

Best Practices: Academic Unit Letter

- Provide context: unit's status, national position, aspirations, directions, needs
- Critical review and analysis of evidence (not simply repetition of the case). Link this assessment to unit criteria.
 - Evaluate quality and impact of scholarly/creative work
 - Evaluate volume of scholarship/creative activity
 - Clarify candidate's contributions to collaborative projects
- Respond to problems in the record- don't ignore them
- Help readers understand the quality and impact of journals/juried exhibitions
 - Citation counts
 - Data on quality of journals/other venues (e.g., rejection rates, if official journal of national association, ranking of presses in the field, etc.)
 - Review of books
 - Competitive grants (and reputation/quality of funding agency)

Best Practices: Academic Unit Letter

- Comparison to peers nationally (in candidate's cohort or recently tenured cohort)
 - present comparative data reflecting quality and level of productivity
- Teaching effectiveness
 - include and discuss summary of teaching evaluations, mentoring activities, peer review or other evidence of teaching/mentoring effectiveness
- Interdisciplinary collaborations
 - Include letter from chair of collaborative unit(s)
 - clarify nature of collaboration (e.g., research, student mentoring)
 - Evaluation of quality and impact of scholarship from perspective of second field

Best Practices: Academic Unit Letter

- Clarify unit expectations and disciplinary culture re: individual and joint authorship and disciplinary norms regarding order of authorship
- Clarify process if there are two department votes (e.g., committee and full faculty or all faculty at given rank)
- If committee vote is split, provide both positions in one letter, signed by all (so individual votes cannot be identified by candidate if s/he reads committee letter)

Example: Academic Unit Personnel Committee Letter **(Descriptive. Need more evaluative/critical commentary – IMPACT???)**

To: Academic Unit Chair/Director
From: Academic Unit Personnel Committee

The members of the Academic Unit Personnel Committee unanimously support Dr. Mark Green's application for promotion to associate professor with tenure.

Professor Green has demonstrated an original, even "cutting edge" research agenda through his well developed record of publications at this point in his career. He is the second author of a book, has published 5 chapters in scholarly books, twelve articles in refereed journals (2 as single author), and another 6 articles and technical reports in non-refereed publications. He has been prolific in writing funding proposals, with 3 funded internally and 1 funded externally. He has delivered more than 60 presentations, half of them as sole author.

Dr. Green's instructional activities are equally impressive. He has developed 3 new courses and modified 2 existing courses. He is mentoring 5 doctoral students and serves on the committees of 12 other doctoral students. He has also offered one of his courses as an online course. Dr. Green's student evaluations of instruction are very strong (most courses in the 4.5-5.0 range, and one in the 3.5 to 4.0 range on a scale of 1 to 5 where 5 is highest). He has received a college teaching award and observations of his teaching by peers were all very positive.

Dr. Green has also excelled in the area of service. He has served on 3 editorial boards, as guest reviewer for numerous publications, and as reviewer for 8 books – all indications of the respect in which he is held by the field. He has served on numerous departmental and college committees and 2 University committees. He has numerous community service activities on his c.v. as well.

Letters from 4 external reviewers who are leaders in the field were received. All expressed overwhelming support for Dr. Green's tenure and promotion to associate professor.

Example: Good Academic Unit Chair/Director Letter

TO: Henry Fonda, Dean
FROM: Burt Reynolds, Chair/Director
RE: Promotion to Associate Professor with tenure for Dr. Connie Francis

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide my interpretation of the credentials of Dr. Connie Francis who is applying for promotion to Associate Professor with tenure in the Department of Best Cutting Edge Discipline at Arizona State University. Dr. Francis was hired by ASU in 1997 after completing her Ph.D. In her 6 years at ASU, Dr. Francis has significantly exceeded our department's criteria in all three areas of research, teaching, and service. Not only is our departmental recommendation unanimous, but the outside letters of support also are unanimously supportive. **I am pleased to strongly endorse these recommendations - in my view; few young scholars have accomplished what Dr. Francis has accomplished. She has set a new standard for our junior faculty, one that few are able to achieve.**

