

**BOSTON COLLEGE  
MORRISSEY COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES**

**PREPARING AND PRESENTING PROMOTION CASES**

Among the most important decisions made by the university are promotion and tenure decisions. Ideally, the process should produce decisions that are fair, uphold high academic and professional standards, and be respectful of the candidates under consideration.

This document is intended to guide department chairs as they advise candidates preparing their promotion dossiers and as they manage the promotion case within their departments and before the Promotion Committee. To facilitate the process, this document also suggests “recommended practices” based on recent experience in the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences. In addition to this material, the candidate and the chair should review carefully the relevant sections of the University Statutes (Chapter II, Sections 7 and 8) included in Appendix A.

Before discussing details, however, it is important to set out three general principles that should inform and guide these important personnel decisions:

All departmental processes surrounding tenure and promotion should both embody the principles of fairness and respect for candidates and reflect the centrality of tenure and promotion decisions to the teaching and research mission of the university. The quality and reputation of academic departments, the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences, and Boston College depend ultimately on the quality of the faculty.

Departments should specify, and adhere to, clear procedures for undertaking tenure and promotion reviews. Information about these procedures should be available to candidates. Candidates should be provided with the pertinent sections of the Statutes and department guidelines and should be given a clearly articulated time line to help them to prepare the necessary materials. The chair and senior faculty should be willing to answer questions and discuss all aspects of the process.

In order to improve faculty performance and to ready candidates for promotion, departments should also have clearly articulated procedures for monitoring the professional development of faculty with periodic reviews and, for assistant professors, written feedback at specified points during the probationary period.

## PREPARING THE PROMOTION FILE

### Materials Submitted by the Candidate

The candidate is responsible for preparing and submitting a promotion file including materials supporting the case for promotion. While the file i



- In addition to the specified material, the promotion file should include any other documents relevant to the case. These might include, for example, letters from colleagues or from faculty in other departments.
- The Promotion Committee carefully assesses the merits of each case. Given the number of cases, however, there is a limit to the quantity of material that can be considered.

## THE DEPARTMENTAL REVIEW

While departments have a natural desire to protect colleagues whom they know and like, they also have a stake in maintaining their credibility when it comes to personnel matters and a professional responsibility to apply rigorous standards in an equitable manner. The best interests of both departments and the University may sometimes require very difficult decisions.

According to the Statutes, “Academic achievement, the chief criterion for promotion, is comprised of excellence in the areas of teaching, research and publications.” In addition to academic achievement, the Statutes also require candidates to fulfill the “more generalized responsibilities of the faculty” and this requires the Promotion Committee “to determine whether or not the candidate has demonstrated the collegueship necessary to an academic community, and a satisfactory level of departmental and college service.” Each of these areas--scholarly activity, teaching, and service--will be considered in turn.

### Evaluating Scholarship

The candidate’s scholarly activity is a central consideration in assessing a promotion case. A thorough evaluation involves a review by both the department and by external reviewers expert in the candidate’s area of scholarship. The department should not “outsource” the review of the candidate’s scholarly activity to the external reviewers.

### Departmental Review

The department should carefully assess the candidate’s scholarly activity and likely trajectory. In a few departments, a special committee is appointed to perform this task. In most departments, all faculty members are expected to review the candidate’s materials. In either case, the internal review should be as rigorous as the external reviews.

The department’s report on the candidate’s scholarly activity should begin by summarizing the candidate’s research interest, comment on publications and presentations, and assess the potential for continued scholarly activity.

the leading journals and venues in the candidate's discipline, or comment on whether the level of research funding is above or below the department's expectations.

### External Reviews

To supplement and inform the department's evaluation, letters from external referees should be obtained to offer independent assessments of the candidate's schol



- Departments should request evaluations by means of a common form letter and make it clear to the candidates that it is inappropriate for them to solicit letters on their own behalf. The instructions should ask for a frank assessment of the candidate's scholarship and should not ask for a reference or a letter "supporting" the candidate's





## Recommended Practices

Over time, departments have developed their own methods for evaluating teaching. While a diversity of approaches is appropriate, some recommended practices have emerged:

