

**Guidelines for Authors of Letters in Evaluation of Candidates for
Tenure, Promotion and Contract Renewal Whitman College Faculty
Personnel Committee** *(updated 3/18)*

Sitting members and members-elect of the Faculty Personnel Committee may not write letters of recommendation for any faculty member currently under review by this body.

In considering the dossiers of candidates for contract renewal, the Committee has three sources of information: student evaluations of teaching, materials submitted by the candidates themselves, and colleague letters of evaluation. For candidates for tenure and promotion, the Committee also has external letters in evaluation of professional activity. All of these sources have limitations, but together they help the Committee perform a responsible and fair evaluation.

Apart from those materials submitted by the candidates themselves, only the internal colleague letters can address all three areas of evaluation: teaching, professional activity and service to the college. It is thus especially important that colleague letters of evaluation give as complete a portrait as possible of the work of the candidate. Seeing as much of a candidate's dossier as possible before submission will help faculty members write an informed letter. When possible, we encourage candidates to share their statements with colleagues writing letters. Authors of letters of evaluation may limit their comments to those matters that they feel competent to address, but authors are encouraged to familiarize themselves with as many aspects of the candidate's work as possible. Bear in mind that the three criteria of evaluation: excellence in teaching, excellence in professional activity, and service to the College are prioritized in that order.

To ensure consideration of the letter, the author needs to deliver it to the Provost/Dean's office by the submission deadline. The Committee will begin deliberations almost immediately after that deadline.

The Faculty Personnel Committee undergoes training and conversation at the beginning of each academic year to recognize how factors such as implicit bias and stereotype threat may affect perceptions of faculty performance. Letter writers are encouraged to consult the document summarizing contextual factors that may matter in the assessment of faculty members entitled "Context in Evaluation Faculty – Diversity Inclusion Access.pdf" on the Provost / Dean of Faculty CLEo site (Resources / Faculty Personnel Committee / 2018-2019 Reviews).

Teaching

Evaluations of teaching depend upon actual observation. Authors of letters of evaluation should try to observe the candidate's teaching on at least two occasions (Faculty Handbook, IV. D. 2. e.). A discussion between the author and the candidate before the actual observation can help clarify the candidate's pedagogic goals. Letter writers are encouraged to ask to see syllabi, exams, presentations and/or handouts, discussion questions and course materials, in order to better understand what the students are being asked to do and to learn in the course. The author is also encouraged to ask the candidate for copies of prior semesters' student evaluations, which may assist the author in knowing about past trends in classes. The Committee encourages authors to discuss their observations with the candidates after each class visit. The Committee finds multiple observations of the same course especially helpful when the author has a conversation with the

candidate between visits. The Committee also welcomes letters that describe visits to different kinds of courses.

In composing the letter itself, please indicate the sources of information available to you. Explain which courses you observed on which days, whether you saw student evaluations and/or course materials, and whether you discussed your observations with the candidate. Try to be as specific as possible, without confining yourself to a mere blow-by-blow description of the classes. Concentrate upon your evaluation of the merits and demerits of the pedagogy. If your class observation casts light upon information from the student evaluations, please indicate that. If your conversations with the candidate helped clarify any issues for you or for the candidate, please indicate that. Finally, please offer a summary assessment of the merits and/or demerits of the candidate's pedagogy.

Professional Activity

The evaluation of a candidate's professional activity also depends upon first-hand observation. The Committee already has the candidate's current *C.V.*, so a listing of recent publications is usually not needed. On the other hand, a Whitman colleague can often shed important light upon the merits of specific venues of publication or presentation, and can often put a candidate's work into a disciplinary context. Authors should indicate which of the publications they examined are peer-reviewed. They are encouraged to consult the department's professional activity guidelines, although those guidelines do not supplant the Faculty Code. In all cases, it is the author's direct engagement with the intellectual substance of the candidate's work which can be of most benefit for the Committee's evaluation. Information can best be collected from reading the candidate's work, observing presentations, attending performances or otherwise having direct access to the candidate's

work. Please indicate clearly the degree of your familiarity with specific materials, explaining what writing you have read or what presentations or performances you have seen. Authors might want to clarify for the Committee the degree to which they feel comfortable commenting upon the academic work of candidates outside of their own fields, and some authors may well prefer not to evaluate the professional activity of such candidates. If evaluations of professional activity are to be of value, however, they depend upon first-hand familiarity with the candidate's work.

Service to the College

Authors of letters of evaluation are encouraged to address those aspects of a candidate's service to the College with which they are personally familiar. The Committee is aware of the elected and appointed committees on which the candidate has served, but authors of letters can sometimes put those services into context, clarifying both the quantity and the quality of a candidate's service. In addition, departmental colleagues are especially able to assess the quality and quantity of a candidate's service outside of regular committee work. The Committee will be looking for evidence of significant service to the College at the time of tenure and especially for promotion to full professor.

Summary Evaluation

The Committee encourages authors of letters in evaluation of a candidate's work to offer a summary evaluation of the candidate's contribution to the work of the College and a specific recommendation on tenure, promotion, and/or contract renewal.