

# **Nuts and Bolts of Peer Review Procedures at Lewiston-Auburn College/USM**

(Adopted by LAC faculty 9/04)

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## Contexts for this document

The present document concerns *procedures* for LAC peer reviews, involving pre-tenure, tenure, post-tenure and/or promotion recommendations. LAC's document on "Criteria for Tenure and Promotion," should be consulted for guidance on *content* of peer review deliberations and recommendations. The Provost's website should also be regularly checked, including for updated guidelines on the *format* of the Personnel Presentation: [http://www.usm.maine.edu/prov/faculty\\_resources/index.htm](http://www.usm.maine.edu/prov/faculty_resources/index.htm)

In response to our Fall '03 faculty meeting discussion of an earlier document, "Nuts and Bolts of Peer Review Process at LAC: Current Practices (8/6/03)," an ad hoc Peer Review Procedures Committee was established to propose a set of revisions. The recommendations of the committee, presented in "Interim Report and Proposals from Peer Review Procedures Committee" (dated 2/9/04), were discussed over the course of three separate faculty meetings during the Spring '04 semester. The present document incorporates the faculty's recommendations in response to those proposed revisions.

The Committee's efforts, and the resulting document, have been guided by several philosophical/policy perspectives. Central among these, and as directly stated in the college's mission statement, is that the college hires with the goal of *retaining* faculty. Meeting this goal in a manner that supports excellence on both the institutional and individual levels entails the responsibility that we maintain a sound *culture* of ongoing professional development. We also need to reaffirm the conviction originally guiding the evolution of our peer review procedures: It is important that all faculty are actively engaged in the peer review process, including by being prepared for and participating in associated meetings. There is no denying that the growth in our numbers over recent years makes follow-through on this commitment increasingly time-consuming. If, however, we are to continue as a well-integrated, interdisciplinary faculty, it is critical that we maintain the commitment to remain familiar with colleagues' work and, in turn, to provide thoughtful and consistent feedback regarding professional development at LAC. Finally, as earnestly as any committee – present or future – can endeavor to refine these procedures and documentation thereof, no set of [workable] guidelines will be able to anticipate every possible scenario. Adapting the words of the recommendations laid out by the ACE, AAUP & UE report on *Good Practice in Tenure Evaluation*, even "[t]he best written rules are not always easily applied to actual situations..."<sup>1</sup>. This, too, makes our mutual commitment to the *underlying* principles and intents guiding peer review all the more critical.

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<sup>1</sup> American Council on Education, American Association of University Professors, and United Educators (2002). *Good practice in tenure evaluation: Advice for tenured faculty, department chairs, and academic administrator*. Washington, DC: ACE, p. 12.

## **Roles of peer review committees and the faculty as a whole**

When peer reviews do *not* involve recommendations for promotion and/or tenure, ad hoc peer review committees conduct the individual review and then propose recommended actions to the faculty as a whole for its vote.

Reviews requiring recommendation for tenure and/or promotion remain entirely at the whole faculty level and do not involve a separate, smaller committee. In these instances, the “peer review committee” is the faculty as a whole. All faculty who participate in regular LAC faculty meetings are welcome to contribute to these discussions; however, under current LAC practice, only tenured and tenure-track faculty vote on personnel matters.

## **Deadlines**

At the end of each summer, LAC’s Dean receives from the Provost’s office a master list of the schedule of personnel reviews for the upcoming academic year. This list includes dates by which people being reviewed should have their personnel presentation completed, when the peer review committee needs to make its recommendations, etc. A copy of the master list goes to our Faculty Chair, and each person on the list to be reviewed receives from our Dean’s office an individual letter containing the deadlines.

We will implement an “early alert system,” activated in July, for faculty whose revised personnel presentation materials are due early in the Fall. Notification shortly before or after the start of the semester provides insufficient lead time in these cases. LAC’s Staff Associate for Personnel, together with the Faculty Chair or Vice Chair, will work out a system to ensure this early notification. As the Provost’s office typically does not issue the full set of review schedules until later in the summer, this may involve working with the Provost’s staff to identify patterns in categories of appointments that will need the early Fall reviews and creating our own LAC system for notifying people who need to have their personnel presentations readied in September.

The most important deadlines concern the timing of recommendations to the Dean and, in turn, when the Dean’s recommendation needs to be received by the Provost. There is some wiggle-room in the early deadlines. However, working backwards from the deadlines for the Dean and Provost, one can see that there must be reasonable time allowed for the scheduling of a meeting with the committee and the person being reviewed, for the writing of a letter, and for a faculty meeting at which the peer review committee’s recommendation is made. If you are being reviewed, consult with our Faculty Chair to determine how much “play” in the original deadlines can be reasonably expected and at what phase of the process.

