

Departmental Recommendation Letter ("Department Chair's Letter") For Academic Actions

Endorsed by: Vice Provost, Academic Affairs; Academic Senate Committee on Academic Personnel (CAP) and Vice and Associate Deans of Academic Affairs

The hallmark of the academic appointment and advancement process is peer-reviewed assessment. As noted in Academic Personnel Manual (APM) 210-1a, "The quality of the faculty of the University of California is maintained primarily through objective and thorough appraisal, by competent faculty members, of each candidate for appointment or promotion."

The Departmental Recommendation Letter ("Department Chair's Letter") is a critical component in the academic appraisal process because it represents peer assessment and highlights the candidate's academic accomplishments. Based on an informal analysis of data provided by the Service Centers, almost 60% of the Department Chair's letters were drafted by staff members rather than faculty members.

This document seeks to provide guidance and clarification regarding the Department Chair's Letter.

ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT CHAIR:

The Academic Personnel Manual (APM) highlights the important role of the Department Chair in providing academic assessment of faculty in his/her Department (*see policy citations at end of document*). Per APM 220-80e,

"The chair initiates a personnel action for an appointment, promotion, merit increase, appraisal, reappointment, non-reappointment, or terminal appointment by addressing a letter setting forth the departmental recommendation to the Chancellor (or to the Dean, Provost, or Vice Chancellor, according to the applicable campus procedure). This departmental letter shall discuss the proposed personnel action in the light of the criteria set forth in APM - 220-10, and shall be accompanied by supporting evidence."

UCSF ACADEMIC REVIEW PROCESS:

In the past two years, there have been significant changes to the academic review process at UCSF. Currently, all academic actions are initiated, reviewed, and approved electronically in the Advance system and academic packets are now assembled by HR Service Center staff. These administrative changes have highlighted the existence of varying and sometimes non-compliant practices among Departments and Schools with respect to the Department Chair's Letter.

ADVANCE:

The Department Chair's letter has been reformatted to streamline and facilitate the documentation of the candidate's academic accomplishments. This new version was available to Departments in a paper format prior to the implementation of Advance and is

now the standard format used in Advance for electronic files. Evaluative comments must be written in each section as appropriate to the criteria required for the academic series of the candidate under review. The evaluative comments should be an assessment of the candidate's academic accomplishments. Additionally, these comments should provide further explanation, if needed, for any of the advancement criteria that are not readily apparent in the supporting documentation.

HR SERVICE CENTERS:

Some Departments have asked (or expected) that personnel in the HR Service Centers (HR Generalists) draft the Department Chair's Letters. The assignment of the Department Chair's letter to a staff member erodes the quality of the Department Chair's letter because HR Generalists are not qualified to provide evaluative comments about a candidate's academic achievements.

While it could be appropriate for HR Generalists to retrieve recent activities from the candidate's CV and include this information in the relevant sections of the Chair's letter, the value of these sections ultimately lies in the formal assessment of achievement by qualified departmental academics, not merely a repetition of CV information by HR Generalists. The "[filter CV](#)" function in Advance already allows one to easily review recent activities from the CV. In addition, HR Generalists should not be expected to draft evaluative statements regarding these accomplishments as that level of assessment can only be provided by academics familiar with the candidate and their field of expertise.

While departmental practices may have deviated from policy during the pre-Advance period, the APM requires that an academic provide the evaluative assessment of accomplishments.

Many academic action packets with a July 1, 2014 effective date have already been initiated by the Service Centers, so the 2013-14 review cycle will be considered a transition year in which the Service Center will continue to assist Departments in transitioning the preparation of Department Chairs' letters to the appropriate faculty in the Departments. For actions effective July 1, 2015 or later, neither HR Generalists nor Departmental staff should draft or provide evaluative comments in the Department Chair's letters. Our goal is efficient and informed reviews of academics, which is the responsibility of the Department Chair with assistance from other faculty members as appropriate.

ACADEMIC POLICY CITATIONS:

[APM 245 Appendix A \(Duties of Department Chairs\):](#)

"The appointee [Department Chair] is responsible for the recruitment, selection, and evaluation of both the faculty and the staff personnel of the department. In consultation with colleagues, the chair recommends appointments, promotions, merit advances, and

terminations. The appointee is responsible for maintaining a departmental affirmative action program for faculty and staff personnel, consistent with University affirmative action goals. The appointee is expected to make sure that faculty members are aware of the criteria prescribed for appointment and advancement, and to make appraisals and recommendations in accordance with the procedures and principles stated in the President's Instructions to Appointment and Promotion Committees...

...In performing these duties, the chair is expected to seek the advice of faculty colleagues in a systematic way, and to provide for the conduct of department affairs in an orderly fashion through department meetings and the appointment of appropriate committees. The chair also is expected to seek student advice on matters of concern to students enrolled in the department's programs. In large departments, the chair may be assisted in the tasks involved in carrying out the responsibilities of the chair by a vice chair or other colleagues, and, when desired, by an executive committee chosen in an appropriate manner; however, the responsibilities themselves may not be delegated."

APM 220-80 e. (Appointment and Promotion: Recommendations and Review):

The departmental recommendation is made in accordance with the procedural regulations of the Academic Senate and established governance practices of the department. The chair initiates a personnel action for an appointment, promotion, merit increase, appraisal, reappointment, non-reappointment, or terminal appointment by addressing a letter setting forth the departmental recommendation to the Chancellor (or to the Dean, Provost, or Vice Chancellor, according to the applicable campus procedure). This departmental letter shall discuss the proposed personnel action in the light of the criteria set forth in APM - 220-10, and shall be accompanied by supporting evidence. The chair shall report the nature and extent of consultation on the matter within the department (including any vote taken) and present any significant evidence and differences of opinion which would support a contrary recommendation. The chair should ensure that individuals who have provided confidential letters of evaluation are not identified in the departmental letter except by code. The department shall adopt procedures under which the letter setting forth the departmental recommendation shall be available, before being forwarded, for inspection by all those members of the department eligible to vote on the matter or by a designated committee or other group of such members. Pursuant to campus procedures, the chair may also, in a separate letter, make an independent evaluation and recommendation, which may differ from the departmental recommendation.