

Guidelines for Chair and Dean RPT Letters

Issued December 2025

The following guidelines are intended to assist department chairs and deans in preparing review letters for faculty undergoing mid-probationary, tenure, and promotion review. These letters are a critical component of the evaluation process and should provide a clear, balanced, and evidence-based assessment of the candidate's record in teaching, research or creative work, and service. Chairs and deans should strive to situate the candidate's accomplishments within department, college, and university standards, address both strengths and areas for development, and offer a well-reasoned and clear recommendation.

Key Considerations

Expectations do not change for P&T if a candidate is going up “early” or has had time added due to parental leave, medical leave, COVID extension, etc. Suspending the tenure timeline (clock) must align with the leave policies in the Faculty Handbook (FHB) and collective bargaining agreement with United Academics of UNM.

COVID impacts are still with us: Promotion and tenure considerations include trajectory and progress towards establishing an independent reputation.

Scholarly impact can be demonstrated in several different ways depending on field and discipline. Whereas productivity can relate to impact, productivity and impact are not the same.

The [AY26 Provost's P&T Guidelines are here](#). The Department Chair's role and letter are discussed on p. 6-7. The materials added to the dossier by the Department are listed in the Table beginning on p. 16. The Provost's Guidelines are the implementation of FHB B4.3.1 on [Departmental Review and Recommendations](#).

Per FHB 4.2.2, annual reviews are not required for faculty during the academic year they are up for milestone (mid-probationary, tenure and/or promotion) review.

The recommended letter lengths are guidelines, not requirements, and reflect the length needed to address expected content.

THE CHAIR'S LETTER

Overall, the chair's letter must:

1. explain the department process,
2. accurately summarize department faculty votes and external letters,
3. provide the chair's own clear and comprehensive assessment of the candidate's record in teaching, scholarship/creative work, and service in relation to department (or school/college) tenure and promotion criteria, and

4. conclude with a clear recommendation – positive or negative—for retention, tenure, and/or promotion. Letters without a clear recommendation will be returned by the college/school before the college/school committee's review process is initiated. The college/school may also return letters that are incomplete, unclear, or inaccurate.

Brief letters rarely address these aspects adequately; most effective letters are typically 4-5 pages in length.

It is helpful to include fact-based description of any shortened clock agreements and/or leaves taken by the faculty member. Avoid references to issues unrelated to research, teaching, or service (i.e. the reasons for extended medical leave should not be discussed). Remember that different timelines do not change expectations for tenure and/or promotion.

Briefly explain the department's internal process for retention, tenure, and/or promotion [e.g. does the department convene review (sub)committees? Does the department allow non-tenure track faculty to provide input?].

- Accurately summarize the department vote and evaluations of teaching, research/creative work, and service. The summary should clearly indicate evaluations by non-tenured faculty (e.g., lecturers), in accordance with the department's bylaws and practices. Include quotes from faculty ballots only if they contribute to an understanding of the candidate's accomplishments, impacts, or areas in which improvement is required. Chair summaries should reflect the overall balance and intent of faculty reviewer comments, in full context, capturing both strengths and areas for development accurately.
- For tenure and/or promotion candidates, accurately summarize the substantive evaluations from the external letters. Include quotes from external reviews only if they contribute to an understanding of the candidate's accomplishments, impacts, or areas in which improvement is required. Provide rationale (e.g. prominence in the field) for inviting external reviewers from R2 institutions or other institutions (e.g. research institutes, international institutions, special focus medical schools). Chair summaries should reflect the overall balance and intent of reviewer comments, in full context, capturing both strengths and areas for development accurately.
- Provide the chair's own assessment of teaching, research/creative work, and service records and assign a rating of excellent, effective, or needs improvement. The rating should be justified by the Chair's written assessment. Keep in mind that tenure and promotion requires a rating of excellent in at least teaching or research/creative work *and* effectiveness in all other areas.
 - Justify assessments of research/creative work, teaching, and service and the recommendation relative to the department, school/college, and/or university standards for the faculty candidate's current rank. Refer to department and/or College/School RPT criteria.

