

ADVICE ABOUT SELECTING AND USING EXTERNAL EVALUATIONS

The “judgment of scholars in the same field at other institutions” is sought because such persons can provide a detached view of the candidate’s work. They need not be personally acquainted with the candidate, but they do need to be persons who will comment with knowledge and authority about the range and depth of scholarly competence demonstrated in the candidate’s writings, performances, or works of art. By seeking outside opinions one hopes to see the candidate’s work in the context of his or her discipline, and to gain an understanding of that work’s significance when viewed from the perspectives of scholars within that discipline. We know our colleagues very well in the context of Mount Holyoke. We seek to learn how their work is perceived in the wider world. This is particularly important when a candidate’s “home” department encompasses more than one discipline.

Each referee should be provided with a copy of the candidate’s vitae, publications, and works submitted for or awaiting publication. For candidates in the creative arts, evaluators should be sent slides, videos, DVDs, CDs, or other representations of the candidate’s work sufficient for evaluators to judge.

Outside evaluators who are not members of the Five-College community are offered an honorarium of \$250 as a token of our appreciation.

Each referee should be assured that his or her comments about a candidate will be held in strict confidence, and will be available only to those persons who must recommend the candidate, or who must act upon the recommendation made (i.e., the tenured members of the department or the ad hoc committee; the Advisory Committee on Appointments, Reappointments and Promotions; the President; and the Trustee Committee on Education).

Four letters of the sort described above from referees who have taken the trouble to review and evaluate a candidate’s scholarly competence will be far more valuable than a larger number of less carefully prepared comments. Please remain mindful that we are asking for scholarly evaluations, not recommendations. The Advisory Committee’s experience is that critical comments, far from harming the cause, usually enhance the credibility of outside assessments.

When the department submits its recommendation, these letters, and other material to the Advisory Committee in the fall, it is also asked to submit brief biographical information about the outside referees. Noting major works or accomplishments of a letter-writer is important. But the Advisory Committee is especially interested in the rationale the department used in selecting referees (e.g. Professor X has taught and done research for many years at a college similar to Mount Holyoke; Professor Y is one of the most highly regarded people in the candidate’s specialty, etc.).