Summary of Suggestions for Improving Rank and Status Reviews (2010)[1]
Craig H. Hart AAVP-Faculty, August 2010

Keep in mind that:
1. It is difficult for university-level reviewers to adequately judge candidate records.
2. Departmental oversight does not substitute for candidate's individual responsibility.
3. Items listed below represent recurring areas of deficiency.

Teaching:
  Better documentation can often be provided:
1. *A list of courses taught by semester, with enrollment numbers, etc. (3.3.2 A)*
2. A contextualization of candidate teaching loads (w/in dept'/college expectations)
3. A contextualization of course GPAs (w/in dept'/college expectations)
4. An <u>analysis</u> of feedback from *student evaluations* and *written comments* (3.3.2 B1; 7.9.4):
    - note trends; consider other evaluation criteria beyond overall course & instructor ratings
5. *Peer evaluations [that] concentrate on a review of the teaching portfolio* (3.2.2C)
6. *A description of steps to evaluate and improve teaching* (3.3.2 D)
    - Candidate is to provide; improvement plan recommended

Scholarship:
  Meeting R&S criteria typically requires providing:
1. An explanation of how *scholarship [is] <u>consistent with disciplinary norms</u> and department, college, and university <u>missions</u>* (3.4.4.1.A; 3.4.3)
2. *Both <u>quality</u> and <u>quantity</u> are relevant in assessing a faculty member's scholarly record* (3.4.3)
3. *Evidence that the scholarship is of high quality with some element of <u>originality</u>* (3.4.4.1C)
4. *Information about the <u>reputation and selectivity of scholarly presses and journals</u>*.
5. Evidence for critical *peer review* (3.4.4.1D):
    - …<u>critically verify the quality</u> of the work (3.4.4.1E)
6. Evidence that *presentations at professional meetings and conferences [have been or are] <u>being developed into publications</u>* (3.4.4.2H):
    - Was candidate the presenter in a multiple-authored poster or paper or along for ride?
7. An <u>explanation for gaps</u> in scholarly productivity records (3.4.3).
8. A description of candidate contributions to jointly-authored works (R&S Policy Appendix A):
    - Are they developing their own <u>independent scholarly agenda</u>?

Citizenship:
  Two major observations; both involve balance:
1. Assure that newer faculty members are not overloaded with course preps or citizenship.
2. Help junior faculty not become overly involved in national professional service.

Evaluation Process Issues:
  Recommendations for improvement include:
1. Write evaluative letters, not advocacy letters.
2. Obtain credible external reviewers:
    - arms-length association
    - well-regarded institutions (BYU-level or above)
3. Allow sufficient time for department to thoroughly review each candidate
4. Report the department vote count; not just "majority approved/denied"
5. Stress confidentiality – breaches have caused numerous problems
6. Prior (3rd year) review letters help evaluators factor previous feedback

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[1] Summary only; full document follows.

Suggestions for Improving Rank
and Status Reviews (2010)

Craig H. Hart AAVP-Faculty
August 2010[2]

Since completing the rank and status review process in July, I have reviewed the University Council on Rank and Status summaries for each candidate and my own notes on the 2009-10 review process. I have distilled my reflections on all this down to what I hope are meaningful recommendations regarding what information candidates, departments and colleges can provide that will help the University Council make better informed decisions in the upcoming 2010-11 review cycle. Despite concerns alluded to below, department and college evaluators are to be commended for their careful evaluations and attention to detail. Thank you for your efforts to make the process as comprehensive and fair as possible.

Drawing from principles generally outlined in the university R&S policy, the items listed below represent recurrent areas of deficiency I noted over the past year that often made it difficult for university-level reviewers to adequately judge candidate records. I hope my informal observations will particularly assist those who oversee the departmental review process consider ways to help non-departmental reviewers better understand each candidate's file in disciplinary context. These items are aggregated across departments and colleges. Some apply to only a small number of units. Others are more pervasive across the university. Section numerical designations for corresponding guidelines in the university R&S document are provided for each item. Some of this was already discussed in UFDC and Deans Council last spring to pass onto colleges and departments. Attending to these items should not detract from continuing to meet other review criteria outlined in the university R&S document.

Please keep in mind that this document should not be perceived as superseding the University Rank and Status Policy. Policy wording is presented in italics throughout the document where deemed necessary. Suggestions beyond policy wording are not meant to be prescriptive. They are designed to help candidates and departments consider ways of packaging the files in a manner that will help university-level reviewers better understand the performance of each candidate in light of disciplinary expectations. Different disciplines may have better ways of doing this than what is suggested below. As stated in the R&S document, the department carries the responsibility of "*addressing the faculty member's performance in light of departmental and disciplinary standards to help guide reviewers at the college and university levels*." (R&S Policy 7.8).

