

The External Review Process From Start To Finish ... And To Revision?

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The external review, a formal appraisal of a faculty member's teaching, research and service credentials conducted by an outside evaluator, is a customary step in the tenure and/or promotion process for college/university faculty (Rhoades-Catanach & Stout, 2001). The process, while often stressful for candidates and awkward for the evaluators, is nonetheless an essential element in sport management faculty assessment because the review letters assist tenured faculty in adjudicating the extent to which a candidate's academic field receives their scholarship (Baron, 2003). This roundtable presentation addresses common practices for evaluating faculty from the standpoints of the candidate and the external reviewer.

From the candidate's focus, the process is time consuming and might even be disconcerting (Highberg, 2010). Preparation for the review requires faculty candidates to either secure their own reviewers or, more likely, submit names of qualified reviewers to a chair or tenure/promotion committee that will then select the reviewers to contact in order to request their participation. The credentials sent to those reviewers might consist of a curriculum vita, or a vita accompanied by examples of publications or other scholarly materials, syllabi, teaching evaluations, narrative statements written by the candidate, or numerous other appropriate documents, all of which are prepared meticulously by the candidate.

The external reviewers, experts in a candidate's field of sport management research and/or teaching, are usually faculty at comparable institutions (e.g., undergraduate or graduate instructional program; size & setting; enrollment profile) and hold the same rank or a higher rank than that which the candidate seeks (Rhoades-Catanach & Stout, 2001). The credentials they receive might outline the review process at the candidate's institution, list benchmarks for the evaluation, and suggest specific criteria to consider (e.g., quantity of publications; journal quality; professional reputation; likelihood of the candidate receiving tenure at the reviewer's institution). Reviewers are given a timeline in which to work, and instructed on letter or evaluation submission processes.

While the above procedures might be considered standard or routine, there are a number of issues that arise for candidates and reviewers. Candidates express concerns that (a) letters are very open to interpretation by their committees and chairs, (b) letters may impugn a candidate's work because it contrasts with a reviewer's own scholarship, (c) reviewers occasionally address their own accomplishments and compare them to the candidates at the same career stage, and (d) reviewers may provide unsolicited comments about a candidate's prospects or suitability for tenure or promotion. On the other hand, reviewers, particularly full professors, are often deluged with requests to evaluate comprehensive packets of materials (i.e., the candidate folios) in a short period of time. Although most materials arrive with detailed instructions, some credentials folios arrive with no guidelines and reviewers are then left to their own devices to compose their letters. Due to a limited number of professors, the same reviewers are asked to review prospective candidates year after year. Finally, because of state Sunshine Laws or campus open record policies, candidates are frequently aware of reviewers' names and comments, and this may interfere with a reviewer's objective assessment of a candidate (Schlozman, 1998).

This roundtable discussion addresses the preceding issues associated with the external review process and suggests methods of improving this important experience from the foci of candidates and reviewers. Discussion will center

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around reviewer selection, appropriate materials, responsibilities for reviewers, interpretation of reviewer comments, and effects of reviewer comments on the candidate. Finally, a standardized process of reviewing sport management candidates will be discussed based on tested systems used by other professional and/or scholarly societies (viz., National Dance Association) where experts are paid a nominal fee for providing objective evaluations that remain confidential.