approximately $270,000 (the equivalent of several faculty lines) to the external-review process, particularly because it has not identified it to be broken.

If done correctly, external reviews and other academic evaluations are time consuming and require a degree of dedication. However, we do it because it is a reciprocal process. We desire substantive reviews of our own work, so we provide substantive reviews of the work of other scholars in the profession. Considering that our very life's work requires the assessment of others, it does not make sense to monetize it beyond the nominal stipend. If we go down this road, we may unwittingly subordinate the camaraderie associated with service to the profession. ■

RESPONSE TO SPOTLIGHT ON PROMOTION LETTERS: THE DEVIL IS IN THE (FINANCIAL) DETAILS

Jane Junn, *University of Southern California*

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Kurt Weyland articulates a sensible proposal for providing monetary incentives to improve response rates to requests for dossier review for promotion to tenure and rank in political science at research universities. The absence of systematic data makes it difficult to know whether and with precision to what extent the rate of decline responses has changed over time. However, through experience, I share Weyland's perspective that it has become increasingly difficult to find willing, thorough, and frank dossier reviewers. At issue, then, are two challenges to the proposal based in feasibility and unintended consequences. Despite these challenges to Weyland's argument, I endorse his proposal as a potential worthy solution—with the proviso to consider a pair of friendly amendments.

From the perspective of faculty and department leadership at highly ranked research universities, the proposal to induce compliance with a monetary incentive is reasonable. External evaluation of scholarly research is among the most valued information in a promotion case for these types of institutions. As a result, the provision of resources to collect evaluations by independent experts is likely to be prioritized. At the same time, political science departments at up-and-coming research universities outside of the top 15 or 20 may find the Weyland proposal less feasible given more modest resources, as well as a stronger demand for resource allocation for research support of faculty and graduate students. Similarly, political science departments in institutions that are more evenly balanced with respect to teaching and research productivity for evaluation in promotion may be under more pressure to prioritize department funds for student learning and teaching enhancement. Finally, well-endowed public and private institutions will have a systematically stronger advantage in providing monetary incentives compared to those with budget pressures.

The realities of the variation in feasibility as a function of type of institution create the conditions for the obvious unintended consequence of further advantaging already advantaged departments at wealthy research universities. Whereas we might reply that paying for the best reviews of the best scholars is a predictable redundancy in a free market, a persuasive counterpoint privileges equity and fairness in the scholarly marketplace of ideas. A second possible unintended consequence is that although paying evaluators may provide an incentive to do the review, it does so without ensuring higher quality of the evaluation. Reviewers in high demand may accept 10 requests with compensation and write the same letters they would have written regardless of payment. Whereas Weyland's proposal might be most effective in altering the distribution of letters in the mix—including more detailed and frank evaluations from reviewers previously absent—payment alone simply incentivizes already permissive reviewers to agree to do more evaluations.

Questions about feasibility, fairness, and unintended consequences can be mitigated with two modifications to Weyland's proposal: one simple and one difficult. The simple amendment reinforces the principal–agent relationship with the provision of a monetary incentive by clarifying the task at hand for the reviewer and encouraging compliance. In my experience, requests for evaluation are widely varied; some come with explicit definitions of criteria for promotion and tenure, specific questions to answer about the work of the scholar in question, and a list of comparators. Others are widely defined and ask in broad terms about the quality of the research and other traits of the candidate. Colleagues I interact with sometimes chafe at the former; they feel constrained by the articulation of the request and therefore often disregard detailed instructions. Ignoring specific questions would be more difficult to both undertake and countenance if the letter-writer is being paid; indeed, absent responses hewing to the queries can be requested to receive payment. Thus, enumerating specific instructions, comparators, and evaluation criteria combined with payment for completing the assigned task will enhance the useable information provided by external evaluations. Although it is without question more effort for departments to articulate their evaluation criteria and identify comparators for reviewers, the payoff to the task of assessing the candidate once letters are returned outweighs the initial effort.

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The more difficult-to-achieve amendment is to create a discipline-wide pool of resources for the provision of evaluation of candidates. Individual institutions might contribute annually to an APSA fund for dossier review and then draw on that fund when evaluations are needed. Well-endowed institutions also can be encouraged to contribute to the fund while providing resources of their own to evaluations required for their individual review requirements.

Weyland articulates a reasonable and well-intentioned proposal to improve how political scientists evaluate our scholarly research.

