

Guidance for Department or Program Review Committee Letters

Note: Please be aware that the following guidelines are meant to be helpful but do not supersede in any way the *Faculty Handbook*, which remains the ultimate authoritative source regarding promotion, tenure, and review.

I. Overall Considerations

The DRC/PRC review letter is an important part of the candidate's file, and PTR and the President rely on this letter. It is to be written by the Department Head or Program Chair and signed by each member of the review committee. The letter details "the Review Committee's evaluation of the candidate, including divergent views, and summarizes the vote" (*Faculty Handbook*, 4.3.6f). In practice, the letter should also help PTR to contextualize the candidate's expertise and record within the discipline. Members of PTR and the President are likely to be unfamiliar with aspects of the disciplinary expertise of the candidate, and much of the guidance below calls for assistance from the DRC/PRC letter.

Programmatic Needs: In the letter, the DRC/PRC should provide a statement about the programmatic needs of the department and the College in relation to the candidate's expertise. The *Faculty Handbook* (4.3.5.2.4a) states that this should be in terms of "present and future" needs and, therefore, should look ahead as well as backward. The *Handbook* specifies that programmatic concerns "include such issues as curriculum flexibility, patterns of student enrollment, and the ability of the department to maintain the quality of its major and minor programs" (4.1.4.1). This statement can guide the writing of the programmatic needs statement. The following questions are important: How does the candidate fulfill departmental, program, or College (CCS, interdisciplinary programs, etc.) needs currently? And how is the candidate's expertise likely to be important moving forward?

Detailing the Review Committee's Evaluation: The DRC/PRC letter should, of course, be an argument that refers to evidence. It should detail what among the richness of material in the candidate's file constitutes positive or negative evidence regarding the demonstration of the evaluation criteria. The letter should provide the disciplinary (or program/multidisciplinary) perspective on the candidate's record according to the language of the *Faculty Handbook* and the department/program scholarship guidelines. There is no need to recount all the details of the file itself or the perspective that the candidate provides in the self-evaluation, since it is not the volume of evidence that is important. PTR and the President will find great value in how the record, including reviewers' letters, is seen by DRC/PRC members as making the case for the conclusion the members reach. If there are concerns about the candidate's file, it is helpful for the DRC/PRC to reference any relevant expectations provided in the pre-midterm, midterm, or post-midterm feedback.

Divergent Views: The DRC/PRC letter should state clearly the nature of any divergent views regarding the fulfillment of the criteria for teaching, scholarship, or service or in overall assessment. The letter should identify how the diverging views find a basis in the candidate's record as it relates to the criteria for tenure or promotion and how the divergent views affect the DRC/PRC vote.

Summary of the Vote: There should be a clear, numerical summary of the vote on whether or not the candidate is supported by the DRC/PRC. However, the letter should not identify who voted in what manner.

What follows is advice on desirable attributes of the DRC/PRC letter for each of the sections on Teaching, Scholarship, and Service.

II. Teaching

The DRC/PRC letter should address whether the candidate has achieved distinction in teaching using the characteristics of distinctive teaching that the *Faculty Handbook* in 4.2.1 describes. The candidate should have discussed an approach to teaching in these terms in the Self Evaluation. The DRC/PRC should bring its expertise and experience to the evaluation of the teaching record, and its letter should give detailed comments that add evidence and convey an argument about whether a candidate has achieved distinction in teaching.

One area where the DRC/PRC letter can be a great help to PTR and the President is in its discussion of aspects of the candidate's teaching portfolio. Each of our disciplines has its own approaches to teaching, stemming from its knowledge base, modes of inquiry, and pedagogical norms and innovations. The DRC/PRC's perspective on the course syllabi, assignments, and other components of the candidate's teaching portfolio is valuable. For example, DRC/PRC members can be very helpful in evaluating the challenge of a problem set or an examination for PTR members from other disciplines. The letter might answer questions such as the following: Is the course syllabus particularly well-constructed? Are there aspects of pedagogical creativity and innovation among the materials a candidate supplies that could be missed by reviewers outside of the discipline?

The ability to challenge students (*Faculty Handbook, 4.2.1.D*) is a characteristic of distinctive teaching, and the DRC/PRC is particularly well-equipped to assess this through their examination of the file.

There is another aspect to "difficulty," which can relate to the difficulty of the candidate's teaching assignment. Are particular courses taught by the candidate notably difficult to teach in some way? Is the structure of the courses, or their placement in the department/program curriculum, particularly challenging in some fashion? With input from the DRC/PRC, PTR members and the President will have better information about the intellectual challenge of the candidate's course offerings within the program or department.

III. Scholarship

The department/program's perspective on scholarship is among its most significant contributions to the deliberations of PTR and the President. The *Faculty Handbook* (4.2.2.1.4) states that "Department colleagues provide valuable judgments concerning the quality of the candidate's scholarship and the promise of continued scholarly growth." Therefore, it is appropriate that the DRC/PRC letter contain discussion of the following matters, in addition to the overall evaluation of the candidate's scholarly record.

First, the DRC/PRC letter (and the candidate's own self-evaluation) should make clear which Department/Program Scholarship Guidelines the candidate has chosen to use. This specificity provides clarity for all parties. The DRC/PRC letter (and the candidate's own self-evaluation) should address how the components of the candidate's record fit within the scholarship guidelines, or where some components might not fit within the stated guidelines. This discussion should make clear and precise reference to the criteria in the scholarship guidelines.

PTR and the President would find it helpful to understand how the candidate's scholarship fits within the discipline overall. The DRC/PRC might consider discussing answers to questions such as the following: How do the candidate's research areas connect? How is the candidate's scholarship related to important or emerging disciplinary concerns? How does the candidate's scholarship tie to other disciplines, if this is relevant?

The DRC/PRC letter should provide an assessment of the quality of the publication/exhibition/performance venues where a candidate's scholarship has appeared. The external reviewers will likely comment on this as well. If the candidate's record includes co-authorship, the committee should also make clear how it views the candidate's personal contributions to joint work. The committee should also provide guidance on what authorship order conventions exist in the discipline when publications are listed on a CV (main author first, last, alphabetical, etc.).

PTR and the President would benefit from the committee's views in the DRC/PRC letter that provide context for letters from external reviewers. If the DRC/PRC believes it advisable, it might do the same for any external "friendly" letters and internal letters from colleagues that share scholarly expertise.

IV. Service

With regard to the DRC/PRC letter's reflection on a candidate's service record, PTR and the President would benefit from discussion of what the committee sees as highlights and contributions that the candidate has made that "demonstrate active engagement" (*Faculty Handbook*, 4.2.3) in the department/program, College, or profession. The DRC/PRC is well-equipped to discuss service contributions that are discipline-specific, illuminating issues that would be opaque to non-specialists.

V. Individual Letters

Individual members need not write an extensive letter if they agree with the DRC/PRC evaluation. Members should expand on and further clarify any divergent views within their individual letters.