

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 (January 2017)
- Memo from Provost Bras on External Peer Review Letters for Promotion and Tenure Decisions (May 21, 2013)
- Memo from Provost Bras on Promotion and Tenure Packages (April 16, 2012)
- 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 (January 2017)

[School Letterhead]

[Date]

[Internal Address]

Dear Professor X:

Dr. ABC EFG, Assistant Professor in the HIJ School of [Field] at the Georgia Institute of Technology, is a candidate for Tenure and Promotion to Associate Professor during the 2015-16 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. EFG's research/scholarship contributions and her stature in the profession. In addition to a collection of material representing her scholarship, I have include a copy of the candidate's vitae. I have also enclosed a statement of accomplishments, which our Faculty Handbook limits to five pages.

We would greatly appreciate your help with this evaluation process. Please provide a candid assessment of the candidate's productivity and the creativity of 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. Most critically, your assessment of the candidate's impact is deeply valued. It would be helpful for you to compare the candidate to leaders in the field at a similar career stage, and to indicate whether she would be a viable candidate for promotion and tenure at your institution.

It is the policy of the Georgia Institute of Technology to maintain the confidentiality of your evaluation to the greatest possible extent permitted by law. While the Georgia Open Records Act does apply, Dr. EFG has [has not] signed a statement that she will not request to see letters from outside referees or seek their identity. However, we ask that you indicate in your letter that you desire that it be treated as a confidential personnel document by including the following wording: *"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."*

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

We also request from you a brief (maximum 100 word) 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, please email your letter to me at X@gatech.edu and follow up with a signed copy in the mail. Thank you for your cooperation.

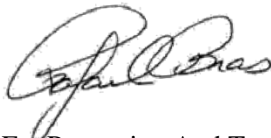
Sincerely,

School Chair
Title



**Georgia Institute
of Technology**

Office of the Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

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

Action	Faculty Handbook Requires	Additional Guidance And Clarification
Who should write?	“The individuals from whom letters are sought should be clear leaders in the field.”	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.
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.

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<p>How are they selected? (Continued)</p>	<p>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.”</p>	<p>A majority of letters are expected to come from people proposed by the Chair or the P&T Committee.</p>
<p>Controlling conflicts of interest</p>	<p>“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.”</p>	
<p>Who should request?</p>	<p>“External evaluations shall be solicited by the Unit Head(s) and supplied to the office of the Dean.”</p>	<p>The School Chair (or Dean designate in Business) should request the letters and receive them back.</p>
<p>How many?</p>		<p>A minimum of five letters is expected in the file.</p>
<p>Use letters twice?</p>	<p>“It is appropriate to use the same letter for two (2) consecutive years of the process.”</p>	<p>This is a judgment call on the part of the School Chair or Dean designate.</p>

April 16, 2012

MEMORANDUM

TO: College Deans

FROM: Rafael Bras, Provost

RE: Promotion and Tenure (P&T) Packages

I am sure you are beginning the process of preparing promotion and tenure packages for next year.

1. **IMPACT** – Each College (or units within a College) should determine appropriate measures of scholarly impact of faculty candidates for P&T. Each P&T package should include an explicit discussion of the impact of the candidate’s scholarship relative to the College’s or Unit’s measures of impact.

2. **EXTERNAL LETTERS** – The letter writers should be senior experts in the field represented by the scholarship of the candidate. The faculty candidate can recommend external reviewers, but the majority of the letters should come from reviewers selected by the Chair, the faculty committee, or the Dean. If an external reviewer has a personal or professional connection to the candidate (e.g., dissertation advisor, postdoctoral mentor, research collaborator), this should be stated in the documents. A substantial majority of the letters should not have personal or professional connections to the candidate.

A candidate for P&T may request that a particular individual NOT be contacted as an external reviewer. Such requests are typically honored. If the School Chair or Dean concludes that overwhelming reasons necessitate use of that reviewer, the letter must be in addition to those normally required, identified as such and included separately from the other external letters.

3. **CONFIDENTIALITY OF EXTERNAL LETTERS** – All candidates will be asked to sign a waiver indicating that the candidate “waives all rights to see the identity of the letter writers and/or the content of their letters.” In addition, the School Committee or Chair must require each letter writer to include a statement regarding his or her expectation that the review will be kept confidential.

4. **PARTICIPATION** - Only tenured faculty members holding an academic rank at or above that which is being considered for the candidate should participate in the formal discussion and vote.

5. **CONFIDENTIALITY OF GENERAL P&T PROCESS** – Confidentiality throughout the process is required and imperative. Candidates are not to be told the outcome of the deliberation until the President has made a determination. At the discretion of the Chair or Dean, informal discussions with the candidate about the progress of these deliberations, but not the anticipated outcome, at intermediate stages may be appropriate.

External Reference List for Dr. G.T. Engineer								
Ref.	Last Name	First Name	Affiliation	Name Suggested by? (Candidate/Chair/Committee)	Reference Solicited? (Yes/No)	Dates		Notes
						Ltr sent	Ltr Rec'd.	
1	Burdell	George	U Penn	Chair	Yes	7/1/2011	7/20/2011	
2	Burdell	Georgette	MIT	Candidate and Chair	Yes	7/1/2011	Not Received	Responded "severe illness in family- sorry can't help right now."
3	Doe	Jane	U Arkansas	Chair	Yes	7/1/2011	Not Received	Contacted again on 7/30/11 and 8/10/11. No responses ever received.
4	Doe	John	UC Berkeley	Candidate	No			Considered but too many collaborations with candidate
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7								
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11								
12								

Updated April 2014

External Reference List Guidelines

1. Use number as labeling method each reference.
2. Write these numbers at the top of each letter ("Reference 1"). In the electronic file, bookmark each external letter using this number in the title of the bookmark.
3. Include on this list every potential reference provided by the candidate, the RPT committee, and the school chair even if that person was not selected by the chair.
4. Immediately after this table, insert a 100-word biosketch for each reviewer.