- Student evaluations are most meaningful when comparisons can be made to similar types of courses. To facilitate such comparisons, departments are encouraged to generate statistics for comparable offerings. These categories could include, for example, large lecture courses, laboratory courses, studio courses, seminar courses, honors courses, and graduate courses.
- Peer evaluations should be conducted on a regular basis over the duration of the probationary period and thereafter. Meaningful peer evaluation is time-intensive, so departments should plan ahead to assure that the file includes reviews from different faculty members and covers the range of courses taught by the candidate.
- If student committees are used, there should be separate forums for undergraduate and graduate students. One or more students should be appointed to serve as rapporteur and to prepare a detailed summary of the deliberations. Instead of offering broad generalizations, the report should offer specific examples and, whenever possible, quote the committee participants.
- **If the department invites student letters, special care should be taken to achieve a representative sample of students. Toward that end, the department might invite the candidate to submit names of students with the remainder of the letters coming from randomly selected students. If the candidate submits names, the candidate should not contact these potential reviewers beforehand. In soliciting student letters, the yield may be poor, so departments are encouraged to cast a broad net.**
- However the department decides to evaluate teaching, it is important that the reviews be candid. Peer reviewers should be encouraged to identify both strengths and weaknesses. Along the same lines, the report on the student committee should reflect the full tenor of the discussion. If student letters are solicited, the department should avoid the temptation to hand pick students or to limit feedback to students who received high grades from the candidate.

## Evaluating Service

Although service may seem a lesser consideration, there have been cases in which unsatisfactory service and expectation of the same in the future has been decisive.

### The Definition of Service

As part of the “generalized responsibilities of the faculty,” the Statutes require the Promotion Committee to consider whether the candidate has provided “a satisfactory level of departmental and college service.” Because it would be difficult to establish a common standard for service, the Statutes continue to define unsatisfactory service: “Such service shall be considered unsatisfactory to the extent that it manifests a consistent record of refusal to carry out legitimate administrative requests for service or an unreasonable unwillingness to carry one's appropriate share of departmental and collegiate obligations of a service character.”

Every faculty member is expected to serve the department and this includes attending faculty meetings and serving on committees when asked. While the Statutes only refer to “departmental and college service,” some departments broaden the definition of service to include work done on behalf of learned societies, professional organizations and the community. This would include reviewing manuscripts for journals or proposals for funding agencies, moderating sessions or serving as a discussant at conferences, serving on committees, and participation in accreditation visits.

### Assessing Service

To help the department evaluate service, candidates should be encouraged to maintain a record documenting their service to the department, to the college, and to the discipline. Because a simple list of activities has limited meaning, departments will need to assess the candidate's commitment to service. Common criteria include the quantity, quality and the impact of the service.

In general, service is satisfactory if the faculty member serves on a reasonable number of committees when asked, fulfills the responsibilities involved, and receives generally favorable reviews from colleagues and administrators for his/her contributions.

An unsatisfactory record of service would be characterized by one, or more, of the following forms of behavior: excessive absences from faculty meetings, unwillingness to serve on

## Recommended Practices

When assessing service, departments should be guided by the following recommended practices:

- The assessment of service should reflect the candidate's career arc. It would be unreasonable to expect an assistant professor to play important roles organizing academic conferences or to serve on especially time-consuming college or university committees. In fact, many departments protect their junior faculty from extensive service, so the Committee is often looking for evidence that the candidate will become a contributing member of the department.
- In some instances, it may be appropriate to add commentary or to request letters commenting on the candidate's service, especially if the candidate has assumed special responsibilities for the department, the university or in professional organizations.
- Because women and AHANA faculty are often drawn into service duties to achieve a diversity of perspectives, it is particularly important for the department to fully document and credit these activities when presenting such cases.

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deliberations and should clarify the procedures used to solicit external letters and to evaluate teaching.

Before its final inclusion in the promotion file, the report should be available for comment in the chair's office to all who took part in the formal deliberations. Individual faculty or groups of faculty should feel free to send separate communications to the Promotion Committee.

Please contact the Dean's office if you would like an example of a department report (.0.01 Tw(o)-4 (li)-2 (n4 Tw

- Most significantly, a good report will accurately reflect the department's deliberations. Even if the department vote is unanimous, the report should still highlight concerns that were identified in the department's deliberations. There are few perfect candidates and the department's report should demonstrate that the final decision was based on a careful assessment and substantive discussion of the promotion file.

