

Association News

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Ethics Committee Issues New Advisory Opinions

Two new advisory opinions, on seeking employment after accepting an offer and external review on tenure and promotion decisions, have been prepared by the Committee on Professional Ethics, Rights and Freedoms of APSA. The Committee reviews grievances of political scientists who allege a violation of professional rights or wish an ethical matter reviewed.

For the text of previous opinions, see *PS*, Winter 1984, pp. 158-65, or *A Guide to Professional Ethics in Political Science*, published by APSA, 1985.

**Advisory Opinion No. 20
(May 9, 1986)**

**Seeking or Accepting Employment
After Accepting an Offer**

Once an individual accepts an offer of employment from an institution, it is incumbent upon the hiree not to seek or accept further employment for the same period of time unless the hiree secures a prior release from the hiring institution.

**Advisory Opinion No. 21
(May 9, 1986)**

**External Review on Tenure
and Promotion Decisions**

Principles

In formulating a policy on outside letters of reference, the Committee on Professional Ethics, Rights and Freedoms has tried to consider fairly the interests of all parties to the transaction: (1) the requesting institution which sees a need for impartial reviews of a candidate's work; (2) the candidate whose job or future professional status are at risk; (3) the reviewer whose time and professional qualifications are being utilized by the requesting institution. Therefore, guidelines for external reviews are defined by a triad of rights and obligations: those of the department conducting the review; those of the candidate under review; and those of the external reviewers. All three share values in common—for instance, a commitment to fairness and dispatch. But obligations and rights are not the same for all parties; each may give these values a differing weight, even a conflicting interpretation. Hence the need for guidelines.

1. Where external reviews are used in tenure and promotion decisions and if they are used in reappointment decisions, it is the right of faculty members to receive, and the obligation of academic departments to provide, external reviews that are expert, disinterested and timely.

2. Guidelines, necessarily, must concern general principles. Guidelines for external review are not intended to be, and should not be read as a uniform code, to be applied to all universities and colleges alike. Academic departments differ, for example, in educational mission, institutional resources, access to external reviewers and size. The proper procedure for one department or institution may not be the same for others.

3. As a matter of principle, a given department should use the same procedures and, in so far as possible, similar criteria for all candidates.

4. Solicitations of outside letters of recommendations for promotion and tenure should always be phrased as an invitation which the recipient is free to reject. No presumption should be expressed that there is an obligation to perform this service, but rather that it is a professional courtesy of assistance to the department making the request.

5. A department that solicits an external review on a confidential basis has an obligation to protect that confidentiality.

6. The candidate being reviewed has a professional right to know the motivating principles, customary standards, and principal procedures of the assessment process of his or her department.

Recommendations

1. The department conducting an assessment has the obligation of providing, in writing, to the candidate being assessed a statement which: (i) sets out the principal parts of the assessment process; (ii) explains the basis of selection of external reviewers; (iii) provides the instructions under which external reviewers will operate; and provides an account of the process which the department and university will follow in coming to a decision on tenure or promotion.

2. The department conducting an assessment is under a specific obligation; (i) to inform the candidate, in writing, if procedures to be used depart in any way from the department's customary procedures; and (ii) to detail how and explain why procedures may differ in his or her case.

3. The department conducting an assessment has a specific obligation to inform the candidate of the materials (e.g., manuscripts, proposals, publication) which are being sent out for review. The materials to be reviewed need not include all of the candidate's work, but should not exclude material the candidate judges indispensable to his or her assessment.

4. The department conducting an external review, given its overall responsibility to assure an informed and timely evaluation, is ordinarily obliged: (i) to provide external reviewers a copy of the candidate's curriculum vita and of the principal materials on which the assessment is to be based; (ii) to ensure external reviewers sufficient time for a competent conscientious assessment, as a rule not less than one month; (iii) to state if the assessment is a confidential one, and if not, the terms of departure from confidentiality;

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and (iv) to explain to external reviewers the relative importance of external reviews in the overall review process.

5. The department conducting a review may differ in the number of external reviewers deemed appropriate. As general principle, the minimum number of reviewers should not be less than three; the maximum number, in the absence of special circumstances, not more than six.

6. When possible, a telephone call should precede a written request so that letters of request are not sent to larger numbers of outside evaluators than is necessary.

7. Prior to selection of reviewers, the candidate being reviewed has a right to call to his or her department's attention possible reviewers he or she feels should be excluded on the grounds of personal bias. The departments or universities have an obligation to provide reviewers that are objective and not harboring personal or professional biases against the candidate.

8. External reviewers perform a valuable professional service in assisting other departments and universities in reviewing candidates for tenure and promotion. It is not inappropriate for departments to offer an

honorarium to external reviewers, in the case of candidates for promotion and tenure who are not members of a reviewer's university. Institutions should inform the reviewer whether or not they will pay a fee and what that fee is when the initial contact is made with the reviewer. □

Update on Project '87

Sheilah Mann

American Political Science Association

Project '87, the joint effort of the American Historical Association and the American Political Science Association for the Bicentennial of the Constitution, is moving ahead at full throttle preparing for bicentennial events in 1987, 1988, and 1989.

Sheilah Mann is Director of Project '87.