

**I-35**  
**HOW TO WRITE A DEPARTMENTAL LETTER**  
**Appointments and Advancements**  
(Revised 6/24)

Accurate and analytical letters of recommendation from the department are essential in the review process. The candidate and their department must make the case; other reviewing agencies cannot do so. The analysis should be rigorous, and for promotions as well as advancements to Professor/Teaching Professor step VI and to Above Scale the analysis should cover the cumulative record of the candidate. In career review cases, the letter should clarify which of the candidate's accomplishments precede the current review and which fall within the current review period.

Personnel reviews that have been deferred due to a family accommodation (i.e. childbearing or parental leave, extension of the tenure clock) should be evaluated without prejudice as if the work were done in the normal period of service. The departmental letter should clearly state that the standard expectations are being applied.

The Department letter should provide a comprehensive but concise assessment of the candidate's accomplishments in all areas of review, together with detailed evidence and context to support this evaluation (see Red Binder sections I-36 and I-75). The department letter should not recapitulate every item on the bio-bib, but should instead succinctly address if and how expectations were met in all areas and explain the basis for acceleration, when applicable. The letter should strive for balance and offer a complete professional evaluation (accurate and analytic), including both supportive and contrary evidence. Thus, the departmental letter should address both the positive and, when applicable, negative aspects of the case, especially if there is significant opposition to the recommendation. It should also, if indicated, include an assessment of the significance of particular extramural evaluations or judgments. At the same time the letter should prioritize brevity, clarity, and focus. Direct quotes and extended quotations from supporting documents (e.g. external letters, bio-bib) and rhetorical statements are to be avoided, since overly long letters are a burden to all reviewing agencies.

When an acceleration is recommended, an explicit justification for the acceleration must be clearly articulated in the department letter, including a reasoned argument for the specific degree of acceleration. In the case of a negative departmental recommendation, the basis of the recommendation should be documented as well. In all cases, the departmental letter must articulate how the requirements for a normal, one-step advancement have been met, taking into account all review areas, prior to addressing any recommendation for acceleration. See Red Binder I-36 for guidance on advancement recommendations and Red Binder I-75-V for information on areas of review, criteria, and evidence in support of evaluations.

Individuals who have provided confidential letters of evaluation should not be identified, except by means of a coded list (e.g., "Reviewer A"). Note that in career reviews (promotions and advancement to step VI or Above Scale), the department letter should provide an overview of career accomplishments as well as the achievements during the current review period.

Teaching, research, professional and public service contributions that promote diversity and equal opportunity are to be encouraged and given due recognition in the evaluation of the candidate's record. Contributions to diversity and equal opportunity may include efforts to advance equitable access to education, public service that addresses the needs of diverse populations, or research in a scholar's area of expertise that helps to ameliorate inequalities. Mentoring and advising of students and faculty members from underrepresented and underserved populations is within the scope of expected duties; however, highly significant efforts should also be given due recognition. (See Red Binder I-75-VI)

Suggested format for departmental letter

1. Brief outline of the mechanisms used for soliciting information and evaluating the academic performance of colleagues in cases of merits, promotions, and so forth (e.g., departmental use of ad hoc committees, teaching evaluation committees, departmental meetings to assess candidates, etc.). Explanation of any apparent anomalies in the voting, e.g., a disproportionately small number of votes relative to departmental size, or excessive abstentions should also be explained.
2. The basis for the departmental recommendation, including analytical evaluation of the performance in each area of review appropriate to the academic series.

#### A) Research/Creative Activity (Professor series)

The Department letter should present a succinct but comprehensive evaluation of the candidate's research/creative activities record, indicating the significance of the overarching accomplishments and/or achievements of singular distinction. The department letter should articulate the grounds for advancement beyond simple numerical tabulations of the items produced. The impact, quality and significance of the work is of the utmost importance. The letter should provide sufficient context for the achievements to be understood by agencies outside of the department/discipline. Similarly, when a candidate is listed as co-PI on a grant or contract, the departmental letter should clarify the candidate's share of the grant money and role in the project. If the contract or grant is listed as "continuing", any changes in the funding for the current review period should be provided. See Red Binder I-75, Section V, for additional information on identifying and assessing research/creative activities.

In certain fields such as art, architecture, dance, music, literature, and drama, distinguished creativity should receive consideration equivalent to that accorded to distinction attained in research. In evaluating artistic creativity, an attempt should be made to define the candidate's merit in the light of such criteria as originality, scope, richness, and depth of creative expression. An important element of distinction is the extent of regional, national, or international recognition.