- Provide the chair's own detailed review and analysis of the record. The chair must carefully consider department and external reviews (if applicable), but the letter should not merely repeat what others write.
- Strive for balance: explain the positive and the less-than positive aspects of the candidate's dossier. Address and help readers understand challenges in the record. Ignoring challenges does not serve the candidate or subsequent reviewers.
- For Research/Creative Work:
 - Discuss accomplishments within department and disciplinary standards.
 - Clarify department expectations and disciplinary norms around individual and joint authorship, order of authorship, and so on.
 - Help non-specialists understand the quality and impact of the work within the discipline or field and why it is important to the department.
 - For candidates with records of community-engaged scholarship, help non-specialists understand the impact of this work.
 - Help non-specialists understand the quality of the journals/publishers/juried exhibitions through which the work has been presented.
- For Teaching:
 - Provide a holistic evaluation of the candidate's accomplishments, activities, and commitment to improvement/development.
 - Include department expectations for teaching loads for the faculty member's current rank.
 - Mentoring typically counts as teaching rather than service, though department workload policies and school/college standards may vary.
 - It may be helpful to consider the seven [domains involved in the "Framework for Teaching & Learning Success"](#) established by the Teaching Enhancement Committee and adopted by the Faculty Senate in Spring 2025.
 - Consider any professional development that the faculty member has taken to improve their teaching and student learning outcomes in their courses, especially as they relate to the seven domains (although faculty are not expected to show evidence of professional development in all 7 areas.)

For Service:

- Include department expectations for the faculty candidate's current rank.
- FHB B1.2.4 also permits discussion of "personal characteristics" as "traits that influence an individual's effectiveness as a teacher, scholar, researcher, or creative artist, and a leader in a professional area." This discussion can be brief unless there is strong concern that such traits undermine contributions to teaching, research/creative work, or service. Assessment of personal characteristics "requires flexibility" (FHB B1.2.4) and should be based on facts, not biases.
- Conclude with a clear recommendation for or against retention, tenure and/or promotion
- Sign the letter

Notification to Faculty Candidate

[FHB 4.3.1](#) states “The chair shall discuss the review and recommendation with the faculty member.” It is recommended that chairs *not* share the faculty vote but rather indicate whether it was positive or negative.

Upon completion of the review process in June, chairs should provide more detailed feedback to faculty. For mid-probation retention candidates especially, chairs should issue a written evaluation, which could be a redacted version of the Chair’s letter, that provides constructive feedback on progress towards tenure, areas on which they may need to focus, and suggestions for resources that can support their success. Chairs are encouraged to provide redacted and anonymized summary feedback from department and external reviews to faculty at other ranks as well.

Chairs should promptly review FHB 4.3.1c if there is a negative department recommendation.

Additional considerations by Rank

Reappointment/mid-probationary review/retention

- Evaluates whether faculty are on track to meet department and College/School expectations

Tenure and Promotion (to Associate Professor)

- The assessment can include both accomplishments and trajectory.
- Candidates should be on track to develop a national reputation. Department, school and college expectations related to the level of reputation established at this stage may vary.
- Chairs can discuss challenges related to changes in funding opportunities, delays in space renovations, and other extenuating circumstances outside of the faculty member’s control.

Promotion to Professor

- Candidates should have had an impact in their field or discipline and developed a national or international reputation.

THE DEAN'S LETTER

The dean need not repeat information that is clear in the chair's letter. If the chair's letter is comprehensive, a 2-page letter from the dean may be sufficient. If the chair's letter is missing information and/or the decision is negative, a longer letter will be necessary.

- The letter should not include a quantitative summary of accomplishments.
- If the chair's letter is incomplete, the dean may address any omitted information.
- If chair's letter doesn't fully situate the faculty member's work in the discipline, the dean should address this in their letter, based on prior levels of review and external letters.
- If the dean disagrees with the chair's analysis, the dean should clearly explain how and why their assessment varies from the chair's.

Dean's letter is their own analysis of the dossier.

- The letter must consider reviewers' input, citing notable observations from external and departmental reviews as appropriate.
- If an associate professor has had a leadership role (department chair, special assistant to the Dean, etc.), then the Dean can include this as a contribution to UNM in their recommendation.
- The letter should point out, discuss, and analyze any weaknesses in the case.
- If the previous (department) level of review resulted in a negative recommendation, the dean's analysis must consider the candidate's response to the negative review.
- The Dean must summarize the recommendation of the school/college-level advisory committee:
 - Explain the college advisory committee votes, particularly if negative or mixed.
 - If the Dean's recommendation conflicts with the school/college advisory committee, the Dean should clearly explain how and why their evaluation varies.

Dean's letter must include a clear recommendation – positive or negative.

- Justify recommendation relative to the department, school/college, university standards.
- Sign the letter.

FHB B4.3.2 - Dean 'shall normally abide by the chair's recommendation.' If it conflicts with chair, copy (redacted) is provided to faculty member and chair. The chair has 10 working days to appeal to the Interim Associate Vice Provost for Academic Personnel.

FHB B4.3.6 – If at any level of review, the recommendation is negative, the faculty member shall be given a copy of the negative recommendation and may request a copy of all reports, recommendations and internal peer reviews and external letters (all redacted as necessary to preserve confidentiality). The faculty member has 10 working days after receiving such materials, if requested, to present their views to the next level of review before the next recommendation, or the final decision is made.

References to the appropriate Faculty Handbook policy should be included in the letter if a negative recommendation is made.