Departmental oversight does not substitute for candidates being individually responsible for demonstrating to colleagues at all levels that that they meet or exceed expectations, as they demonstrate their maturity and wisdom in the preparation of their file. Accordingly, the individual faculty member "*bears the burden ... for presenting persuasive evidence to the university that he or she is appropriately qualified . . . for receiving candidacy, continuing faculty status or rank advancement.*" (R&S Policy 1.2)

Teaching

Better documentation can often be provided to help evaluators readily ascertain whether there is "*a sufficient record of high quality teaching*" for 3rd year reviews and promotion to associate, and "*an established record of high quality teaching*" for promotion to full (4.3, 5.2 and 5.3). Among other items in the R&S policy, the following often require more attention in the *description of teaching activities and*

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quality (3.3.2 A, B). It is acknowledged that some of these criteria are not clearly specified in the R&S policy (e.g., summarizing and analyzing course GPAs).

- *A list of courses taught by semester, with enrollment numbers (3.3.2 A)*. This list is often missing. Although not suggested in the R&S policy, it is helpful to include in this table course evaluation response rates, instructor and course ratings, and average course GPAs for easy reference.

- A contextualization of candidate teaching loads within the framework of department and college work load expectations (and/or individual circumstances) to help in assessing whether and how a candidate is performing under full workload demands.

- A contextualization of course GPAs in light of department and college grading standards.

- An analysis of feedback from *student evaluations* and *written comments* (3.3.2 B1; 7.9.4). Departments that do this well evaluate positive and negative trends in student comments across course sections over time. They also look beyond the overall instructor and course ratings and evaluate additional course and instructor rating items to ascertain trends.

- *Peer evaluations [that] concentrate on a review of the teaching portfolio* (3.2.2C). The "portfolio" typically includes courses at the *graduate and undergraduate* (upper and lower division) levels, as applicable (7.9.4). When peer reviews of **only** one course in one semester are provided, it is difficult to fully evaluate the teaching portfolio. Sample peer evaluation templates are available from the Department Chair/Administrator website https://departchair.byu.edu/ . These will soon incorporate guidelines for measuring student learning presented at University Conference that can be used in future reviews.

- *A description of steps to evaluate and improve teaching* (3.3.2 D). Candidates who provide this typically do so in their self-assessment and document improvement where applicable, often in response to feedback from formative reviews. Having this documented helps evaluators ascertain how responsive candidates are to peer and student feedback in improving their teaching. Where there are lingering concerns, it is helpful to provide an improvement plan.

Scholarship

When presenting and evaluating the candidate's scholarship record, guidelines outlined in section 3.4 are helpful, including those highlighted below that are often overlooked. Meeting R&S criteria typically require providing:

- An explanation of how *scholarship [is] consistent with disciplinary norms and department, college, and university missions* (3.4.4.1.A). It is often difficult for non-departmental evaluators to ascertain what disciplinary and department norms are. To reiterate from the R&S document: *The scholar's record shows a growing body of works that have stood the test of exposure to and evaluation by other scholars in the discipline. Each discipline has its own scholarly traditions and its own channels for communication among scholars, and therefore each department should establish criteria for defining and evaluating scholarship within its discipline. A faculty member's scholarship should then be measured against those criteria (3.4.3).* Examples of defining norms and evaluation criteria include explaining whether a program of scholarship should fit into a focused, thematic, coherent research agenda (or if scattershot publications are acceptable), and articulating whether a national reputation stemming from a body of work is important for promotion to full from disciplinary perspectives.

- An assessment of both quantity and quality. *Both quality and quantity are relevant in assessing a faculty member's scholarly record* (3.4.3)*.* It is helpful to other levels of review when department evaluators carefully read, critically evaluate and comment on the quality of the work, rather than simply quantify the work.

- *Evidence that the scholarship is of high quality with some element of originality* (3.4.4.1C). It is sometimes difficult for non-departmental reviewers to ascertain whether the work is original or a repackaging of old knowledge that doesn't contribute substantially to the discipline.

- Information about scholarly outlets. *The reputation and selectivity of scholarly presses and journals are relevant in evaluating the quality and impact of scholarship* (3.4.4.1E). R & S document *criteria that apply in evaluating scholarship published in paper formats [include] quality, peer review, publisher's reputation, and selectivity, etc.* (3.4.4.1G). Etc. can include journal impact ratings, disciplinary rankings, acceptance rates, quality of editorial board, evidence of critical peer review, distribution data, critical peer reviews of books, publisher's reputation and selectivity, author citation counts. This type of relevant data can be included in an annotated bibliography for each publication.

