UNIVERSITY GUIDELINES FOR SOLICITING EXTERNAL REFEREES:  
Promotion and Tenure Cases occurring within the Standard Cycle¹

George Mason University’s promotion and tenure processes require that each candidate have evaluations from a set of external referees who are recognized experts in the candidate’s field or fields and can speak to the quality and impact of the candidate’s collective work. While the primary focus of the external evaluation is related to a candidate’s research, scholarship, and creative work, it may also be appropriate that referees comment on a candidate’s external professional service contributions and their teaching/mentoring approaches and achievements.

The Faculty Handbook requires that each Local Academic Unit (LAU) develop specific guidelines with respect to the selection and use of external referees. These University Guidelines were developed as a resource for LAUs in response to requests for clarity. LAUs may choose to expand on the requirements outlined here.

The minimum number of external referees is five, although LAU guidelines may require more than five. Regarding the selection of external referees, local academic units should consider the following:

- Units may allow candidates to suggest up to 40% of the external referees and to name up to two individuals to exclude. In no case should the candidate see the final list of referees.

- External referees should be subject matter experts who are selected on the basis of their ability to comment on the candidate’s professional accomplishments. For faculty who are engaged in Interdisciplinary/Multidisciplinary (I/M) work, the choice of external referees should be made so that the I/M scholar’s achievements are fairly represented and evaluated². Note that strong subject matter experts may not always be tenured faculty members, although their ‘rank equivalent or higher’ must be demonstrated.

- The five required external referees are expected to provide an independent judgment of the candidate and should not have a vested interest in the success or failure of the candidate. Mentors, advisors, collaborators, co-authors, and family members are ineligible.

- Beyond the required five external referees, the LAU might find value in additional external evaluations from collaborators. In these instances, collaborators should be asked to document the extent and nature of the candidate’s individual contributions to the collaborative work, rather than to evaluate the quality and importance of a shared work. The relationship to the candidate and their work must be clearly articulated. No more than two of these letters should be requested.

- LAUs should determine an a priori defined list of individuals who would best serve as external referees and send formal requests to their top choices. If someone declines or ignores the request, then that should be noted and another on the list should be approached. The goal is to make every effort to ensure that the group of external referees, as a whole, can evaluate the totality of the candidate’s professional accomplishments.

Once confirmed, external referees should be provided with sufficient time (e.g., 4-8 weeks) and documentation to offer an informed evaluation.

¹ Office of the Provost, May 2019
² Reference Interdisciplinary/ Multidisciplinary policy once finalized.
• Minimally, external referees should be provided with the candidate’s dossier that includes:
  o A current curriculum vitae;
  o A copy of the candidate’s statement of research/scholarly/creative work;
  o Copies of selected recent publications;
  o (If appropriate) Teaching materials; and
  o The criteria for evaluating promotion and/or tenure (for the college/school and the
    program/department, as applicable).

• If a candidate’s tenure clock was stopped for any reason, please indicate that in the follow up
  communication to confirmed referees. For example, “Please note Professor __ was granted a
  tenure-track contract extension for 1 (2) year(s) and this additional time should not be counted in
  the review of the record.”

When submitting materials for promotion and/or tenure cases, LAUs should provide the list of external
referees, along with their rank, institution, and a brief biography that highlights their qualifications/
credentials as a reviewer.

While LAUs may tailor their letters, they should use a similar format and general content/language to
contact all persons asked to serve as external referees.
EXTERNAL REFEREE SELECTION TRACKING FORM FOR [Candidate’s Name]

As outlined in the University Guidelines for Soliciting External Referees, candidates for promotion and/or tenure are eligible to recommend up to 40% of the external referees to review their qualifications. Candidates are also allowed to request up to two referees who should not be contacted.

The following are possible External Referees for this case that have been identified by the candidate:

1. [potential referee name, title, institution]
2. [potential referee name, title, institution]
3. [potential referee name, title, institution]

The candidate requests that the following individuals NOT be used as External Referees (optional):

1. [name, title, institution, and 1-2 sentence rationale]
2. [name, title, institution, and 1-2 sentence rationale]

Waiver

I, ____________, acknowledge that I will not have access to the names of the External Referees selected to review my case nor access to their recommendation letters.

Signature: ___________________
Date: _______________________

To be provided to the LAU head or Level 1 committee head by <insert date>. 
EXTERNAL REFEREE LIST FOR [Candidate’s Name]

Name of External Referee 1
Rank of External Referee 1
Institution External Referee 1
Brief bio about External Referee 1’s qualifications.

