

MEMORANDUM

TO: Committee on Faculty Affairs (CFA)

FROM: Steering Committee

RE: External Review Process for Faculty Promotions

DATE: October 2018

Background: The TCNJ Promotion and Reappointment Document 2015 (as well of the Promotion and Reappointment Document in recent years prior) indicates that candidates for promotion to full professor will be given access to external review letters but that the identity of the reviewer will be redacted. The document is silent as to whether the department PRC, the dean, the CPTC, the provost and the president will see the redacted or the unredacted letters. Practice has varied across the campus. The draft of the revised TCNJ Reappointment and Promotions Document shared with the faculty in April 2017 was similarly silent on this issue. At the open forum held in April 2017, a dean raised a concern, indicating that he felt that it was essential for him to know the identity of the letter writer. In its Final Recommendation (May 16, 2017), CFA added a sentence to the RPD indicating that the unredacted letters would be shared with the dean, the CPTC, the provost, and the president. The then chairs of CFA, Abby O'Connor and Matthew Cathell, indicated in an email that the rationale was two-fold, both in response to the concern raised by the dean and out of concern that under current practice not all faculty candidates were being treated in the same way. In Fall 2017, several faculty members emailed Steering to raise concerns about this added sentence. All faculty members who contacted Steering were from the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, where the practice has been to share redacted letters with all reviewers. In December 2017, Steering charged CFA to consider these faculty concerns.

In its Final Recommendation (April 28, 2018) CFA recommended that the policy be further revised to allow the candidate to know the identity of the reviewer. This recommendation was accepted by Steering and moved to Step 7 of the governance process. Because the RPD is a Board-level policy, the final step in the process is approval by the Board of Trustees.

Bill Keep, Interim Provost, presented the recommendation to the Mission Fulfillment Subcommittee of the Board of Trustees on September 25, 2018. The BOT members raised two questions:

1. To what extent did the faculty consider the impact on the quality of external review letters given a change where external reviewers will know that their review will not be confidential? Having considerable experience writing reference letters, the BOT members express skepticism that the proposed change would have a slight or unimportant impact on the quality of external review letters.
2. After the Interim Provost described the promotion documentation process, BOT members asked: Was the recommended change shaped by the campus' current technology (i.e., Vibe) rather than by what policy would produce the highest quality external review letters? If so, then would a change in process rather than in policy provide quality external reviews?

Charge: In keeping with the timeline below, CFA should consider the questions raised by the Board of Trustees. In doing so, CFA should consider 1) the role and potential value of external reviews as articulated in the Reappointment and Promotions Document and 2) the policy most likely to produce high quality external reviews from highly qualified reviewers. CFA should consider consulting with Interim Provost William Keep regarding the context of the concerns of the Board of Trustees. After collecting testimony, CFA will report its recommendation to the faculty prior to submitting a final recommendation to Steering. In that report, CFA should clearly articulate who, if anyone, will know the identity of the external reviewers.

Testimony Tier: Tier II from Faculty

The issue requires moderate testimony from the campus community. The assigned council or committee should consult with relevant individuals and groups in developing a preliminary recommendation. The completed preliminary recommendation should then be made available to the relevant stakeholder groups, and testimony should be solicited in the form of written feedback (through a survey and or e-mail).

Timeline: CFA should again review the issue of external review letters with the goal of completing a preliminary recommendation by March 2019.

TCNJ Governance Processes

Step 1–Steering issues a charge

Step 2-Governance prepares a Preliminary Recommendation

Once the appropriate standing committee or council has received the charge, it should start by collecting data needed to make a preliminary recommendation. It should receive input from affected individuals and all relevant stakeholder groups prior to making a preliminary

recommendation. For issues that have broad implications or that affect a large number of individuals, initial testimony should be solicited from the campus community at large. For some issues, sufficient initial testimony may come from input through committee membership or solicitation from targeted constituent groups. When, in the best judgment of the committee, adequate clarity of the principles contributing to the problem are known, a preliminary recommendation should be drafted and disseminated to the campus community.

Step 3–The Relevant Stakeholders provide Testimony

Once a preliminary recommendation has been completed, the standing committee or council should seek testimony from the campus community. The testimony should be gathered in accordance with the Testimony Tier (see below) assigned to the issue by Steering.

For issues that require public testimony from the campus community, the chair of the standing committee or council should approach the president of the appropriate representative bodies to schedule the next available time slot at a meeting of that body.

Testimony should be gathered in a way that allows stakeholders to weigh in fully on the issue. Members of the standing committee or council that wrote the preliminary recommendation should be present to hear and record the testimony.

Step 4–Governance prepares a Final Recommendation

Once the standing committee or council has received appropriate testimony, it should revise the preliminary recommendation into a final recommendation. Once the final recommendation is complete, the standing committee or council should use sound judgment to determine whether or not more public testimony is required. If, in its feedback to the original preliminary recommendation, a stakeholder representative body requests to review an issue again, the committee or council is bound to bring it back to that body. If a full calendar year has passed since the formal announcement of the preliminary recommendation, the committee must re-submit a preliminary recommendation to the campus community. When the committee or council has completed the final recommendation, it should forward it to the Steering Committee. The final recommendation should be accompanied by a cover memo that summarizes the initial charge, how testimony was gathered and the nature of that testimony, and how the committee responded to that testimony, including a description of how the preliminary recommendation evolved as a result of testimony.

Step 5–Steering considers the Final Recommendation

Step 6–The Provost and/or President and Board consider the Final Recommendation

Step 7–Steering notifies the Campus Community Testimony

For a complete description of all steps and of the testimony tiers, see Governance Structures and Processes, 2017 Revision, pages 21–24.