- Evidence for critical *peer review* (3.4.4.1D). When candidates do not publish in *nationally and internationally recognized peer-reviewed scholarly presses and journals in their discipline* (e.g., trade magazines, public policy venues, non-peer reviewed practitioner outlets, local presses), there *is greater responsibility placed on the faculty member and the department to critically verify the quality of the work* (3.4.4.1E). Providing evidence for critical peer review also applies to the evaluation of creative works and performances *(3.4.4.2D)*.

- Evidence that *presentations at professional meetings and conferences [have been or are] being developed into publications* (3.4.4.2H). It is also helpful to indicate whether the candidate was the presenter in a multiple-authored paper, and whether it was a poster or paper presentation.

- An explanation for why there are gaps in scholarly productivity records. Faculty with responsibilities for producing scholarship *are expected to demonstrate consistent productivity of high quality scholarship over the course of their careers* (3.4.3).

- A description of candidate contributions to jointly authored works in an annotated bibliography (see scholarship under R&S appendix A Checklist). It is also helpful to know whether the candidate was equal, lead, first, second, third author, etc. Some disciplinary standards have candidates list authorships alphabetically, or "with" other authors, etc., making it difficult to ascertain relative contributions and whether candidates are leading out on a sufficient number of projects and developing their own independent scholarly agenda. Designating student co-authors can also be helpful in evaluating mentoring contributions.

Citizenship

Two major observations arose from the past year's evaluation that can be helpful for newer faculty in the years ahead. Both involve helping these faculty members successfully balance citizenship responsibilities with other important obligations. They include:

- Assuring that newer faculty are not overloaded with too many course preps and major citizenship assignments, or performing extensive service for others (e.g., statistical analyses) which keeps them from getting their own research done. If some of this has occurred due to a unit being short-handed as a result of the hiring freeze, it is helpful to have that explained.

- Helping junior faculty not become overly involved in local and national professional service to the exclusion of focusing on solid teaching and research.

Department and College Evaluation Process Issues

Recommendations for improving the evaluation process include providing:

- Independent "evaluation" letters from review committees, chairs, and deans (7.9.11; 7.10.2; 7.10.3). Letters written in an evaluative manner are most helpful to university-level reviewers. Advocacy letters that do not address weaknesses uncovered by external reviewers or non-adherence to department and disciplinary standards are not very helpful. Nor are letters that rubber-stamp lower levels of review without some evidence of a thoughtful, independent evaluation.

- Credible external reviews of scholarship (follow guidelines in 7.9.6 closely). About one third of the candidates being considered for R&S this past year had at least one external reviewer with a personal association with the candidate that had potential to bias the reviews (e.g., co-authors; former mentors). There were several cases where almost all of the external reviewers were not arms length. *The committee report will* [also] *describe how the reviewers were selected, the reasons they were chosen, their stature in the field, and any relationship they may have with the faculty member (7.9.6).* External reviewer vitas provided in the file (at least in short form) can also help university-level reviewers ascertain their stature in the field.

- *External reviews of the body of the faculty member's scholarship from at least three faculty members at well regarded academic institutions* (7.9.6). It is more difficult to ascertain reviewer credibility when reviewers reside at colleges or universities deemed to be less distinguished and in lower tiers relative to BYU. Sometimes "at least three" external reviewers as recommended in the R&S document are not enough, particularly in cases where reviewers provide perfunctory evaluations. It may be helpful to obtain one or two more, but more than that can be overkill. When sending out department standards for assessing scholarship as recommended in the R&S policy, it can be helpful to signal that reviewers are also free to judge the quality of scholarship based on their perceptions of national disciplinary norms. It is not very helpful to receive comments from external reviewers like, "Dr. _____ met the department checklist for promotion."

- Sufficient time for the department to thoroughly discuss each candidate. Ten or fifteen minutes allotted to a candidate can be detrimental to the critical decision making process. Adherence to the guidelines in 7.9.10 is beneficial. Announcing meetings well in advance can assist faculty in planning their schedules to be in attendance. Assuring that all eligible faculty members have ample time to read the department committee report before the department meeting and vote can provide for an informed discussion (7.9.9). Reporting the department vote count – not just stating that the majority approved or denied advancement gives university–level evaluators a better idea of how much support a candidate has from colleagues. Stress confidentiality – breaches in confidentiality have caused numerous problems.

- Prior review letters (3rd year) helps evaluators understand the prior feedback that candidates have received (See R&S Checklist, Personal Statement 1).