

Department of Biological Sciences
Guidelines for Peer Review of Teaching

Developed by the Executive and Personnel Committee, spring 2015; finalized fall 2018

Faculty at all ranks should have their teaching reviewed by peers on a regular basis, with the aim of improving teaching effectiveness and generating a record for use in promotion and teaching award dossiers.

The review process should adhere to the following guidelines.

For T&R faculty (tenured/tenure-track faculty and instructors):

- A minimum of two peer reviews must be included with each promotion dossier, ideally conducted within the preceding two years and encompassing two different courses. Once promoted to professor or senior instructor, T&R faculty will typically be reviewed primarily when needed for teaching awards, if there are concerns about teaching effectiveness based on SPOT feedback from students, or upon request from the faculty member themselves.
- Pre-tenure faculty and new instructors should work with their mentor and the department head to identify appropriate reviewers and develop a timeline for the peer review process. After the first promotion, faculty should confer with the department head regarding a plan for additional reviews. Requests for peer reviews will be extended by the department head in consultation with the faculty member.
- Reviews for promotion purposes should generally be performed by a tenured faculty member or instructor at a higher rank than the individual being reviewed (hereafter referred to as the candidate). One of these individuals should be in the same discipline and one in a different discipline (e.g. EEB vs. MMC) from the candidate. Reviewers may include one individual from outside the department, including from the Center for Instructional Development and Educational Research (CIDER).
- The candidate should share the course syllabus and other pertinent materials, including access to the course online site (currently Canvas), as soon as these are available, preferably before the start of the semester.
- Reviewers should attend at least two classes. They may confer with the candidate about sessions that may be particularly relevant for review and which to avoid (e.g. a scheduled guest speaker). Visits to the class may be announced or unannounced at the reviewer's discretion.
- The review will have two components. The first will be a written record, consisting of a formal letter addressed to the department head that becomes part of the candidate's permanent file and that is included with the promotion dossier. The content of the letter will be shared in a discussion with the candidate, but the letter itself will remain confidential. This letter does not have to be long or detailed, except in cases where it will also be used for a teaching award nomination. This letter should consist of

- 1) a paragraph describing the reviewer's credentials and their relationship with the candidate;
- 2) 1-2 paragraphs (or more if a teaching award may be a possibility) describing the reviewer's impression of the candidate's teaching effectiveness, addressing both the strengths and unique aspects of the candidate's teaching, as well as areas for potential improvement;
- 3) a final paragraph addressing the candidate's unique teaching contributions to the department (e.g. particular expertise, innovative pedagogy) as well as any improvements that have made since the previous review, if applicable. It should also mention that the content of the letter, but not the letter itself, will be shared with the candidate.

The second component will be an individual meeting with the candidate for an in-depth discussion of the reviewer's impressions, conveying both the positives and constructive suggestions for change/improvement.

- For new faculty members (i.e. prior to the first promotion) it is recommended that a preliminary review occur early in their appointment, typically during the second time through a particular course. This should be accompanied by a meeting with the candidate to convey general impressions and make constructive suggestions. Rather than a formal letter, the reviewer may document their general impressions and how the review was performed with an informal note to the department head. There should then be a follow-up review one to two years later, preferably of the same course by the same reviewer, that results in a formal letter for the candidate's file. There should be a second independent review of a different course by another individual, for a total of three reviews resulting in two formal letters.

For institute faculty members with minimal teaching expectations associated with their appointments:

- Two peer reviews should be documented with formal letters prior to promotion. These letters should have the same form as described for the T&R faculty above. They should also be accompanied by follow-up meetings with the candidate to convey positive impressions and areas for improvement/change, if any.
- The early review for pre-tenure faculty is optional, recognizing the lower teaching load of these individuals relative to T&R faculty.
- Both reviewers may be suggested by the candidate, acknowledging that they will have a better sense of who is best qualified to review their contributions in team-taught graduate and medical school courses.