Name of External Referee 2
Rank of External Referee 2
Institution External Referee 2
Brief bio about External Referee 2’s qualifications.

Name of External Referee 3
Rank of External Referee 3
Institution External Referee 3
Brief bio about External Referee 3’s qualifications.

Name of External Referee 4
Rank of External Referee 4
Institution External Referee 4
Brief bio about External Referee 4’s qualifications.

Name of External Referee 5
Rank of External Referee 5
Institution External Referee 5
Brief bio about External Referee 5’s qualifications.

Please use the format above when creating a candidate’s External Referee List. This is the minimum amount of information required by Mason.
Dear ____:

Professor ___ is being considered for promotion and/or tenure at the rank of Associate/Full Professor in the Department of ___ within the School/College of ___ at George Mason University. Tenure is a lifetime institutional commitment to the candidate, and external review is an essential component of the review process. Since you are a leading expert in ___, we would be grateful if you could serve as an external reviewer.

Would you be willing to review Professor ___’s dossier? This includes evaluation of their research/scholarly/creative work, impact on the field(s), professional service contributions, and their teaching/mentoring approaches and achievements (if appropriate to the LAU and/or candidate).

We fully appreciate that there are many demands on your time and thank you for considering this request. If you agree, we will provide you with the dossier and evaluation criteria. We would need to have your letter by <insert date>.

We are interested in your evaluation of the quality and impact of Professor ___’s collective work. We would ask that you not specifically recommend for or against promotion or tenure, or comment on whether or not the candidate might receive promotion or tenure at your institution.

To ensure that our external reviewers have sufficient time to write their letters, please let us know if you are available to do the review by <insert date>. If you are able to assist us, then we will get you the materials for review by <insert date>.

The Mason Promotion and Tenure Guidelines require that at least five of the requested references come from individuals without a vested interest in the success or failure of the candidate and who can provide an objective evaluation of the dossier. If you do have a close connection to Professor _____, please share that in your response to us.

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

NAME

Title
Local Academic Unit/ Affiliations
Email
SAMPLE FOLLOW UP COMMUNICATION TO EXTERNAL REFEREES  
Spring 2019

Dear _____:

Thank you for agreeing to review Professor ___’s dossier as part of their application for promotion and/or tenure at the rank of Associate/Full Professor at George Mason University. As promised, enclosed are the materials needed to review Professor ___’s case.

We ask that you provide a candid evaluation of the quality and impact of Professor ___’s work. Please do not specifically recommend for or against promotion or tenure, or comment on whether or not the candidate might receive promotion or tenure at your institution. It would be helpful to share how you know Professor ___ and their work.

We are especially interested in your judgment of Professor ___’s research/scholarly/creative excellence and impact on the field(s). Mason is dedicated to Interdisciplinary/Multidisciplinary (I/M) research and we ask that you keep this in mind as you review this candidate’s scholarship. We would also appreciate any comments concerning Professor ___’s contributions to their field(s) through professional service and contributions to professional organizations. Finally, you may choose to comment on Professor ___’s experience in university teaching and mentoring, if appropriate. Our College/School criteria and local academic unit criteria (if applicable) for promotion and/or tenure are attached.

We are very grateful for your time and professional opinion as we consider Professor _____’s candidacy. It is important for us to understand their contributions from a perspective beyond our campus and your help with this is invaluable.

Your letter will be available to all faculty and university officials involved in the promotion and/or tenure process, and it is intended to be read by no one else. Excerpts from letters, without attribution, are sometimes included in the evaluations by the different levels of review. Candidates do have access to internal evaluations written as part of their case. We will treat your letter as a confidential document to the full extent allowed by law.

We hope to receive your letter by <insert date>. If you need a week or so longer then we can work to accommodate you. To facilitate speed of response, please email your signed letter to <insert name & email>. Finally, as our Provost asks us to provide brief descriptions of our external referees, we ask that you please attach/send an updated copy of your curriculum vita when you send your review. The Mason Promotion and Tenure Guidelines require that at least five of the external referees come from individuals without a vested interest in the success or failure of the candidate and who can provide an objective evaluation of the dossier. If you do have a close connection to Professor _____, please share that in your response to us.

Thank you again for agreeing to be an external referee for Professor ___. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you should need anything further.

Sincerely,

NAME