Department Standards for Tenure/Promotion to Associate Professor. **To receive a positive recommendation for interim evaluations or for promotion and tenure, the candidate must be evaluated, minimally, as average in research, teaching, and service with an above average ranking in research and teaching.** Furthermore, all faculty are expected to conform to a high standard of personal and professional ethics. **More specifically, promotion to the ranks of Associate Professor requires demonstration of the following:**

- Refereed publications
- Creativity and independence in research
- Demonstrated competence in subject matter as evidenced through teaching and mentoring
- Effective service to academic unit, college, university and community
- Evidence of professional service and activity (e.g. active participation in related professional associations, editing/reviewing for professional journals, speeches, presentations at national professional conferences)
- National recognition (e.g. recognition by established leaders in the candidate's field of her/his contributions, service on editorial boards or on professional organizations' boards etc.)

Example: Academic Unit Chair/Director Letter (continued, page 2)

Interpretation of Outside Letters. All of the external reviewers of Dr. Francis's credentials are successful senior faculty members at major universities, and are scholars of national reputation in Cutting Edge Disciplines or related fields. All of the reviewers know Dr. Francis professionally, but none have such close associations with her that would endanger an objective evaluation. Significantly, all of the reviewers indicated that Dr. Francis is worthy of tenure and promotion. Persistent themes in these letters reflect the fact that Dr. Francis is considered to be: (1) a researcher who had made significant contributions to the field of cutting edge #1, cutting edge #2, and cutting edge #3, and cultural issues related to these, (2) an established scholar who is addressing important topics of scholarship, (3) a researcher whose publications are in highly respected journals with high rates of rejection, and (4) a well-rounded scholar who has served her profession, her students, and her university well.

... Her work is viewed as programmatic, original, sophisticated, and influential. Importantly, all of the reviewers explicitly recommended that she be granted tenure at ASU and that she would be very likely to achieve tenure and promotion at their institutions, some of which are the finest in the country. Impressively, **two of the reviewers are editors of top-level journals.** The reviewers also consider Dr. Francis to have made significant contributions in instruction and service. These are significant sources of support as these individuals are highly experienced in reviewing and evaluating the work of many individuals. As such, it is clear that she is viewed as one of the most accomplished young scholars in the country and all reviewers feel that her potential in the future is even greater...

Example: Academic Unit Chair/Director Letter (continued, page 3)

Significance/Quality of Research. Dr. Francis's research focuses primarily on issues related to the linkage of cutting edge discipline with a traditional discipline. In this work, she integrates rigorous conceptual and methodological models that allow her to examine interesting developmental processes. **All external reviewers noted the sophisticated and strong theoretical and methodological rigor of her work, and the impact it has had.** As noted by one reviewer (reviewer #5), "although her vita gives evidence of great productivity, it does not show just **how pervasive her impact on the research in her field has been.**" Impressively, Dr. Francis has taken on a leadership role in her work - as evidenced by her first-authored publications and her role as a Principal Investigator on a large federal grant that she was awarded. Moreover, this funded work focuses on X, thus contributing to our understanding of diversity and culture.

Dr. Francis has published a total of 21 peer-reviewed journal articles or book chapters... Importantly, she is publishing her work in some of the top journals in the field (e.g., *Cutting Edge Journal*, *Journal of Cutting Edge Research*, and *Cutting Edge Quarterly*). **These are highly respected journals with rates of rejection 80% or greater, and are the top-ranked journals in her field of study.** Most impressive is the consistency she has shown in both the quality and quantity of her research publications. She also has had significant exposure of her work through her 42 presentations at national meetings, as well as her participation in a number of invited conferences, symposia, and research workshops. Additionally, Dr. Francis has proven herself to be an excellent mentor of graduate students and evidence of this is provided in the number of students who are co-authors on her papers and presentations...

Example: Academic Unit Chair/Director Letter (continued, page 4)

An overall picture of Dr. Francis is that of a highly motivated investigator who is pursuing high-quality lines of research for which she has become highly recognized. **Although much of her scholarly work has been a collaborative effort between Dr. Francis and her mentors from Well-Respected Public University, it would be a mistake to question her independence and autonomy.** The fact that she is first author on many of her published pieces, and her role as the PI on her federal grant, attest to her role as a leader in this work. Moreover, she has taken a leadership role in her other work with ASU colleagues and students.

