College of Engineering Guidance on Soliciting External Reference Letters for Promotion and/or Tenure Cases

Per Section 3.3.8 (Promotion and Tenure Procedures) of the Georgia Tech faculty handbook, at least five letters of recommendation “from appropriate individuals outside the Institute must be obtained by the Unit for any decisions relates to tenure or promotion. The individuals from whom letters are sought should be clear leaders in the field. Brief biographical sketches of these individuals should be included in the materials submitted for consideration, as well as the letters received. Generally, the letter writers should not have a personal or professional connection to the candidates (e.g., dissertation advisor, postdoctoral mentor, research collaborator). If letters from such individuals are included, they must be in addition to those normally required, identified as such, and filed separately from other external letters. A justification for including letters from these individuals must be included in the package.”

To facilitate the solicitation of these external reference letters, the College of Engineering provides the following guidelines.

1. Faculty candidates for promotion and/or tenure will submit a list of at least 5 but not more than 8 potential external references for their case along with contact information such as a phone number and email address. This list should be submitted along with one-paragraph bios for each potential reference, provided in an editable text format, to the School RPT Committee.

   If there are any individuals that the candidate would like not to be contacted as an external reviewer, this should be notated in a separate list along with the reason for not including this individual.

2. The School Chair should independently develop a list of potential external references for each promotion/tenure candidate, and submit this list to the School RPT Committee.

3. The School RPT committee will then compile the lists from the candidate and chair, noting who suggested each potential reference (e.g., candidate, chair, or candidate and chair). A summary of the potential external references is then submitted to the School Chair.

4. Per the faculty handbook, “the final decision regarding who shall be selected to provide recommendations from the list shall rest with the Unit Head(s) and the Faculty committee”. In the College of Engineering, this has been a responsibility of the School Chair.

5. The Chair will then maintain a list that contains all suggested potential reference names for each candidate, noting which of the references were selected to be contacted, who suggested each name, date of first contact, response (e.g., accepted to write letter, declined – any reason for declination, or no response), date of any reminders sent, and date the letter was received. Names that were not selected to be contacted should be included in the list as well.
Reusing External Reference Letters

Per the faculty handbook, “it is appropriate to use the same letter for two (2) consecutive years of the process.” To reuse external reference letters from a previous year, the following should be considered:

1. Either all letters are reused or none of them can be reused. It is the candidate’s decision whether or not to reuse letters for a second review. As a reminder, candidates who have waived their rights to access confidential documents will not have access to the letters or the contents of the letters.

2. If the candidate chooses to reuse previous letters, the candidate and School Chair can also choose to contribute additional potential names of external references to be solicited for new letters, using the same process outlined above. Final selection of the new external references submitted is determined by the School Chair and the School RPT Committee.

3. If letters are reused, the School Chair should extend a courtesy to the external letter writer allowing them to update their letter if they would like to do so or to submit a new letter altogether, based on the current candidate packet.

4. In either case, the School Chair must inform the letter writers (new or old) whether or not the candidate has waived their right to view the letters. If reusing letters and the candidate has not waived their right the second time, the letter writers need to be notified of this so that they can make an informed decision about whether to reuse the previous letter or write a new letter.

Sample language to include in the School Chair Reference Request Letter is below.

“You provided a letter for Dr. Burdell for promotion and tenure review last year and we are permitted to use that letter again this year. However you may prefer to update that letter, and therefore, we are providing updated materials for you to work from. If you would like us to reuse last year’s letter, please inform me of that as soon as possible.”
Templates for Letter Requests and Reference List

On the following pages are other important documents including memos from Provost Bras relative to external reference solicitation.

- Sample Reference Request Letter Template from Institute Faculty Affairs (May 2013)
- Memo from Provost Bras on External Peer Review Letters for Promotion and Tenure Decisions (May 21, 2013)
- Example Table of External Reference List that must be included in all promotion and/or tenure candidate files
Sample Reference Request Letter Template from Institute Faculty Affairs (May 2013)

Dear Professor/Dr. [External Reviewer Name]:

Dr. [Candidate Name], [Rank] Professor in the School of [Discipline] at the Georgia Institute of Technology, is a candidate for [promotion and/or tenure] during the 20XX/XX academic year. This process requires comments on the quality and impact of the candidate’s creative contributions from experts in the discipline outside of Georgia Tech.

You have been suggested as a reference who is knowledgeable and capable of making an assessment of Dr. [Candidate name]’s research/scholarship/creative contributions and [his/her] stature in the profession. In addition to a collection of material representing Dr. [Candidate name]’s scholarship, I have included a copy of the candidate’s vitae. I have also enclosed a statement of accomplishments, which our rules limit to five pages.

I would greatly appreciate your help with this evaluation process. Please provide a candid assessment of the candidate’s productivity and the creativity and impact of [his/her] work based on the intellectual products included in the package, along with any knowledge you might have of other contributions, including those in teaching and service. It would be helpful for you to compare the candidate to leaders in the field at a similar career stage, and to indicate whether [he/she] would be a viable candidate for [promotion and/or tenure] at your institution.

[This section may vary significantly by unit, for example, addressing particular aspects of the candidate’s creative contributions.]

