



Lists of Possible Reviewers

As someone who had not experienced strong mentoring through my dissertation or early years as a faculty member, I was stumped about how to identify external reviewers of my research or teaching. “External review” means that reviewers work at other institutions, not the candidate’s. When I applied for tenure, external review of both my teaching and my research was required. Here are some things I learned.

Most guiding Documents specify that a candidate for review must provide the review committee with names, along with contact info and brief bios, of people who might be qualified to provide comprehensive review of the candidate’s research. The Document often further specifies that the committee must choose at least one reviewer from the candidate’s list and at least one NOT on the candidate’s list...as well as some other requirements. These reviewers may not be co-authors; they may not have served on your dissertation committee; they may not be collaborators on grants.

So how do you identify external reviewers for your research if you cannot name anyone truly familiar with your work? One approach is to consider who co-authors with your co-authors. Often these people are aware of your work; they may use similar research methods or focus on similar themes. They may cite your papers, and you may have met them at conferences. But they are distant enough to be reviewers.

Reviewers usually need to be tenured themselves, and hold the rank of Associate Professor, if you’re applying for tenure; there may be requirement for their additional achievement if you are applying for full. You want to consider what kinds of institutions these distant colleagues inhabit, and the quality of their publications. In research review, your case is helped when your reviewers are well-known and valued in your field. But they do not have to be the Best-Known World-renowned Expert—most of the people on your college and university review committees wouldn’t know Who That IS because their expertise lies in Other fields.

Please don't choose as candidate reviewers professors who are so insulated at Prestigious Research Universities that they have no conception of the range of higher education institutions that exist, or what it is like to balance a significant teaching load with research and service.

Less frequently, external review of teaching portfolios is required. If this is something you must do, the strategy for identifying external reviewers is a little different. Here you want to focus on people who teach at "peer institutions," universities that play a role in the constellation of higher education institutions analogous to the one yours plays. You'll want to identify people who teach in programs similar to yours, whether that's undergraduate, master's, or doctoral.

You can meet them by going to regional, rather than international, academic conferences, and by being friendly, expressing interest in what they do and what they like about what they do. You can find these colleagues by participating in teaching-focused symposia associated with regional or national conferences, or by seeking out great teaching conferences focused on topics you instruct.

Please understand: It is considered acceptable, and sometimes courteous, to ask someone at a conference if they would be willing to serve as an external reviewer for your dossier, as you are submitting it this next year. It is NOT acceptable for the conversation to go much beyond that yes-no question and its often friendly response. (They know there is no guarantee they will be asked, if they agree to be on your list.) Under No circumstances, may you discuss the content of your dossier or the content of what might be included in the review. The sooner you start thinking about who might serve as an external reviewer of your dossier elements, the easier it is to make sure you create some pleasant casual contact with them in the years and months leading up to your review.

If you're up against the deadline, and you haven't thought about this yet, think back to previous conferences you attended, who you enjoyed meeting and why. And then go look at their faculty profiles online. You'll find your reviewer candidates. Trust that they will serve the academy by providing this service. And know that you, too, will have your time to serve as an external reviewer.