In summary, **Dr. Francis has exceeded the research criteria for tenure and promotion in our department.** Her research accomplishments demonstrate that Dr. Francis (1) has a clearly defined, programmatic, and independent research program, (2) contributes significantly to the knowledge base in her field through scholarly publications in top-quality journals and through presentations in conferences and workshops, (3) is recognized by peers for her contributions to the field and has established a national reputation as an outstanding researcher and scholar, and (4) continues to show progress and promise as a researcher and leader in her field of study. Thus, Dr. Francis is considerably above average in research quality and productivity.

Example: Academic Unit Chair/Director Letter (continued, page 5)

Teaching. Dr. Francis has developed into an effective and versatile instructor. She generally teaches two courses each semester; however, at various times she has received course reductions to pursue her research (spring, 1998, 1999, fall, 2001, and spring, 2002). She teaches moderate- and large-sized undergraduate upper-division courses, as well as small, intensive graduate courses.

Our student evaluations consist of two components: (1) a rating of the instructor - focusing on aspects such as knowledge, responsiveness, and respect for students, etc. and (2) a rating of the course - focusing on aspects related to grading, text, level of work, etc. (NOTE: in our evaluation rating system, lower scores reflect better evaluations in courses taught before spring 2012. In fall 2012 we moved to using an online system where 5 reflects a better evaluation.) Based on these evaluations, Dr. Francis has demonstrated consistently positive teaching evaluations. Across all classes, Dr. Francis has an overall instructor rating of 1.36 (out of 5). **The evaluation of the class component of her courses averaged 1.61. Based on our 5-point scale (with 3 reflecting average performance), Dr. Francis is consistently well above average and is generally in the top third of the ratings...** More detailed information on the department evaluations is available for the past 3 years (see Summary of Student Evaluation of Instruction). Comparisons of Dr. Francis's overall ratings the past 3 years revealed that her mean evaluations are generally better than those for the entire department. This is true when comparing her scores for undergraduate or graduate courses. Her evaluation scores also are at about the mean levels of those at the same rank and better than the average ratings for those faculty at the next rank of Associate Professor. Thus, Dr. Francis is perceived by our students to provide high-quality instruction across a wide variety of courses and assignments. (***Summary of Student Evaluation of Instruction containing courses, mean teaching evaluations per course compared to academic unit or course averages***).

The second formal instructional evaluation used in the department is a review of Dr. Francis's syllabi and course materials. Based on the materials provided, it is clear that Dr. Francis is an innovative, rigorous, and dedicated teacher...

Example: Academic Unit Chair/Director Letter (continued, page 6)

Professional Activities and Services. In our department, we try to limit the service responsibilities and expectations of our junior faculty, particularly in their early years. Despite this, Dr. Francis has made exceptional service contributions... She has been a valuable member of some of our most important department committees ... and has been an active member of some of our search committees.

One of the most important service contributions Dr. Francis has made is in her commitment to service to her profession. The most visible evidence of this is her role on the editorial board of *Cutting Edge Quarterly*--one of the premier journals in the field...

Chair/Director Recommendation. Based on the criteria established in our department for tenure and promotion, I strongly agree with our review committee that Dr. Francis has met and surpassed these criteria. She has established a nationally recognized program of research and scholarship, she is an outstanding instructor and mentor of students, and she is a valuable department citizen who is participating in her scholarly and service responsibilities at the national and state levels. Her record of teaching, research, and service exceeds our criteria for tenure and promotion. All external reviewers concur with this conclusion and recognize the potential for her continued contributions in research, teaching, and service. She is recognized as one of the most promising researchers in her field and her record of accomplishments is considered exceptional.

In addition, our department depends greatly on Dr. Francis's contributions. Her role in our department is critical to our graduate program and finding someone who is as competent and collegial as Dr. Francis would be difficult. This attests to the critical significance of Dr. Francis's contributions and value in the department.

In summary, without hesitation I believe that Dr. Francis's record of performance and accomplishments surpass our criteria for tenure and promotion. I strongly support her application for tenure and promotion and recommend that she be granted both.