## **Constitution of peer review committees**

The LAC Faculty Chair and Vice Chair work with the Provost office's master list to identify the number and timing of reviews throughout the upcoming year and then constitute ad hoc peer review committees for each "cluster" of three or four personnel reviews with the same (or very closely timed) set of deadlines. As outlined below, every tenured or tenure-track faculty member (with at least one year of service at LAC) has a chance of serving on a peer review committee each year. We chose as a faculty *not* to set up one standing committee responsible for all personnel reviews, nor have we a system where a new faculty member is assigned one committee that follows him or her through all pre-tenure reviews. By shifting the composition of peer review committees with each new panel of reviews, we increase the number of colleagues who have an opportunity for a detailed update on the work and professional development of any one individual faculty member. Among its other benefits, this can work to the faculty member's advantage when it comes time for the full faculty to vote on tenure and promotion.

The peer review committee will most often consist of four people, two tenured and two pre-tenured (ratio subject to revision as proportion of tenured faculty increases), to be chosen at random from the pools of tenured and tenure-track faculty who are not being reviewed in that same cycle. Once a faculty member has been assigned to one peer review committee, his or her name is removed from the pool for subsequent peer review committees that academic year *unless* circumstances are such that the pool of names is exhausted before all committees are constituted. Then, everyone back in the pool!

At least one of the four committee members' primary academic appointments should be in the same degree program as the person being reviewed. If it happens that a particular subcommittee does not contain a member with the same teaching program background, the Faculty Chair will arrange for a fifth person from that degree program to participate in that one review.

All peer review committee members should know the type of personnel action associated with each review based upon the information provided by the Provost's office. The Provost's office generates a table with this information for USM faculty; all faculty will receive a version of this table, produced in collaboration by LAC's Staff Associate for Personnel and the Faculty Chair/Vice Chair, with the information on timing relevant for LAC faculty reviews. In a similar vein, all peer review committee members need to be familiar with LAC review criteria and procedures, including the form of the personnel presentation document. This is especially important if one has not recently served on a peer review committee

## **Determining the Chair of each review**

For peer reviews *not* involving tenure or promotion: While there is not an overall Chair for the peer review committee, someone does need to take the initiative to set up the meeting time. The Faculty Chair or Vice Chair may assign someone on the committee the task of setting up the meeting. The "Chair" of a person's review, however, is the individual responsible for

drafting the committee's letter for that person. A person being reviewed may, in anticipation of the meeting, ask someone on the committee to serve as the Chair for their letter and review. "Fifth members," brought in for programmatic reasons for an individual peer review, are customarily *not* asked to serve as the Chair of that review as they may be assigned to serve on another peer review committee that same year.

Regardless of the mechanism for selection, the Chair for each faculty member's review should be identified *prior* to the start of each peer review committee meeting. If the faculty member being reviewed by any given committee does not request a specific colleague on the committee to serve as his or her Chair, it is then up to the peer review committee to have clarified and assigned among themselves who will serve as Chair for each review.

The review Chair has special responsibility to be very familiar with the individual's materials – again, prior to the review meeting – but the expectation is that all peer review committee members (not just the Chair) will also have taken time for examination/reading of the personnel presentation and associated files on reserve in Library.

For reviews involving recommendations for tenure and/or promotion: As with peer review procedures not involving promotion or tenure decisions, the Chair for each faculty member's review should be identified *prior* to the start of faculty meeting at which the presentation and vote will occur. A faculty member being reviewed for tenure and/or promotion may approach any tenured or tenure-track colleague to serve as his or her Chair. The Faculty Chair (or Vice Chair) should confirm prior to the faculty meeting that identification of a peer review Chair has occurred. If the faculty member being reviewed has not initiated identification of a review Chair, then the Faculty Chair customarily takes on that role. As with the smaller peer review committees, the review Chair has special responsibility to be very familiar with individual's materials prior to the review meeting; however, the expectation remains here also that all faculty members (not just the Chair) will have taken time for examination/reading of personnel presentation and associated files on reserve in the Library.

### **Scheduling the committee's meeting**

In practical terms, the only possible meeting time for the up to ten people involved in any one panel of a peer review committee will almost always be Wednesday between 11:30 to 4:00. Thus, when you see you are about to serve on a review committee or are yourself to be reviewed, keep that time slot open until the meeting is scheduled, especially during any weeks without a regularly scheduled faculty meeting. There are rarely any non-extraordinary options for scheduling outside of this one time slot.

Count on at least a total of 45 minutes per person being reviewed. In practice and principle, one hour is much preferred. You may need to spread out your committee's reviews over more than one Wednesday.