**Each voting member of the department is expected to submit a justified ballot to the Dean. The ballot should provide a justification for the vote cast, whether positive, negative or abstaining.**

#### PRESENTING THE PROMOTION CASE

The Promotion Committee is responsible for making an independent judgment about the candidate's past performance and future trajectory in the areas of scholarship, teaching, and service. Part of the assessment process is a meeting the o (f)13(n t)-2 (he)4 ( )JTJ-0.004 Tc 0.004 Tw d(n)-4

is sometimes necessary for the Committee to ask hard questions to solicit an honest assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the candidate being considered.

### Recommended Practices

The candidate's prospects should not hinge on the chair's skill at presenting the case. If a case is properly presented, the departmental report should contain the essential information and the hearing should help the Committee understand the case. To prepare for the hearing, the following recommended practices are offered:

- By design, the Promotion Committee is composed of representatives from the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences. The chair should be prepared to speak intelligently to a diverse audience and to explain complicated concepts in simple language.
- Members of the committee prepare for the hearings by carefully reading the materials relevant to the case. It is, therefore, not necessary to read lengthy passages from the departmental report or the reviews. The most effective opening statements are brief (five minutes) and provide either a broader perspective or important information that might have been overlooked in the file.
- When presenting the case, the chair may be tempted to assume the role of an advocate. Experience suggests the promotion and tenure process works best when the chair focuses less on defending the candidate and more on accurately representing the department's deliberations. It is often necessary and appropriate for the chair to acknowledge problems present in a particular case.
- The chair should anticipate and be prepared to discuss different aspects of disciplinary culture. Given the breadth of the departments in the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences, the Committee frequently asks questions that transcend the candidate under







requests for service or an unreasonable unwillingness to carry one's appropriate

process for that year. If a Department Chairman or Dean is an untenured faculty member, he shall, in any case where a member of his Department, School or College is being considered for tenure, be replaced by a tenured faculty member appointed by the Academic Vice President.

B. PRELIMINARY PROCEDURES

1. The Chairmen of Departments, where applicable, and Deans, where applicable, shall, in consultation with all tenured faculty members senior to candidates for promotion, review each year before October 15, the promotion status of all faculty members within the Department, School or College. The Chairman of each Department, where applicable, shall submit to the Dean of the School or

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criteria mentioned above. All tenured Professors shall be polled on each tenured Associate Professor and untenured Professor who is a candidate for promotion.

By or about November 15, a record of the results of these meetings, including the votes cast by individual faculty members, shall be sent to the appropriate Promotion Committee by the Chairman or Dean along with his recommendation on each candidate and the records of the consultation with non-voting faculty members and students.

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members wish to include, and shall, after review of the report by the members of the Committee, transmit it to the President of the University not later than January 15.

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E. DECISION BY THE PRESIDENT

1. If the President questions or disapproves any recommendation, he shall notify the appropriate Committee and convene a meeting to discuss the case. If, after the meeting, the President disapproves the recommendation, he shall forward to the appropriate Committee, no later than February 15, a letter stating the reasons for his disapproval.
2. The President shall communicate notice of his decision to each faculty member who

APPENDIX B  
SAMPLE LETTER SOLICITING AN EXTERNAL REVIEWER

Springtime, 2007

Dear Professor \_\_\_\_\_,

Among the most important decisions made by any university are promotion decisions. Letters from external referees offer a crucial outside assessment of a candidate's professional achievement and are a vital source of information in making promotion decisions.

I am writing to ask your assistance in evaluating XXX, who will be considered in the fall for promotion to [Associate Professor with tenure/Full Professor] at Boston College. I have enclosed a copy of Professor XXX's *curriculum vitae*. If you agree to our request, I will supply you with copies of his/her scholarship. The department would need your letter of evaluation by October 1, 2007.

I understand that these requests impose a burden on the most distinguished members of the profession, but I very much hope that you will be able to assist in this matter. I shall call you next week to follow up. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me (phone; e-dress).

Thank you for your consideration in this very important matter.

Sincerely,

Name  
Chair, Department of ZZZ

APPENDIX C  
SAMPLE COVER LETTER WHEN SENDING SCHOLARLY MATERIALS

Springtime, 2007

Dear Professor \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you very much for agreeing to assist in our consideration of XXX for promotion to

Thank you again for your willingness to serve as an external reviewer. I recognize the time and energy necessary to prepare such a review and I appreciate your willingness to participate in this process. Please feel free to contact me if I can provide any additional information about Dr. XXX or answer any questions about the tenure process at Boston College.

Sincerely,

Name  
Chair, Department of ZZZ

Enclosures