The departmental letter must assess the degree and quality of the candidate's role in any collaborative work, or explain why such assessment is impracticable.

#### B) Professional and/or Scholarly Achievement and Activity (Teaching Professor series)

Because "professional and/or scholarly achievement and activity" is a broad category, the Department letter should clearly articulate expectations for accomplishments related to the underlying discipline or to pedagogy, and provide clear evidence of achievement, leadership, and/or influence on the campus or beyond. The department letter should articulate the grounds for advancement beyond simply enumerating the accomplishments. The impact, quality, and significance of the professional, scholarly, or pedagogical activity is of the utmost importance, with sufficient context provided for the achievements to be understood by agencies outside of the department/discipline. The departmental letter must assess the degree and quality of the candidate's role in any collaborative work, or explain why such assessment is impracticable. Similarly, when a candidate is listed as co-PI on a grant or contract, the departmental letter should clarify the candidate's share of the grant money and role in the project. If the contract or grant is listed as "continuing", any changes in the funding for the current review period should be provided. See Red Binder I-75, Section V, for additional information on identifying and assessing professional and/or scholarly achievement and activity.

#### C) Teaching and Mentoring

The department letter should include a statement of the normative teaching load and how the candidate's obligation was met for the review period. For example:

- The normal department teaching load is [ ] courses per academic year. During the current review period, Professor [ ] taught [ ] (explain if partial credits) at the undergraduate level and [ ] (explain if partial credits) at the graduate level. This fulfilled the teaching requirement for the review period.

(If applicable, incorporate the following):

- As part of their expected teaching load, Professor [ ] additionally taught [course] during Summer [ ], which constitutes a core component of the curriculum of the department (only in cases when summer teaching is a required component of teaching load).
- During the review period, Professor [ ] had [ ] releases for [ ] (sabbatical, grant, overload previous cycle, etc.).
- [OR] This was an overload of [ ] that will/will not affect course load expectations in future cycles (explain if course reduction will occur in future cycle).
- [OR] This was [ ] course/s short of normative teaching expectations that will/will not be made up in the next review cycle.

The letter should assess the overall contributions of the candidate to the departmental curriculum on lower-division, upper-division, and graduate instruction. The department assessment might also evaluate

the candidate's contribution to academic advising, thesis and dissertation directorship, work relating to the curriculum, among others.

The letter should include an evaluation of the candidate's teaching and mentoring performance, including an analytical evaluation of the campus teaching evaluation scores and other evidence of teaching effectiveness, if provided, and indicating the significance of the record. The analysis should include information on the number of graduate committees (MA and Ph.D. as reflected in the bio-bibliography). See Red Binder I-75, Section V for more information on judging the effectiveness of a candidate's teaching and mentoring.

**D. University and Public Service**

The letter should include a full analysis of the candidate's involvement in service, indicating the *significance* of the record and the *quality* of the activities.

**E. Other Achievements**

The departmental letter should include an analytical assessment of other significant accomplishments not otherwise addressed in the letter. The significance of honors, awards, and other distinctions or noteworthy activities contributing to DEI should be described in the relevant area of review.

**3. Summary**

This section is optional, and may be used to summarize the most significant accomplishment of the review period, and to provide an explicit justification for acceleration or other special action.

In cases of appraisal, departments may make one of the following three recommendations: a) Continued Candidacy: indicating an assessment that the candidate is likely to eventually qualify for promotion to tenure rank. B) Continued Candidacy with Reservations: indicating an assessment that there is an identified weakness in the record that appears to require correction in order for the individual to eventually qualify for promotion to tenure rank. C) Terminal appointment. In addition, the letter must also include an evaluation of the performance as progress toward eventual tenure.

**Chair's Separate Confidential Letter**

While this option is not often used, the Chair may, in accordance with APM 220-80e, submit a separate letter indicating their own analysis and recommendation. This letter is not made available to other members of the faculty in the department. It should be noted that a Chair's separate letter is designed to be evaluative of the evidence available to the department; new evidence can be considered on the rare occasions when it could not be appropriately shared with the department. A Chair's confidential letter may also be used to address unresolved issues between majority and minority opinions related to a case, or to address a candidate's comments in response to the departmental review. When a Chair submits a confidential "Chair's separate letter", it should be clearly identified as such, and will become part of the personnel review file. The status of such a letter is considered to be non-departmental (as is a letter from a dean). It is not submitted to an ad hoc review committee when one is convened. As a "confidential academic review record" (as defined in APM 160-20-b), a Chair's letter will be made available to the candidate upon request along with other review agency reports at the end of the review process.