

T&P Toolkit – Guidelines

Sample letters to referees for tenure and promotion applications

These letters are intended as examples of the information which should be communicated to referees for tenure and promotion applications in the areas of professional contribution and standing, teaching and service. They are intended to be used in connection with applications for **tenure and promotion**, since they express themselves in terms of criteria which are specific to tenure and/or promotion to Associate Professor. When writing to referees about applications for promotion to Full Professor, or about Alternate Stream applications (Associate Lecturer or Senior Lecturer), please refer to the specific criteria which govern those applications (in the *Tenure and Promotions Policy, Criteria and Procedures* and the *Alternate Stream Document*, respectively).

LETTER 1

Sample Letter to Referees re: Professional Contribution and Standing – initial contact

MM/DD/YYYY

Dear _____,

Professor XX, currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Social Science, Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies at York University, is a candidate for tenure and promotion to the rank of Associate Professor. The Department File Preparation Committee is assembling a file which must contain letters of reference from recognized scholars in the candidate's field who are in a position to evaluate the quality and the significance of her/his scholarly work. We hope that you will agree to undertake this task.

I enclose a copy of Professor X's curriculum vitae. If you are willing to act as a referee, we will provide you with electronic copies of Professor X's recent publications (*where applicable, letter may refer to other appropriate forms of academic production in your department – creative works, performances, textbooks, etc., candidate's statement and reviews of candidate's work*) (chosen in consultation with the candidate), appropriate excerpts from York University's tenure and promotion criteria, our department's own standards for achieving tenure and promotion, and a letter giving some basic guidelines for referees' assessments. As York's procedures require that referees be at arm's length from the candidate, please indicate your relationship, if any, to the candidate. Referees are considered to be at arm's length if they have had no prior professional involvement (e.g. as thesis supervisor, co-author, close colleague, co-applicant on a grant, etc.) or significant personal relationship with the candidate.

Please note that the University Tenure and Promotion Procedures require letters of reference to be written in such a form that the writer's name, address and all contextual information is contained in a header in order to permit us to remove this information and to make available the remaining text of the letter to the candidate. The text of the letter should contain no personal identifiers. The candidate will also be provided with a list of the names of referees.

Participants in the tenure and promotion process who are outside of the [unit name] frequently find it helpful to have some background information on the referees who prepared

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an evaluation. For this reason, we would appreciate receiving a brief autobiographical sketch or a condensed curriculum vitae if you agree to provide an evaluation for us. The autobiographical information can be forwarded when you reply to this inquiry.

To ensure the timely progress of Professor X's file to upper-level committees, we would need to receive referees' assessments by _____ (*2 months from the date of this letter*). We will contact you shortly to ask whether you are willing to provide an evaluation of Professor X's work. Thank you for considering this request.

Yours sincerely,

Chair,
Department Tenure and Promotion File Preparation Committee

Encl. Professor XX's curriculum vitae

LETTER 2

Sample Letter to Referees re: Professional Contribution and Standing - follow-up letter to those agreeing to provide assessment

MM/DD/YYYY

Dear _____,

Thank you very much for agreeing to provide our Department Tenure and Promotion File Preparation Committee with a confidential letter of reference assessing the scholarly work of Professor XX, who is a candidate for tenure and promotion to the rank of Associate Professor. I enclose again an electronic copy of Professor X's curriculum vitae, (*where applicable: and a statement by the candidate*), and the following electronic copies of recent publications and other evidence of *his/her* professional contribution and standing (*where applicable, letter may refer to other appropriate forms of academic production in your discipline – creative works, performances, textbooks, etc., and reviews of candidate's work*): **List here exactly what is being sent to the referee.**

If there are any other items which you would like to examine but which are not readily available to you, please let me know and I will forward electronic copies. You need only consider those publications (*where applicable: works*) which you feel you have the expertise to judge but please also feel free to comment more generally on the candidate's contributions to the field.

You will also find enclosed an excerpt from York University's Tenure and Promotion Criteria, and our Department's own standards for achieving Tenure and Promotion. While candidates for promotion are assessed on the basis of their professional contribution and standing, teaching and service to the University, we ask that you restrict your comments to the candidate's scholarly work.

In your assessment we would ask you:

- to provide detailed descriptions and appraisals of the candidate's scholarship (*where applicable: creative production, performance*), commenting on the quality and importance of individual pieces of work;
- where possible, to situate these assessments within commentary on the candidate's professional standing and contribution to the field or discipline, taking into account his/her entire record;
- to evaluate the candidate's qualifications in relation to the York criteria, and to assess whether the candidate's record meets the usual expectations (as you understand them) in the discipline;
- include a statement attesting that you are at 'arms length' from the candidate. Referees are considered to be 'arms length' if they have had no prior professional involvement (e.g. as thesis supervisor, co-author, close colleague, co-applicant on a grant, etc.) or significant personal relationship with the candidate;

- to assess Professor X's scholarship in terms of the demonstration of *excellence, high competence, competence, or competence not demonstrated* – the terminology of the University's Tenure and Promotion criteria.