It is a policy change most useful to the proper evaluation of candidates for promotion and tenure. Equally as important, however, is the example we set to create processes to encourage the deliberate, detailed, fair, and wise evaluation of our disciplinary colleagues for younger faculty to emulate. ■

RESPONSE TO SPOTLIGHT ON PROMOTION LETTERS: FIRST, TRUST OUR OWN JUDGEMENT

Robert C. Lieberman, *Johns Hopkins University*

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Kurt Weyland raises an important set of issues in his provocative and well-reasoned article. Granting (or denying) tenure is one of the most important decisions that colleges and universities make. Tenure entails both a major commitment of resources over a long time and, perhaps more important, a commitment to individual teachers and scholars on the expectation that they will continue, over the remainder of their careers, to be productive and innovative scholars, effective teachers, and committed institutional citizens. In short, it is a high-stakes bet, and we are right to be concerned, along with Weyland, about whether the procedures we follow at our own institutions and across the profession consistently provide information that we need to make reasoned critical judgments. Before directly addressing Weyland's proposal for improving what he suggests is a broken process, it is worth pausing to set the challenges of the tenure system in a broader institutional context.

Naturally, an institution wants to reduce risk and uncertainty in making a tenure commitment. Thus, evaluations must be not only fair but also rigorous. Tenure review remains a bedrock process of faculty governance and it relies on a familiar system of peer review. However, it is framed by a strong institutional interest in avoiding Type I errors (false positives). It is better, from a university's point of view, to deny tenure to those who go on to be "stars" in the field than to give lifetime contracts to those who turn out to be less-productive colleagues in the mature phase of their careers. (Note: I write from the perspective of highly competitive research universities; however, I think my general points apply with some adaptation to other types of institutions.)

What should the standard be for granting tenure? In my view, the standard is simple to articulate: successful candidates for tenure should be, above all, emerging leaders in their field of scholarship. However, this straightforward standard proves to be fiendishly difficult to implement. The standards of accomplishment for intellectual leadership tend to be difficult to articulate, especially in a heterogeneous field such as political science. Should we place more weight on books or articles? How do we evaluate an individual's contribution to team projects, especially as coauthorship becomes a more widely practiced norm in parts of the field? How much weight should we put on quantity of scholarly output as opposed to assessment of quality? How do we measure intellectual influence and impact? There are no "cookie-cutter" answers to these questions that easily separate strong from weak cases; for this reason, I think it is not generally wise for institutions to write into policy precise quantitative standards for tenure. Finally, it is difficult to dispassionately evaluate colleagues who, in many cases, have become friends; they are our office neighbors, lunch partners, workout buddies, and fellow preschool parents. Those human relationships are difficult to set aside in the interests of cold professional judgments.

These considerations suggest several reasons why, as Weyland rightly notes, external-review letters play such an important role in tenure evaluations. Of course, the foundation of any tenure case must be the department's careful assessment of the candidate's record: scholarship (both quality and impact) as well as teaching and service. However, along with the department's own evaluation, external-review letters have several important roles. First, as the standard I previously articulated suggests, tenure is as much an external as an internal process. Recognition by colleagues in the profession as an emerging important voice in a set of important scholarly debates is an essential ingredient of a strong tenure case, and this is a view of the case that external-review letters uniquely provide. They are without question the best way to assess the impact and influence (or lack thereof) of individual candidates' work and their prominence in the scholarly landscape. (Quantitative measures of influence, such as citation counts and h-indices, are useful but limited indicators; they are no substitute for the careful and nuanced evaluation of expert members of the discipline.) Moreover, external-review letters can serve as a check on the human tendency of departmental colleagues to be partial toward those we know well. As long as we exclude interested referees (i.e., those with personal or professional stakes in the outcome of the case, such as research collaborators and former teachers), we should be able to rely on external evaluations to eliminate familiarity bias from departmental decision making.

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These observations about the place of external-review letters in a well-functioning tenure-review process bring us to Weyland's central claim about the problem with current external-evaluation practices: most letters appear to be positive and do not generally seem to offer a truly candid or critical assessment of a candidate's role. He is correct about this. It is rare to see an explicitly negative letter in a tenure file; most letters come in shades of positive. (I can report, at least anecdotally, from my experience as a university administrator that this phenomenon is widespread across disciplines; political science is not distinctive in this regard.) However, we should not be so quick to infer from this pattern of positivity that letters do not carry useful information about candidates. When read carefully, they reveal a great deal.

There is no question that reading tenure letters is often something of a hermeneutical exercise. It might also be the case that the interpretive work required to reveal their secrets would be eased

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