



EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT AND PROVOST

May 23, 2012

To: Deans, Department Chairs, and School Directors

From: Joseph A. Alutto, Executive Vice President and Provost *Joe*

Subject: Promotion Reviews

This year the university processed more than 230 promotion reviews, with about 20 or so requiring extra review by the provost's faculty promotion and tenure committee. In looking back over the process for this and past years, there is one issue that appears to be a significant weakness in our practices, that is to say the nature of P & T letters written by deans and department chairs.

While there are clearly differences in style, the dominant tone of many such letters is one of "counting" and "reporting" rather than providing true assessment. By that I mean that letters at both levels tend to focus on simply reporting data that have already been noted at earlier stages of review. For example, there will be statements that the candidate "published x articles, x in top journals, and x books." Or, he/she "taught x courses and received x SEIs"; and "x outside letters were collected, and x were positive and y letters were negative." Or, "the TIU vote was x in favor, y opposed; and the college committee voted x in favor of promotion, and y opposed." Or, "external reviewer A said x; B said y," etc.

This is all useful information, and I realize this approach has become a convention in many of your units. However, it is already in the dossier and also should have been summarized in the P & T chair's summary of the faculty's vote. Therefore, it need not be the primary focus of either the chair or dean letter. Instead, decanal and chair letters should be focused on articulating the context and an overall independent assessment of the candidate. Thus, we should expect that such statements focus on how the candidate fits into long-term unit plans or the development of a specialty field; what the "numbers of publications, courses taught, etc." really mean in the context of the unit; how the chair/dean personally evaluates the overall performance and promise of the candidate; and how thorough were the peer reviews of teaching effectiveness, etc. In effect, those letters should help the college and university levels of review better understand the case by providing value added.

I understand that to explain a final recommendation it is necessary to tie facts to conclusions reached. However, currently in many cases the balance seems to be weighted more toward repeating data already in evidence than toward providing reasoned judgments that allow my office to more effectively understand the role that has been played by a candidate and the

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role to be played going forward. We often also find that by focusing on the reporting of data there is a failure to convey other important information. For example, it is not helpful to say that the vote of the TIU was 10-8 in favor of promotion without providing insight into the reasons for such disagreement. Those reasons can range from clear differences in assessments to internal political or ideological disputes that manifest themselves in voting patterns. It is also not helpful if a writer fails to mention that internal disagreement on a case reflects that a unit is aggressively seeking to improve through implementation of enhanced standards or, in the case of promotion to full professor, of the application of more flexible criteria. Knowing that a split vote may be a reflection of changing expectations is important for those reviewing a case at the next level.

I also understand that by tradition some departments view chair letters as simply reports of positions and actions taken by faculty. However, that is not what is expected from a university perspective. The fact that the faculty rules require "separate written assessments" from chairs and deans points to the importance of your perspectives, interpretations, and independent evaluation. President Gee and I expect and need these independent lenses of deans and chairs to be focused on cases, so that we can better understand aspirations and actions we should be joyfully supporting.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if this memo is not clear. Understand that I highly value the evaluative skills of department chairs and deans. Those views must help guide any and all issues of promotion, and we are simply attempting to ensure that this takes place.