Please note that the University Tenure and Promotion Procedures require letters of reference to be written in such a form that the writer's name, address and all contextual information is contained in a header in order to permit us to remove this information and to make available the remaining text of the letter to the candidate. As indicated in previous correspondence, the candidate will be provided with a list of the names of referees consulted and may read the text of all letters of assessment.

To ensure the timely progress of this file, we ask that your letter be sent to us no later than _____ (2 months from the date of this letter).

Letters should be addressed to:

Prof. XX
Chair, Prof. XX's File Preparation Committee

and mailed to:

Allyne Sareno, Administrative Secretary
Department of Social Science
York University
4700 Keele Street
S737 Ross Building
Toronto ON
M3J 1P3
Canada (see enclosed label for your convenience)

We are most grateful to you for your assistance in this collegial undertaking.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. XX
Chair, Prof. XX's Tenure and Promotion File Preparation Committee

XX:pb

- Encl. 1. Prof. XX's curriculum vitae
 2. Prof. XX's personal statement
 3. Excerpts from the Department of Social Science Tenure and Promotion Guidelines
 4. Prof. XX's publications.
 5. Review of Prof. XX's Publications

LETTER 3 - NEW**Letter of solicitation for co-author/collaborator comment**

Be specific as to whether it is co-author on publication or collaborator on research project

MM/DD/YYYY

Dear _____,

Professor XX is being considered for tenure and promotion to Associate Professor. York University's procedures require that comment be sought from co-authors/collaborators as to the nature of Professor XX's contributions to joint work (articles, monographs, edited works, research grants, etc.). Professor XX's C.V. indicates that you co-authored/collaborated on the following:

List here the specific work on which you wish the co-author/collaborator to comment.

We would appreciate if you would provide us with a statement that explains the nature and extent of his/her contributions to your joint publications/work, e.g., division of labour on data collection, writing, editing. We are aware that this is a potentially difficult task and that in many cases it will be difficult to provide exact answers. However, we ask that you be as specific as possible and that you restrict your comments to the candidate's contributions to the joint work, as opposed to evaluating the work itself.

To ensure the timely progress of this file, we ask that your letter be sent to us by no later than _____ (2 months from the date of this letter). We are most grateful to you for your assistance in this collegial undertaking.

Yours sincerely,

Chair
Department Tenure and Promotion File Preparation Committee

LETTER 4**Sample Letter To Colleagues re: Teaching – initial contact**

MM/DD/YYYY

Dear _____,

Professor XX, currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Social Science, Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies, is a candidate for tenure and promotion to the rank of Associate Professor. The Department File Preparation Committee is assembling a file which must contain letters of reference from those who can assess the candidate's teaching and who can evaluate his/her performance in various teaching situations. You have been suggested to this committee as someone who is particularly able to assess Professor X's teaching, and we hope that you will agree to undertake this task.

If you are willing to act as a referee, we will provide you with an electronic copy of Professor X's curriculum vitae (*optional: a teaching dossier prepared by the candidate*), course outlines, assignments and handouts and any other relevant curricular materials. We will also be asking you to visit a class (or classes, as appropriate) taught by Professor X to evaluate his/her performance in a teaching situation.

Please note that the University Tenure and Promotion Procedures require letters of reference to be written in such a form that the writer's name, address and all contextual information is contained in a header in order to permit us to remove this information and to make available the remaining text of the letter to the candidate. Candidates will be provided with a list of referees.

To ensure the timely progress of Professor X's file to upper-level committees, we would need to receive referees' assessments by _____ (*2 months from the date of this letter*). Thank you for considering this request.

Yours sincerely,

Chair,
Department File Preparation Committee

LETTER 5**Sample Letter to Colleagues re: Teaching – follow up letter to those agreeing to provide assessment**

MM/DD/YYYY

Dear _____,

Thank you very much for agreeing to provide our Department Tenure and Promotion File Preparation Committee with a confidential letter of reference assessing the teaching of Professor XX, who is a candidate for tenure and promotion to the rank of Associate Professor. I enclose again an electronic copy of Professor X's curriculum vitae (*optional: a teaching dossier prepared by the candidate*), course outlines, assignments and handouts and relevant course materials.

In your assessment we will ask you to comment on the candidate's teaching accomplishments. It would also be helpful if you could assess those accomplishments in terms of the demonstration of *excellence, high competence, competence, or competence not demonstrated* – the terminology of the University's Tenure and Promotion Criteria. I enclose an excerpt from the University's *Tenure and Promotions Policy, Criteria and Procedures* and our own Department's Tenure and Promotion Standards.

