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Would you promote/tenure this candidate? Selecting external reviewers

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One of the most important junctures in a faculty member's professional life is being reviewed for promotion and/or tenure. The P & T process typically involves multiple components including instruction, research and service productivity; setting future goals; and identifying external reviewers. Many institutions place great emphasis on external evaluations as reviews are perceived as unbiased assessments of the quality and quantity of the candidate's work compared to others at a similar stage.

Unfortunately, candidates may underestimate the importance of selecting external reviewers. Faculty who are not strategic risk adverse consequences such as refusals of review candidates. Additionally, faculty who select reviewers who hold differing theoretical or research orientations may risk a negative review based on these factors. With the high value on these evaluations, one negative letter can reduce the chances of a positive decision within the academic program or university.

Faculty who are eligible for promotion and/or tenure need to be mentored on how to be strategic about external review nominations. Like a research agenda, faculty should begin the process of deciding on reviewers earlier in their career. As chairs, there are several ways to help prepare faculty for their external reviewer selection.

- 1) Faculty should be mentored to construct a spreadsheet of possible reviewers. This should include a greater number than required in the P & T guidelines. If a dean requires 10 names, for example, the faculty should try to come up with 15-20 possible names. For each, have basic information such as the rank, tenure status, and school of each candidate. In addition, ratings of the reviewer's academic department and institution can also be used to select reviewers who will be viewed as the most credible. A sample spreadsheet will be provided to participants.
- 2) With the prominence of electronic libraries, faculty should evaluate each reviewer candidate's publications. How do these fit with the faculty member's publications? Is the theoretical framework, methodology, analysis and conclusions aligned with the review candidates? Faculty can begin to prioritize, and exclude, review candidates based upon these data.
- 3) Faculty should begin to find ways to expand professional networks to include these individuals. While many P & T guidelines prohibit co-authorships, there are numerous other ways to connect with potential review candidates. These include attendance and presentations at conferences, seeking out sessions that are presented by review candidates, asking more senior colleagues to make introductions to review candidates, and joining special interest groups or committees where potential review candidates serve.

As part of yearly evaluations, chairs should include questions about how faculty are progressing with external review lists. In addition, chairs can tag resources that lead faculty to connect with these individuals. For example, prioritizing conference attendance support to those where faculty can interact with potential reviewers.

In summary, this presentation will highlight the importance of strategic decision-making and include case vignettes for discussion. In addition to discussing risks and pitfalls in a poor selection process, the presentation will highlight ways that chairs can support faculty in a positive review process.