It is the policy of the Georgia Institute of Technology to maintain the confidentiality of your evaluation to the extent permitted by law. While the Georgia Open Records Act does apply, Dr. [Candidate name] has signed a statement that he/she will not request to see letters from outside referees or seek their identity. However, we also need you to indicate in your letter that you desire that it be treated as a confidential personnel document (see sample statement below).

[or]

It is the policy of the Georgia Institute of Technology to maintain the confidentiality of your evaluation to the extent permitted by law, and to fully apprise reviewers of the conditions regarding that confidentiality. Thus you should be aware that Dr. [Candidate name] has not waived his/her right to see your evaluation. Therefore, if the candidate elects to do so, he/she may request to see your evaluation. Furthermore, the Georgia Open Records Act applies to all records at Georgia Tech.

Your letter should be directed to me, and it will become a part of the portfolio prepared for Dr. [Candidate name]. Please explicitly state your past/current relationship to the candidate in your letter.

I also request from you a brief (about one-half page) biosketch. Since your letter will be reviewed by others in the Institute who will not necessarily be familiar with you or your field, this information will provide perspective.

I will appreciate your sending the recommendation at your earliest convenience, but no later than [Date]. Due to the time element involved, you can fax your letter to me at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or email it to me at schoolchair@gatech.edu, and follow up with a signed copy in the mail. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

[School chair]

Sample Statement Regarding Confidentiality to Include in Review Letter:
By signing and submitting this reference letter, I expect that my identity will be kept confidential and that my letter will be treated as a confidential personnel document.
Date: May 21, 2013
To: Deans
From: Rafael Bras
Subject: External Peer Review Letters For Promotion And Tenure Decisions

For external peer review letters requested for promotion and tenure decisions to be made in 2013-14, I write to remind you of the procedures required in the Faculty Handbook and my expectations, which are based in part on recommendations from the Promotion and Tenure Process Review Task Force. The Task Force has developed a template for letters to request external reviews. The template is available at http://www.academic.gatech.edu. The newly-organized and clarified faculty handbook wording is available at http://dev2013facultyhandbook.gatech.edu/3.3.9-promotion-and-tenure-procedures.

External Peer Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Faculty Handbook Requires</th>
<th>Additional Guidance And Clarification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who should write?</td>
<td>&quot;The individuals from whom letters are sought should be clear leaders in the field.&quot;</td>
<td>Full professors preferred. Institution should be equal to or better than GT in the field. Letter writers must hold at least the rank and tenure status that the candidate is seeking. Letters from practitioners are welcome in appropriate cases.</td>
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How are they selected?

The list of individuals from whom letters are to be obtained should be developed jointly by the candidates for promotion and/or tenure and the Unit Head(s). The final decision regarding who shall be selected to provide recommendations from the list shall rest with the Unit Head(s) and the Faculty committee. A candidate for Promotion and Tenure may request that a particular individual not be

A full list of reviewers proposed by the candidate, by the School Chair, and by the unit P&T committee should be included in the file. The listing should indicate which ones the Chair selected to contact and what reply was received, including reasons for not reviewing if that is the case.
| How are they selected? (Continued) | contacted as an external reviewer. Such requests are typically honored. If the School Chair or Dean concludes that circumstances require use of that reviewer, the letter must be in addition to those normally required, identified as such, and filed separately from the other external letters. A justification for including the letter must be included in the package. “

… [T]he list provided by the candidate for external evaluators should be included in the package.” | A majority of letters are expected to come from people proposed by the Chair or the P&T Committee. |
<p>| Controlling conflicts of interest | “Generally, the letter writers should not have a personal or professional connection to the candidates (e.g., dissertation advisor, postdoctoral mentor, research collaborator). If letters from such individuals are included, they must be in addition to those normally required, identified as such, and filed separately from other external letters. A justification for including letters from these individuals must be included in the package.” | |
| Who should request? | “External evaluations shall be solicited by the Unit Head(s) and supplied to the office of the Dean.” | The School Chair (or Dean designate in Business) should request the letters and receive them back. |
| How many? | | A minimum of five letters is expected in the file. |
| Use letters twice? | “It is appropriate to use the same letter for two (2) consecutive years of the process.” | This is a judgment call on the part of the School Chair or Dean designate. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ref.</th>
<th>Last Name</th>
<th>First Name</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Name Suggested by? (Candidate/Chair/both)</th>
<th>Reference Solicited? (Yes/No)</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Burdell</td>
<td>George</td>
<td>U Penn</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>7/1/2011</td>
<td>7/20/2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Burdell</td>
<td>Georgette</td>
<td>MIT</td>
<td>Candidate and Chair</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>7/1/2011</td>
<td>Not Received</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Doe</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>U Arkansas</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>7/1/2011</td>
<td>Not Received</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Doe</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>UC Berkeley</td>
<td>Candidate</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>Contacted again on 7/30/11 and 8/10/11. No responses ever received.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Doe</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>UC Berkeley</td>
<td>Candidate</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Considered but too many collaborations with candidate</td>
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External Reference List Guidelines
1. Use number as labeling method each reference.
2. Write these numbers at the top of each letter ("Reference 1") and bookmark with this label in electronic file.
3. Include all names provided by the candidate, RPT committee, and school chair even if not selected.