August 13, 2014

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deans, Associate Deans and Chairs

FROM: Winston Langley, Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

SUBJECT: Guidelines for Major Faculty Personnel Reviews

T76-081, the Academic Personnel Policy for the University of Massachusetts ("the Redbook"), and its Implementation Guidelines provide detailed instructions for the preparation of major faculty personnel reviews. The following are additional comments—intended to be consistent with T76-08—that are grounded on experiences within the Provost’s Office; on guidelines developed and disseminated in September 1996; on the June 1997 report of the CAS Personnel Practices and Procedures Review Committee; on an examination of clarifications on personnel actions by UMass Amherst with which we share a common contract; and on practices that have been followed over the years.

1. Size of Personnel Committees

Neither the Redbook nor the Implementation Guidelines specifies a size for personnel committees at either the departmental or collegiate level. They do, however, provide for ad hoc committees when necessary to carry out a "full, fair, and impartial" review. Whenever possible, and in all tenure cases, there should be at least five members of personnel committees making recommendations on major personnel decisions, so that no single member's vote can give the appearance of a substantial division of opinion. A membership of at least five also allows for the range of deliberation that should properly accompany such decisions.

2. The Basic File

a) Format—Files should be uploaded to Xythos with secure access provided by a password to ensure confidentiality. Only those faculty members and administrative personnel involved in the review will be permitted access to the Xythos files. A "Table of Contents" (see “Organization of Major Personnel Action Files”) file should list all items uploaded for review. Materials within each section should be arranged in a clear and orderly fashion with appendices as appropriate (e.g., a letter from a solicited scholar informing the requesting department that s/he is unable to provide a review as requested). Article II, Sections B, C, and D of the Implementation Guidelines define the contents in detail. It is important that a submitted file be properly organized so that the succeeding level of review can proceed with its required evaluation without having to consume considerable amounts of time attempting to make sense of the file or to find items listed in the table of contents. All additions to the file should be dated.

b) Candidate's Curriculum Vitae (C.V.)—It is the responsibility of the Department Personnel Committee to ensure that the candidate's C.V. is clear and appropriate and, if necessary, to ask that it be revised by the person under review. The C.V. should clearly identify the status and nature of the listed scholarly work such as: published, accepted for publication, or unpublished; peer-reviewed or solicited articles; and original or reprinted work. The chronology of the educational and academic experience as well as that of the scholarly work should be clear. It is the responsibility of the candidate to ensure the accuracy of all entries on the C.V.
c) *Language in reviews for reappointment through tenure decision year (Fourth Year review)—* All levels of fourth year review should avoid using the terms "strength" and "excellence" in their recommendations and, in general, should be explicit about the difference in the degree of scrutiny between the fourth year review and the tenure review.

3. Evaluation of Teaching

   a) *Course Evaluations*—The discussion of course evaluation should, if possible, include comparative information about general or course-specific departmental norms. This information, in turn, should include indications of the contributions that a candidate's course work is making or has made toward the overall curriculum of his or her department.

   b) *Course Materials*—The discussion of teaching, apart from statistical and other data contained in the file, should include reference to course materials such as syllabi, examinations, and assignments, among other things. An analysis of the quality and appropriateness of these materials should form part of the teaching evaluation.

   c) *Student Letters*—Student letters in the file should be accompanied by at least three other pieces of information: a clear statement about how the students solicited for evaluation letters were chosen; an indication of the percentage of response achieved; and differentiations made among department-solicited, candidate-solicited, and unsolicited letters.

   d) *Student Advising and Mentoring*—Student advising and mentoring are a very important part of teaching evaluation and should be carefully appraised and reported.

   e) *Annual Faculty Reports*—These should be included in the files of promotion and tenure cases and should indicate the progress a candidate has made in teaching and his/her own professional development.

4. External Reviewers of Research, Creative or Professional Activity

   a) *Choice of Reviewers*—The selection and solicitation of outside reviewers are the responsibility of the Department Personnel Committee. By requiring that at least one of the minimum of three outside reviewers be selected from a list provided by the candidate, the Redbook assures a candidate's input into the process; but the committee should not choose reviewers that it believes are clearly inappropriate (particularly because of close personal and/or professional ties to the candidate) and may request additional names, if needed, from the candidate. Likewise, the committee has an obligation to ensure that individuals it selects are not inappropriate, particularly because of personal bias against the candidate, and should permit the candidate the opportunity to express concerns to that effect.

   b) *Outside Letters*—The quantity and quality of letters are quite variable. Some reviewers write extensively and substantively about the accomplishments of the candidate; others write briefly or merely touch on features of the candidate's career that are evident from the curriculum vitae. This variability might be partially corrected by a more specific crafting of the letter soliciting the review. Asking for comments on the quality of the work as well as its contribution to the field or fields in question could help. So, too, should a specific request for comments on the candidate's "potential for continuing professional [development and] achievement" (Redbook 4.6).

   c) *External Letters for reappointment through tenure decision year reviews (Fourth Year Reviews)*—External letters on scholarship are not required in the case of fourth year reviews and should be solicited only as circumstances advise that they are warranted,
such as in the cases of departments with graduate program(s) and expectations of extramural funding. External letters on public and professional service may be appropriate.

5. **Evaluation of Service**

In many ways, this area is the most difficult to assess and the process of review should keep in mind three things. First, this area of evaluation must be documented in a manner that is no less exacting than that required for teaching and scholarship. Second, both tradition and the FSU Contract require that faculty participate in the governance and maintenance of the University (departments/programs, colleges or schools, and other constitutive units, as well as the University itself). Third, activities in the area of service extend to the use of one's specialized knowledge, expertise or teaching skills to non-university audiences. To be favorably considered for excellence in service, a candidate must furnish credible evidence that she or he has **exceeded** in both the "governance and maintenance" as well as the non-university categories of service contributions, although the balance in each category will vary from candidate to candidate. Simply serving on a large number of committees will not satisfy the criteria for excellence in service. In other words, excellence in service is unlikely to be earned by contributions in only one of the two categories; and quantity of activities, without persuasive evidentiary indications that one has excelled in those activities will not earn one excellence.

6. **Promotion to the Rank of Professor**

All levels of review are required to give full, careful and specific consideration to teaching and service in promotion cases. Insufficiently distinguished performance or insufficient documentation of performance in these areas may serve as a basis for rejecting a recommendation for promotion to professor, even where the required substantial scholarly accomplishment and recognition have been established. As well, a very important consideration, in promotion to professor, is evidence in a candidate’s file that she or he has a **strong record** of successful mentoring of students and junior professors. Finally, because the status of professor is the highest professional achievement a faculty can realize, the promotion from associate professor to professor must be based on the fulfillment of expectations that exceed that which supports the promotion from assistant to associate professor.

7. **Community Engaged Scholarship**

As part of the university's evolution, we have sought over the years to make more explicit the university's expectations in matters of personnel review. Community engaged scholarship is one such area of review. Faculty members, whose research focus is in community engagement, should have the results of that research (shared in refereed journals or established publishing venues, for instance) treated equally with other areas of research emphases.