **early** promotion (either to Associate Professor or to Professor) and **early** tenure as exceptional actions used to recognize truly unusual achievement in **all** areas of faculty responsibility, along with a complete absence of **any** concerns about performance. Merely reaching the expected level of accomplishment for promotion or tenure sooner than the final review period arrives is not a sufficient basis for awarding early promotion or tenure. And even with unusually strong faculty accomplishments, I would be hard-pressed to support a request for promotion or tenure more than one year ahead of schedule. Similarly, merely having met minimum criteria does not guarantee a positive recommendation, especially in the matter of promotion. Meeting the minima should not persuade a candidate to feel entitled to promotion. Once minimum requirements are met, the promotion subcommittee, the Chair, and the Dean are obliged to exercise careful judgment about the quality of overall performance over a given span of time. Candidates who clearly *exceed* some (or all) criteria are stronger candidates than those who minimally *satisfy* all criteria, and so are likely to earn promotion sooner as well. The stronger candidates will probably earn promotion in their first years of eligibility, while those who meet but do not exceed expectations may need to contribute more years of solid service before securing their promotions. And, while I share faculty concerns about relatively low salary levels, I will not support the use of early promotion to address salary deficiencies. Promotion and tenure are academic actions that must be based purely on academic considerations.

I urge faculty and staff, DPCs, and Chairs to be doubly certain that a candidate has sufficient years of service to be eligible for promotion. This is most relevant to issues of promotion to professor and IAS promotion by change in title. My predecessors have sometimes declined to consider promotion recommendations because the basic eligibility criteria had not been met. And in counting years of service, FASH instructs us to include only those years completed before the application year.

**Voting:** Voting on personnel matters must be conducted according to state statutes and the most recent Senate approved policies. It is important to remember the principle that reappointment, tenure, and promotion represent actions for which positive motions are introduced; accordingly, votes for any of these actions are votes in favor of a positive motion. Only a clear majority yields a favorable vote; a tie vote means a *failure to*

*approve* the motion.

Abstentions are appropriate when there is a clear conflict of interest, for example in the case of spousal or other family relationships. Otherwise, abstentions should be rare or nonexistent. It is not appropriate for a DPC or Promotion Subcommittee member to abstain from voting merely to avoid a difficult or uncomfortable decision, and I encourage DPC chairs to establish and enforce this standard. Recommendations occasionally go to the Chair or Dean with vote tallies rendered ambiguous by the number of abstentions recorded. For example, a 3-2 vote in favor of an action, accompanied by 2 abstentions, sends an unclear message; only 3 of 7 voters have clearly indicated their approval. However, the same 3-2 edge from a body of only 5 voters is clear: the action is approved by most of the members. While I may not always insist on a written statement of the basis for any abstentions, I do feel strongly that faculty need to fulfill their professional responsibility to evaluate their colleagues. And in any event, a DPC that sends such an ambiguous message should understand that I cannot accord it the same weight I give to actions carrying clear support.

**Legal considerations regarding votes:** State law is a little fuzzy at the intersection of personnel actions (which can generally be deliberated during closed session) and our State's "open meetings" and "open records" laws. I don't have room here to explore fully all of these intricacies. However, departments must abide by an important provision in the "open records" law: all roll-call votes **MUST** be recorded in the minutes. Important distinction: if a DPC conducts its votes by any method *other than* roll-call voting (say, by a show of hands), its meeting minutes need only reflect the motions themselves and whether they passed or not. You will still show any vote totals on our personnel recommendation forms, but they need not appear in the minutes. This distinction is true whether or not the meeting takes place in closed session. Also, be aware that the Wisconsin Attorney General will not guarantee to defend your department (should litigation ensue) if your DPC *votes* during closed session; he would advise that the DPC **come out of closed session to vote**. For complete details, please see [http://www.doj.state.wi.us/AWP/2007OMCG-PRO/2007\\_OML\\_Compliance\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.doj.state.wi.us/AWP/2007OMCG-PRO/2007_OML_Compliance_Guide.pdf).

**Other Issues:** I encourage you to consider the following rather specific items as you undertake reappointment, promotion, and tenure evaluations this year:

1. As noted above, it is essential that candidates be provided copies of every written document used in the review process. This includes review team reports, evaluations by individuals, and reports from subunits within a department. Please indicate explicitly on **all** forms that the candidate has been given copies. My office must make sure that this full disclosure has occurred, so your explicit assurances will save a lot of time and trouble.
2. Please make sure that candidates have an opportunity to respond in writing to the evaluations prepared by the Department Personnel Committee; and if such responses are submitted, make sure they are attached to the original documents before the evaluation report is forwarded to me. This is mandated by *FASH*, Ch. 5, and obliges you to plan

your work with careful attention to the stated deadlines.

3. Please use the most recent forms from the Provost's website rather than older paper copies that you may have on hand.

4. Requests for IAS changes in title must be based on a performance review.

Marty Wood, Dean  
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