We are also asking you to visit the following class (*or classes*) taught by Professor X: (*day, time, location, title*) on (*date*). Professor X has been informed that you will be observing his (*or her*) class that day. In addition to your description and assessment of the class you observe, we ask that you comment on the course syllabus, course materials, assignments, etc.

In order to ensure the confidentiality of your reference, we would ask that you write in such a way that your name, address and any contextual information be conveyed in a header section or brief cover letter separate from your assessment. As indicated in previous correspondence, the candidate will be provided with a list of the names of referees consulted and may read all letters of assessment (stripped of personal identifiers).

To ensure the timely progress of this file, we ask that your letter be sent to us no later than _____ (*2 months from the date of this letter*). We are most grateful to you for your assistance in this collegial undertaking.

Yours sincerely,

Chair,
Department File Preparation Committee

LETTER 6

Sample Letter to Students re: Teaching

MM/DD/YYYY

Dear _____,

We are writing you to see if you would help us by providing your views about the teaching of Professor XX, in the Department of Social Science, Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies.

As you may be aware, Professors at York University who are in the “tenure stream” apply for tenure and promotion from Assistant to Associate Professor within the first few years of their appointment. “Tenure” means permanent, continuing employment (following an initial probationary period of employment). To prepare for this review, a committee in the candidate’s Department assembles a file that includes confidential letters of assessment of the candidate’s work.

In order to gather a complete picture of a candidate’s teaching, we do several things: we ask colleagues to sit in on classes and write evaluations of the candidate’s teaching; we review students’ quantitative course evaluations; we ask teaching assistants to write assessments; and we invite students (randomly selected) to write letters evaluating the candidate’s teaching. **That is how we came to write to you.** All of the letters are written in confidence, as explained below. These assessments, taken together, enable the “Adjudicating Committee” in the Department to evaluate the candidate’s teaching.

We hope that you will take the time to write a letter assessing Professor X’s teaching from your own point of view. In your letter, please indicate the course or courses you took with him (*or her*). Your letter should comment specifically on such issues as Professor X’s teaching strategies, the organization of the course, effectiveness in communicating, availability and responsiveness to the needs of students. Please feel free to add or comment on any other teaching-related issues which you consider pertinent.

All the letters we gather for Professor X’s tenure and promotion file must be signed, but they will be treated as confidential. Since candidates are entitled to read copies of the letters with names and addresses and any other identifying information removed, we ask that your name, address and any contextual information be conveyed in a header section or in a brief cover letter separate from your assessment. Candidates will be provided with a list of names of referees.

Please send us your letter by no later than _____ (*2 months from the date of this letter*) to allow us to meet our deadlines.

On behalf of the file preparation committee, I would like to thank you for taking the time to write to us. Your comments, along with those of other students, will form an important element of our assessment of Professor X’s teaching.

Yours sincerely,

Chair,

Department File Preparation Committee

DR/pb

Please address your letter marked confidential to:

Prof. Darryl Reed
c/o Allyne Sareno
Office of the Chair, Department of Social Science
S737 Ross Building
York University
4700 Keele Street
Toronto, ON
M3J 1P3

LETTER 7 - NEW**Sample letter to students receiving thesis or teaching supervision**

MM/DD/YYYY

Dear _____,

We are writing you to see if you would help us by providing your views about the supervision of Professor XX, in the Department of Social Science, Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies.

In order to gather a complete picture of a candidate's teaching, we do several things: we ask colleagues to sit in on classes and write an evaluation of the candidate's teaching; we review students' quantitative course evaluations; we ask teaching assistants to write assessments; and we invite students (randomly selected) to write letters evaluating the candidate's teaching. In addition, we invite students who have received direct supervision from a professor either in their undergraduate or their graduate research to write to us about their supervision experience. **That is how we came to write to you.** All of the letters are written in confidence, as I will explain below. These assessments, taken together, enable the "Adjudicating Committee" in the Department to form its own evaluation of the candidate's teaching.

We hope that you are willing to write a letter assessing the teaching of Professor XX from your own point of view. In your letter, please indicate the nature of supervision with him/her (i.e., undergraduate thesis, graduate thesis or doctoral dissertation). Then it would be helpful if you could comment on the effectiveness of his/her supervision, whether and how your professional development was encouraged, the extent to which the supervision experience further stimulated your interest in the discipline, and whether the supervised research prepared you for more advanced work in your discipline. These are just suggestions. Please feel free to include any other pertinent aspects of your supervision experience. Your letter, whether long or brief, will be most appreciated and will help us document Professor XX's teaching as fully as possible.

