Fall 2018

To: Department Chairs, Directors and Deans
From: Kristine Kwekkeboom, Chair, Social Sciences Divisional Committee
Re: Tenure Reviews during the 2018-2019 Academic Year

I’m writing to alert you to changes in, and recommendations from, our Social Sciences Divisional committee, which are useful to know, even if you do not have any tenure cases coming up this year in your department/school.

1. **Expectation to include a copy of the Department’s tenure guidelines in the candidate’s tenure dossier.** As described in Faculty Policy & Procedure 7.14.D, “Each departmental executive committee shall establish written criteria and standards it will employ in recommending the granting of tenure.” The Social Sciences Divisional Committee recognizes there may be variation among departments with regard to the benchmarks of excellence, and in the desirable indicators of quantity, quality, and impact of scholarship, teaching, and service. Inclusion of the specific departmental tenure guidelines in the dossier will help the committee to appropriately evaluate candidates, applying the Social Sciences Divisional tenure guidelines in the context of the local standards of the candidate’s department and discipline.

2. **Reminder to include, in the department chair’s letter, a statement describing how excellence in teaching is defined, promoted, and assessed in the candidate’s department.** Criteria for excellence in research is often the primary focus of the Chair’s letter, however, there is an expectation that candidates also demonstrate excellence in teaching and/or service. The committee needs to understand what activities constitute excellence in teaching in the home department and how the candidate demonstrates meeting or exceeding those expectations (e.g., through evidence such as new teaching materials developed, teaching workshops that the candidate attended or led, successful implementation of new teaching methods, and teaching-related awards). This is not a new addition to the tenure guidelines, but the guidance has been moved to emphasize its importance. Similar information should be provided if the department is making a case for excellence in service.

3. **Revisions to template letters to external reviewers.** Two revisions were made to the template letters for both standard and senior hires.
   a. **Evaluation of teaching has been removed from the primary request to reviewers.** Given the expectation that external reviewers do not directly work with the candidate being reviewed, they most often have no basis on which to evaluate the candidate’s academic teaching. The template letters still invite comments on the candidate’s effectiveness in communication, accomplishments in mentoring graduate students, and/or evidence of pedagogical skills, *to the extent that the reviewer feels he or she is able to comment.*
b. The UW-Madison definition of arm’s length reviewers has been added to the letter templates. The committee often struggles with unclear or unstated descriptions of the nature of relationships between external reviewers and tenure candidates. The template has been revised to directly ask reviewers to indicate whether or not they are personally acquainted with the candidate, and also lists the four criteria necessary to be considered at arm’s length. This includes individuals who (a) are not and have not been UW-Madison faculty, (b) have not mentored the candidate, (c) have not collaborated with the candidate, and (d) have no personal interest in the candidate’s success or attainment of tenure.

Departments are strongly encouraged to use the template letters, especially the changes noted above and language regarding confidentiality expectations.

Some other reminders and tips:

- The department chair’s letter is the single most important document in the dossier. Please take the time to write a concise yet comprehensive review according to the guidelines. More than half the cases that are denied by the Social Sciences Divisional Committee have weak chair’s letters that did not provide adequate context about the nature of the discipline, the candidate, and/or articulate reasons for support for the candidate’s promotion.

- Peer evaluations of teaching are required for probationary faculty every year, starting in the candidate’s second year. It is extremely useful for probationary faculty to receive feedback on their teaching so that they can make changes and document improvement over time. The peer evaluation should be conducted by a faculty member and based on both course materials and observation of teaching. Written documentation of the evaluation should be included in the tenure dossier. A sample peer evaluation form is available on the divisional committee website. [https://secfac.wisc.edu/documenting-scholarship/](https://secfac.wisc.edu/documenting-scholarship/)

- The department chair’s letter should indicate the expectation and value of independent research and research collaboration within the discipline. If all of a candidate’s research is collaborative, his or her unique contributions to the work should be highlighted. The Research section of the dossier should include a description of contributions to coauthored publications that specifies team members’ effort and their roles/ activity.

- All documents relevant to the submission of tenure dossiers to the Social Sciences Divisional Committee, including the updated, most recent version of the committee’s tenure guidelines and template letters are available at: [https://secfac.wisc.edu/tenure/social-sciences-divisional-committee/tenure-documents/](https://secfac.wisc.edu/tenure/social-sciences-divisional-committee/tenure-documents/)

- A number of exemplary dossiers from past successful tenure cases are available for review. To arrange time to look over these dossiers, please contact Divisional Committees Coordinator Michaela Aust (contact information below).
Consider submitting your cases early in the academic year. We anticipate a high volume of cases this year. If there are too many cases for a given meeting, some cases must be deferred to the next meeting. Our past experience suggests that cases submitted in fall and early winter are much less likely to be deferred because of case overload than cases that arrive later in the spring.

The committee seeks to work with departments/schools to ensure fair and judicious reviews of candidates. Please contact me (kwekkeboom@wisc.edu) or Divisional Committees Coordinator Michaela Aust (Michaela.aust@wisc.edu or 263-5741) with any questions, comments, or suggestions.