

## **Factors to Consider When Preparing RPT Dossiers**

### **Recommendations from the Professional Standards Committee and the Office of the Provost**

#### **Overall Organization**

The PSC encourages all units to continue to self-assess and improve their consistent organization and bookmarking of dossiers to make them easier to navigate (e.g., all supporting materials after basic dossier entries; external reviewer CVs after all letters rather than after each letter; searchable pdf by using the OCR-optical character recognition feature in Adobe Acrobat; check all links to ensure they work).

#### **Common Definitions**

The PSC encourages the development of university-wide common definitions of workload categories (e.g., teaching/advising, scholarship, service, administration, clinical). Among the most common areas of confusion are the overlapping and different use of the terms service, clinical, and administration.

The PSC also encourages the development of university-wide common definitions for recording RPT voting (i.e., Yes, No, Absent, Recuse, Abstain). A common inconsistency relates to the differences between the terms abstain and recuse. The PSC has offered proposed definitions of these terms in our operating procedures.

At all voting levels (i.e., department, FSC, PSC) it is essential for there to be a brief rationale for votes recorded as no, abstain, or recuse. This is particularly important for "No" votes. The PSC puts little to no weight on "No" votes that are not accompanied by an explanation.

#### **Workload Distribution by Chair**

The PSC finds boilerplate language about workload from some Chairs (e.g., 40:40:20), without specifics about how many courses are actually taught along with other duties. The PSC recognizes workload distributions may differ from year to year during the review period. While we are not seeking excessive detail, it is helpful to have accurate estimates of an individual's workload distribution (e.g., the average number of courses taught per year) in order to assess aspects such as scholarship output. One might expect different output for someone who is teaching five courses per year rather than two, or how taking on significant administrative roles (e.g., Department Chair) might impact time for scholarship. The reason we request information on the average number of courses taught with the estimates of workload percentages is because how courses are counted varies across the university. For example, in some units, 40% for teaching equals five courses, and in others, it equals four courses. This is further obscured when boilerplate language is used because it does not offer information about releases or shifted roles. Therefore, two faculty in the same department can be listed as having 40% devoted to teaching, where one person is teaching five classes a year and the other is teaching two classes a year. For the individual with fewer courses, understanding how that time has been redistributed is important to reviewing the dossier fairly (e.g., junior faculty releases with no additional responsibilities are different from a shift to externally funded research activities or added administrative duties).

We request that LCOM departments consider putting workload percentages on the first page of all dossiers with estimates of percent of effort by category:

- (a) Clinical (e.g., serving patients);
- (b) Teaching and Advising;

- (c) Scholarship (e.g., publications, grants, presentations);
- (d) Service (e.g., committee work at various levels within the university, service to the profession);
- (e) Administration (e.g., Directing a Center or Clinic, Chairing a Department, Coordinating a Program).

### **External Letters**

The PSC notes continued issues pertaining to "arm's length" external letters for tenure and promotion consideration. Too many are still coming through that are clearly not at arm's length or they flirt with the appearance of favorable bias.

Here is an actual example of what a submitted letter writer stated that would seem to establish the person as clearly not at arm's length: "I have co-authored seven scientific papers with Dr. XX, which were published in the period 2008-2018". We are unclear on the process steps that would have led to a Chair soliciting such a letter, or if received, why it has not been acknowledged and shifted to a different part of the dossier as a supportive letter. Ensuring arm's length letters is a shared responsibility between the faculty member and the Chair. The PSC encourages departments to review their processes used to ensure arm's length external letters.

Some received letters, while they may technically be at arm's length, flirt with the appearance of favorable bias. Actual submissions have included statements such as, "I am a friend of his mentor", or "We are from the same academic lineage, but not overlapping". Soliciting letter writers who are closely connected in such ways may present the appearance of selection for benefit based on the writer's loyalties to mentors or the faculty member's graduate program. Given the availability of potential reviewers, the PSC discourages solicitation of letters from people with academic kinship relationships. We understand that there are small, highly specialized, fields of research in which it may be difficult to avoid soliciting letters from evaluators who have not previously intersected professionally with the candidate, or who do not belong to the same academic network.

The credibility of arm's length letters is enhanced when the letters come from reviewers who:

- (a) Work at an institution of higher education at least comparable to UVM (R1, R2) or other relevant organization;
- (b) Have attained the rank or a higher rank as the promotion being sought;
- (c) Have submitted a CV that reflects a substantial body of work that establishes them as an appropriate reviewer for a specific candidate;
- (d) Have no real or perceived bias related to the applicant.

### **Early Tenure**

The PSC has reviewed some early tenure cases one or more years earlier than the standard timeline. The PSC requests that early tenure cases be specifically identified (e.g., with a notation on the first page of the dossier). We suggest the Chair's initial statement explicitly identify this as an early tenure case and provide a brief rationale for why the person is going up early. When early tenure is more than one year earlier than the standard time frame, it has raised questions among PSC members about whether the productivity has been sufficiently sustained and under what conditions (e.g., substantially reduced course load). We encourage more clarity and transparency on early tenure reviews. Years brought in that were accepted by UVM as counting toward tenure from the initial appointment letter may be part of an early or standard time frame review. We encourage Chairs to provide such information immediately in the first section of *1. Overall Expectations* (by Chair). The front page might be modified to include a

distinct line to note early tenure and to clarify whether it is based exclusively on time at UVM, or includes time credited from previous appointments at other comparable institutions of higher education.

### **Nature of Contributions to Scholarship**

Many dossiers continue to omit the applicant's specific contribution to co-authored scholarship. It is helpful to know the approximate percentage of contribution and the nature of the contribution. Given differences among disciplines, there needs to be clarity on the author's role. When does the last author simply reflect the smallest contribution, and when does last author represent a prominent position (e.g., in LCOM sometimes the last author is the leader of the lab, the individual who conceptualized the study or it is their original line of research)? The PSC seeks to understand the approximate percent of contribution and nature of contribution. Namely, what did the faculty member actually do with regard to a particular publication (e.g., conceptualize the study, develop the research plan, collect data, analyze data, write all or part of the initial draft, edit)?

### **Gratitude for the Work**

Serving on the PSC involves a significant investment of time and effort. One of the most common sentiments expressed by PSC members is that the time and effort are worthwhile. We appreciate the opportunity to review the breadth and depth of work produced at UVM. Members of the PSC approach each dossier with great respect for the work of our UVM colleagues and carefully review each dossier. PSC members have the unique opportunity to interact with disciplines that we would typically not encounter otherwise. It is an experience that contributes to our sense of UVM as a special place where so many talented people produce important work.