E. Student Letters on Teaching and Advising

Student letters and course evaluations provide snapshots of the candidate’s teaching and advising skill set. The information must be carefully acquired and presented. What the colleges have to say.

E1. How should the peer review of teaching be organized and reported?

Most useful is to have several senior faculty members participate in the peer review to diffuse the workload and provide different points of view. Classroom observation by an experienced colleague is valuable as is an assessment of course materials and assignments. The peer reviewer(s) should produce a brief summary of their experience that is shared with the candidate included in the dossier.

E2. How should course evaluation data be presented?

Course evaluations vary from college to college but some concise summary needs to be provided for each course that is taught during the probationary period. The summaries should include the course evaluation response rate. The department should be ready to provide raw course evaluation data (e.g., written student comments) should it be requested at any time during the review process.

E3. Should some number of former students be asked to write a letter?

Letters from current and students is an essential part of the dossier. Letters from individuals suggested by the candidate need to be so identified. If the department selects a group of students to write teaching evaluations, then the methodology needs to be unbiased and documented. In all cases the solicitation letter should be included in the dossier. Sample questions to pose can be extracted from the course evaluation form. If students write about the candidate’s teaching in a particular course, then they should be asked to share the grade that they received.

E4. How should the candidate’s ability to supervise students in research and project work be assessed?

The previous suggestions apply but obviously a different set of questions need to be asked. Did you advance your skills as a researcher and/or independent thinker? Did the candidate provide sufficient guidance and encouragement? Was joint work properly portrayed as such?

E5. How should the candidate’s mentoring and advising skills be assessed?

Mentoring is deeply connected to both teaching and research advising. Thus, a broad assessment of those skills is bound to shed light on the candidate’s ability to act as a mentor. With respect to advising, degree programs require faculty to provide academic advice and support to its students. A sampling of letters from current and former advisees is the best way to evaluate the candidate’s talents in this important direction.