TO: Members of Primary Unit Evaluation Committees

From: Todd T. Gleeson, Dean

Subject: Advice for Preparing Adequate Personnel Dossiers

Date: September 1, 2007, updated December 16, 2009

Members of the 2006-07 College Personnel Committee have asked me to prepare a memo that would provide guidance to members of Primary Unit Evaluation Committees (PUEC) in their task of preparing personnel dossiers for comprehensive review, tenure, and promotion cases. This request was derived from the Personnel Committee members’ experience over the last few years reviewing candidates who were disadvantaged because of shortcomings in dossier preparation by the unit, and a feeling that it was reflecting poorly not only on the candidate, but on future candidates from the same primary unit.

PUEC members perform a number of functions to help a candidate prepare a quality dossier. PUEC members often forget that quality of the dossier contents and their written report sets the perception of how thorough and how rigorously the department has evaluated the case. The quality of the PUEC’s work defines the degree of trust that the review committees at the College and campus levels have in the primary unit’s judgment. Please pay particular attention to the following aspects of review and dossier preparation processes:

**Curriculum Vita Review:** CV construction is the candidate’s responsibility, but PUEC members can be helpful by reviewing the content and format of the candidate’s CV before it is submitted to the dossier and especially before it is sent out to external reviewers. There is a useful advisory written on the subject of CV organization for personnel dossiers on the web, and both the candidate and the PUEC should review it (www.colorado.edu/ArtsSciences/facultystaff/administration/reapptpromoten.html). In addition to the advisories contained in that document, the Personnel Committee would like to add two more:

The vague meaning of “forthcoming”: We discourage candidates and PUEC’s from describing publications as “forthcoming.” The term forthcoming means different things in different disciplines, and to different individuals within a single discipline, and so its use obfuscates the real status of the publication. If a publication is out of the author’s hands – that is, if it has been accepted for publication with no further revisions needed - use the term “in press.” If it is anything else, use an appropriate descriptor (“in preparation”, “in review”, “in revision”, “accepted with revision”, etc.)

Documenting “in Press”: Candidates and PUECs should collaborate on obtaining documentation that a publication is in fact “in press”. This is particularly important when the reappointment or promotion hinges largely on the status of an “in press” monograph or a number of “in press” articles. Documentation may include email or correspondence between the publisher or editor and the author or PUEC member.
The College’s Personnel Committee recently discussed the role that edited and co-edited monographs play in promotion or tenure dossiers. The question was whether an edited contribution should be considered primarily as a professional service, or whether it should be considered primarily as a scholarly contribution, as a book or article would be. Although not unanimous, the Personnel Committee reached agreement that the act of editing a volume is primarily a reflection of professional service and stature in the subfield. If the unit believes that editing a particular volume reflects strong scholarly effort, it is incumbent upon the PUEC to make that case. Junior faculty are advised not to invest too much energy in these endeavors until their scholarly record is excellent based on primary authorship or other creative works.

**External Letter Solicitation:** PUEC members should solicit recommended referees from the candidate, and should itself assemble an independent list of referees. Please do not allow solicitation of letters from individuals with close professional or personal relationships with the candidate, as this reflects very poorly on the rigor of the department, and occasionally compromises a case. Units that do not follow this advice harm not only the candidate’s case, but also their unit’s reputation in the eyes of the review committees. A useful advisory has been written that lists best and worst practices in this area (see the above URL). Both the candidate and the PUEC members are encouraged to read this advisory.

**Solicitation of Teaching Evaluations:** PUEC members could be putting more effort into documenting teaching, particularly in those cases where they think a case might be made for teaching excellence. Last moment peer reviews of classroom teaching communicates to review committees exactly what they are, an afterthought.

PUECs are obligated to provide evaluative assessments of at least two additional measures of teaching beyond the FCQs. PUECs that do not meet this requirement will experience a return of the dossier to the department for the PUEC to complete its work, followed by another vote by the department.

Please note this important policy change: a new campus level policy interpretation has determined that ALL student letters (current, former, graduate students, postdoctoral trainees) are to be treated as confidential and summarized in the same manner as are external referee letters.

Once the dossier has been assembled and letters solicited, the PUEC plays an important step in evaluating the merits of the reappointment or promotion case. The College Personnel Committee would like to offer PUEC members the following advice before they start to write these evaluative summaries of the teaching, research or creative work, and service records.

**Credibility & Balance:** The PUEC is not an advocacy assignment and members shouldn’t write from that perspective. Review committees read the PUEC report as the voice of the department and blind advocacy diminishes the reader’s sense that the department is making a dispassionate recommendation. Assertions of excellence while turning a blind eye to the shortcomings of the case (and nearly every case has some relative weakness) erodes the credibility of the PUEC and the department. An honest discussion of a period of weak publishing or a poor teaching semester will not harm the
candidate. Glossing over or ignoring indicators of candidate performance only guarantees that they’ll be the focus of scrutiny and discussion at higher levels of review.

A second area of needed balance involves abstracting of quotes from external letters. Selecting only the most laudatory passages, or only the most critical statements out of context, stands in sharp contrast to the rigor and balance we try to apply to our own scholarship. The bias and “spin” does not escape the notice of higher review committees. An overall review of each letter by the PUEC would be more valuable to committee members. Review committee members read each letter in full.

**Use the language of meritorious and excellent:** The College Personnel Committee measures each case against the standards of the department and the College. The College standards for what constitutes a meritorious record in each area, and what constitutes an excellent record is described in the College letter to the Vice Chancellor’s Advisory Committee (VCAC) available at above referenced URL. PUEC members are urged to evaluate each record using the arguments and language of that letter. Read the section on teaching excellence before making an argument for excellence based primarily on high FCQs, which is generally not a very persuasive argument to committee members.

**Assessment of publishing venues:** With the recent availability of web data that rank natural science and social science journals by citation indices or measures of impact, review committees are beginning to make judgments of journal quality as one indirect measure of the quality of the published scholarship. PUEC members should consider doing this preemptively as part of their assessment of the candidate’s record, as they are in a more informed position than are members of the Personnel Committee or VCAC to assess the role and influence of each journal used by the candidate. Consider answering the following questions: What are the best journals in this candidate’s discipline? How do the journals used by the candidate compare? What is your reference or authority for these rankings? (e.g., external letters, ISI, journal rejection rates). For book venues, can you make analogous comparative statements? ISI provides data on citation indices for most journals in the natural and social sciences at:
http://portal.isiknowledge.com/portal.cgi/jcr

Your associate dean is a good source of information if you would like elaboration on any of these points.