


# Proposed Resolution on the Selection Process for External Reviewers in Tenure Cases

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## Background

What the colleges have to say about external letters and reviewers.

**For simplicity we shall assume that** An external reviewer is an individual who provides an evaluation of the candidate's **research and scholarship and is external to Cornell University.** **and who is not a voting member of the candidate's unit. Note that by this definition an external reviewer can be a Cornell faculty member, e.g., a member of the candidate's graduate field who is in a different department. The purpose of an external reviewer is to provide an outside perception of the candidate's research and scholarship.** Collectively, the external reviewer letters should inform the reader about the candidate's breadth, depth, impact, and **anticipated** trajectory.

Because of the importance of this dossier component, the candidate should be able to suggest reviewers. **The broader the engagement of the voting faculty the better. To identify prospective reviewers, broad engagement of the voting faculty by the chair or unit head is recommended.** However, it is understood that in the larger units the task may be delegated to a subset of the voting faculty.

A typical selection method starts with the candidate submitting to the department a list of potential reviewers. The department subsequently produces the final list by augmenting a subset of the candidate's list with its own choices. Numerical rules govern the process, e.g., the candidate might be told to "provide six names of which two will be selected." The end result is a final list that is the union of two **disparate** lists; **there are** candidate-selected reviewers and department-selected reviewers. The trouble with this approach to external reviewer selection is that it invites second guessing by the candidate: "if I leave Professor X off my list then the department will most assuredly select Professor X." Moreover, the strategy has no inspirational value in terms of getting the candidate to think early and often about their "radius of impact". The candidate invariably focuses on reviewers who are deeply familiar with their work and not at all about reviewers who can attest to its far flung implications.

The independent list method (ILM) for choosing external reviewers addresses these shortcomings and is as follows. The candidate and the department independently produce their own list of reviewers. The lists should be equal in length and assembled with one goal in mind: the collection of individuals on the list provide **an accurate fair and informed** assessment of the candidate's work. **A "fair and informed accurate assessment" requires the inclusion may include** some individuals whose area of expertise has some "distance" from the candidate's area of expertise. This compels the candidate to think **in a productive way** about radius of impact and why it is important.

Using the two lists, the department proceeds to develop the final list of external reviewers. There are three numbers associated with the process that need to be identified: the length **L** of the independently-produced lists, the minimum number **C** of selected reviewers that must be chosen from the candidate's list, and **a range of** the total number **T** of selected reviewers (**8 external reviewers is a suggested minimum**). The independent lists need to be included in the dossier so that it is clear which of the received letters are from reviewers chosen by the candidate **only**, which are from reviewers chosen by the department **only**, and which are from reviewers chosen by both. **The list should include reviewers that were asked and declined, plus the reason for declining, if given. Note that individuals may decline to review a promotion dossier for multiple reasons and declining a request for dossier review without a given reason does not reflect on the candidate's suitability for promotion, i.e. should not be viewed negatively against the candidate.**

## The Resolution

*Whereas* the selection of external reviewers is central to the tenure review process;

*Whereas* candidate input to the process should be structured in a way that is fair and **which inspires an understanding of why radius of impact is important transparent;**

*Be it resolved* that the **ILM independent list** method for selecting external reviewers be adopted by each college.