

LETTERS OF REFERENCE GUIDELINES

College of Human Medicine

MSU specifies guidelines, processes and procedures for external letters of reference for tenure system faculty, fixed term faculty and academic specialists.

https://www.hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/faculty-academic-staff/faculty-handbook/external_ref-letters.html

CHM uses these guidelines for letters of reference for faculty in all appointment systems. Departments should use the following CHM guidelines in addition to MSU guidelines, processes and procedures.

Purpose

The purpose of letters of reference is to provide evidence during the promotion review process that individuals seeking promotion have achievements and performance level that is comparable with faculty at peer institutions for the rank sought.¹

Reviewers

Letters of reference should be from leading scholars in the relevant discipline at peer institutions. The reviewer must:

- Hold the academic rank for which the candidate is being considered, or higher.
- Be professionally capable of evaluating the candidate's scholarly work objectively and commenting on its significance in the discipline.
- Submit the letter on institutional letterhead with signature

Letters must predominantly represent persons other than collaborators. In no case may those who served as primary dissertation chair or major advisor for post-doctoral research be chosen as reviewers.

Confidentiality

University policy states that all letters soliciting evaluation for promotion and tenure recommendations must include the unit's statement on confidentiality. The CHM uses the university's suggested language:

Your letter of evaluation, as part of an official review file, will be held in confidence and will not be disclosed to the faculty member under consideration or to the public except as required by law or University policy. In all such instances, the information made available will be provided in a form that seeks to protect the identity, privacy and confidentiality of evaluators.

Departments who wish to deviate from this language must consult the university policy for the university's expectations and the procedure for review of the revised statement. See https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/faculty-academic-staff/faculty-handbook/confidentiality_ref-letters.html

¹ Academic specialists may or may not have effort allocated to research/scholarly activity. When they do not, letters should be solicited from individuals with a record of and reputation for distinguished performance in similar areas of the mission. External letters might comment on relevant external service, outreach or other forms of external engagement related to the area(s) of effort, and would compare to individuals filling similar roles at peer institutions.

Solicitation of Letters

Soliciting letters of reference and providing materials to the referees is solely the responsibility of the department chairperson. Candidates must not discuss their case with prospective or actual external evaluators at any stage of the review process.

The department chairperson shall:

- Specify the number of potential evaluators to be suggested by the candidate
- Specify a proportion or number of letters of reference to be solicited from persons suggested by the candidate
- Determine which of the potential referees will be asked to provide letters of reference
- Add names not on the candidate's list

The process of soliciting letters of reference must incorporate the following principles and procedures and must be applied uniformly to all faculty in the unit.

The request to a referee must include:

- The unit's statement on confidentiality
- A request to disclose any potential conflicts of interest
- A description of the candidate's assignment, including, for example, the percentage of the appointment devoted to research/scholarly activity, teaching, service, etc.
- A request to assess
 - The candidate in comparison to others in his/her cohort nationally
 - The extent and quality of the scholarship of the candidate, including its contribution to the discipline
- The following additional resources
 - Curriculum Vitae
 - The Reflective Essay (and the COVID-19 Impact Statement if submitted as a separate document)
 - A representative sample of the candidate's scholarly work
 - The applicable promotion criteria

College Requirements by Appointment System

Tenure System

For reappointment to the second probationary period, external letters of reference are not required.

Assistant Professor (or Associate Professor) to Associate Professor with Award of Tenure

- Minimum of 4 and maximum of 6 external letters
- Of the total number of external letters submitted with the dossier, at least two letters should have been nominated by the chair independently from the candidate's recommendations
- Letters must come from reviewers who hold rank of Tenure Associate Professor or higher

Associate Professor (with Tenure) to Professor

- Minimum of 4 and maximum of 6 external letters
- Of the total number of external letters submitted with the dossier, at least two letters should have been nominated by the chair independently from the candidate's recommendations
- Letters must come from reviewers who hold rank of Tenure Professor

Research System

Assistant Professor of Research to Associate Professor of Research

- Minimum of 4 and maximum of 6 external letters

- Of the total number of external letters submitted with the dossier, at least two letters should have been nominated by the chair independently from the candidate's recommendations
- Letters must come from reviewers who hold rank of Associate Professor or higher

Associate Professor of Research to Professor of Research

- Minimum of 4 and maximum of 6 external letters
- Of the total number of external letters submitted with the dossier, at least two letters should have been nominated by the chair independently from the candidate's recommendations
- Letters must come from reviewers who hold rank of Professor

Health Programs, Fixed Term, and Non-Prefix Community Based

Assistant Professor to Associate Professor

- Minimum of 1 external (chosen by department chair)
- Additional 3-5 internal and/or external
- External letter must be outside of the MSU appointment system
- Internal letters are from faculty in the University who are knowledgeable in the candidate's particular field and expertise
- Letters must come from reviewers who hold rank of Associate Professor or higher
- Of the total number of external letters submitted with the dossier, at least two letters should have been nominated by the chair independently from the candidate's recommendations

Associate Professor to Professor

- Minimum of 2 external (1 chosen by department chair)
- Additional 2-4 internal and/or external
- External letters must be outside the MSU appointment system
- Internal letters are from faculty in the University who are knowledgeable in the candidate's particular field and expertise
- Letters must come from reviewers who hold rank of Professor
- Of the total number of external letters submitted with the dossier, at least two letters should have been nominated by the chair independently from the candidate's recommendations

Academic Specialists

In the continuing system, for reappointment to the second probationary period, external letters of reference are not required.

Award of Continuing Status (continuing system only)

- Minimum of three and maximum of six external letters
- External review letters should be external to the university. If the Specialist being reviewed does not have an "external facing" role, letters from individuals external to the department are acceptable.
- All external reviewers should be of equal rank or higher.
- Of the total number of external letters submitted with the dossier, at least two letters should have been nominated by the chair independently from the candidate's recommendations

Promotion from Specialist to Senior Specialist (continuing system or fixed term system)

- Minimum of three and maximum of six external letters
- External review letters should be external to the university. If the Specialist being reviewed does not have an "external facing" role, letters from individuals external to the department are acceptable.
- All external reviewers should be of equal rank or higher.

- Of the total number of external letters submitted with the dossier, at least two letters should have been nominated by the chair independently from the candidate's recommendations