All the letters we gather for Professor XX's promotion file must be signed, but they will be treated as confidential. Since candidates are entitled to read copies of the letters with names and addresses and any other identifying information removed, we ask that your name, address and any contextual information be conveyed in a header section or in a brief cover letter separate from your assessment. Candidates will be provided with a list of names of referees.

Please send us your letter by no later than _____ (*2 months from the date of this letter*) to allow us to meet our deadlines.

On behalf of the file preparation committee, I would like to thank you for taking time to write to us. Your comments, along with those of other students, will form an important element of our assessment of Professor XX's teaching.

Yours sincerely,

Chair,

Department File Preparation Committee

DR/pb

Please address your letter marked confidential to:

Prof. Darryl Reed
c/o Allyne Sareno
Office of the Chair, Department of Social Science
S737 Ross Building
York University
4700 Keele Street
Toronto, ON
M3J 1P3

LETTER 8**Sample Letter to Colleagues re: Service**

MM/DD/YYYY

Dear _____,

Professor XX, currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Social Science, Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies, is a candidate for tenure and promotion to the rank of Associate Professor. The Department File Preparation Committee is presently assembling a file which must contain letters of reference from those who can assess the candidate's service contributions. You have been suggested to this committee as someone who is particularly able to assess Professor X's service, and we hope that you will agree to provide a letter which gives some detail about the nature and quality of his (or her) contributions (*optional: , particularly on [name of committee(s)]*), both routine service contributions and those which go beyond the routine, e.g., special projects, significant administrative posts, or instances where the candidate has demonstrated collegial leadership.

It would also be helpful if you could assess the candidate's service accomplishments in terms of the demonstration of *excellence, high competence, competence, or competence not demonstrated* – the terminology of the University's Tenure and Promotion Criteria. I enclose an excerpt from the University's *Tenure and Promotions Policy, Criteria and Procedures* and our own Department's Tenure and Promotion Standards.

The candidate will be provided with a list of the names of referees consulted and may read all letters of assessment (stripped of personal identifiers). In order to ensure the confidentiality of your reference, we would ask that you write in such a way that your name, address and any contextual information be conveyed in a header section or a brief cover letter separate from your assessment. The letter of assessment should contain no personal identifiers.

To ensure the timely progress of Professor X's file to upper-level committees, we would need to receive referees' assessments by _____ (*2 months from the date of this letter*). Thank you for considering this request.

Yours sincerely,

Chair,

Department File Preparation Committee

DR/pb

Please address your letter marked confidential to:

Prof. Darryl Reed
c/o Allyne Sareno
Office of the Chair, Department of Social Science
S737 Ross Building
York University
4700 Keele Street

Excerpted from York University's *Tenure and Promotions Policy, Criteria and Procedures* – part of Preamble Section B. Where letters refer to the inclusion of "appropriate excerpts from York University's tenure and promotion criteria", it is suggested that the following be used.

B. ELIGIBILITY FOR STATUS IN PROFESSORIAL RANKS AND TENURE

A university scholar is a professional person devoted to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, and service to the University. Promotion, although it may be associated with seniority within the University, must in its essential nature be related to the University's recognition of a scholar's real achievements.

In keeping with the University's commitment to foster a climate of respect for equity and diversity, standards for tenure and promotion must recognize research and professional contributions in an equitable way. This means acknowledging diverse career paths, traditions, and values.

The following outline of promotion through the ranks is a mere average profile; it is put forth to give members of faculty a general notion of what is to be expected; it is not, however, a set of rules. Candidates for tenure and promotion will move at varying rates, according to their own patterns of professional growth.

Assistant Professor

In some Faculties promotion to this rank is seen as automatic upon the completion of a Ph.D., in other Faculties this degree is not an appropriate indication of achievement. Clearly, it is possible for junior scholars to demonstrate that they are already mature professionals who have completed their training and have embarked upon their careers. The Committee is sensitive to the different indications of this level of achievement prevailing in the different Departments and Faculties. The Committee will not use a single scale to judge all candidates, but will be guided by the initiating unit's and the Faculty's own criteria. Nevertheless in all the Faculties of the University, an Assistant Professorship should mean that the years of apprenticeship are over and that the student has now become a scholar.

Associate Professor

An Associate Professor is a matured scholar whose achievements at York and/or elsewhere has earned his or her colleagues' respect as an individual of superior qualities and achievements. A normal expectation of promotion to Associate Professor would be between three to six years of service in the rank of Assistant Professor.

Professor

A Professor is an eminent member of the University whose achievements at York and/or in his/her profession have marked him or her as one of the scholars from whom the University receives its energy and strength. Clearly this level of achievement cannot be identified with serving several years as an Associate Professor; nevertheless, the rank should not be considered a form of apotheosis. The rank of Professor should be within the expectancy of all Associate Professors.