## **What the individual being reviewed needs to do prior to the committee meeting**

1. Once you see who will be on your committee, decide if you want to ask a specific person to serve as your review committee Chair. There is no need to initiate this arrangement if you have no preference.
2. Confirm with Faculty Chair deadlines for preparation of your personnel presentation materials. Your committee needs a reasonable time period to review your materials prior to your committee meeting.
3. The UMS personnel presentation entails a highly ritualized format. One explanation offered in the past is that the system Board of Trustees, in receiving materials for faculty up for tenure, prefers a high degree of “comparability” in format. A template and a set of guidelines (updated annually) is available on the Provost’s website: [http://www.usm.maine.edu/prov/faculty\\_resources/index.htm](http://www.usm.maine.edu/prov/faculty_resources/index.htm). This same basic template should structure pre-tenure reviews also. Adapt the cover sheet to reflect the context of each review (i.e., the sign-off’s relative to contract status if it’s not time for tenure or promotion).

While we do need to conform to the structure of the UMS individual personnel presentations, we also can – and should – incorporate within that format treatment of LAC’s criteria for tenure and promotion. In addition, the Provost has recently asked that we 1) include a brief introductory statement (along the lines – but, again, briefer – of our teaching philosophy) to the sections on scholarship and on service, and 2) incorporate in our narrative on teaching how we may have modified our practices based on peer visits to the classroom. Recent experience suggests that you may add such narrative introductions to any and all of your personnel presentations’ sections; this can be a useful opportunity to provide fuller contexts for the material you present.

In order to increase continuity between an individual’s reviews year to year, each newly constituted committee should be familiar with the set of peer review letters the faculty member has earlier received. All colleagues being reviewed should include a copy of past peer review committee letters in the set of documents put on reserve in the library for each upcoming review.

4. Prior to your committee meeting, an electronic attachment of your personnel presentation should be circulated to [lac-fac@usm.maine.edu](mailto:lac-fac@usm.maine.edu). A hard copy of the personnel presentation and any supporting materials you wish to have considered should be put on reserve in the library. It’s a good idea to alert colleagues via the lac-fac listserv when those materials are available in the library.

## **[Recapping] What members of peer review committees need to do prior to the committee meeting**

1. Confirm meeting time (see “Scheduling the committee’s meeting,” p. 4, above) and keep your schedule open for that time.
2. Be familiar with peer review procedures and criteria.

3. Know the nature of the recommendation – and letter – required for each review.
4. Review the individuals' personnel presentation materials, including those on reserve in the library.
5. Confirm who on the committee will be serving as chair for each review.
6. One more time: Steps 1 - 5 should be accomplished **prior** to the start of the review meeting!

### **Procedures during individual review committee meetings (not involving recommendations for tenure or promotion)**

1. The person being reviewed should prepare a *brief* – as in 10 minutes – opening statement of material they would like to *highlight* from their personnel presentation. If this opening presentation goes much beyond 10 minutes (especially if the reviews are being tightly scheduled), opportunities for thoughtful discussion can be significantly diminished. While a lengthy opening statement may then sound like an attractive anxiety-reduction mechanism, it ultimately is not. It results in reduced opportunities for meaningful interchange and feedback, besides likely taking time away from others being reviewed that same day.

2. During the next section of the committee meeting for each review, the individual and committee discuss the faculty member's personnel presentation, accomplishments, plans for future, etc.<sup>2</sup>

3. The person being reviewed then leaves the meeting room and the committee further discusses the materials, summarizes the key points for inclusion in the committee's letter (see next section), deliberates on recommended actions, and votes.

The vote for a person in the last year of a current contract is to recommend to the Dean the offer – or not – of a new contract. The usual recommendation is a two-year contract. In cases where the peer review results in serious reservations about progress being made towards tenure, a recommendation for a one-year contract may be made instead.

When the person being reviewed is in the first year of a two-year contract, the vote is to recommend “no action” (to allow the current contract to continue in effect) or termination of current contract.

4. The person being reviewed then returns to the meeting room, where the outcome of the

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<sup>2</sup>We decided in 1998, during the last major faculty discussion of these procedures, that the first and second segments of each peer review meeting (i.e., faculty presentation and committee discussion with the person being reviewed) will be open to any other interested faculty, with the subsequent discussion and initial drafting of letters then conducted by the assigned peer review committee members alone. To date, however, no faculty member not assigned to a peer review committee has exercised the option of attending the first two, open segments of the meeting.

committee vote is then shared. If need be, a committee may schedule additional time for deliberation, but it is preferable for all involved to complete the process during the allotted time.

Faculty being reviewed need to be aware of the almost inevitable experience of a committee suggesting revisions of personnel presentations, either to increase "compliance" with UMS protocol and/or, in committee's view, to strengthen the presentation. The review committee, in turn, needs in its communications to clearly distinguish the "outcome" of the review vs. the editorial suggestions they make for the the personnel presentation document. Specifically, the peer review committee needs to be clear when it expresses anything other than "editorial" concerns or suggestions with the document.

### **Letters generated by peer review committees**

When the review occurs during an initial one-year contract or during the second year of a two-year contract, a full "narrative letter" is required. This letter, in addition, to stating the committee's recommendation (a new contract or not), should summarize the committee's impressions of progress in the areas of teaching, scholarship and service, making direct reference to the criteria LAC faculty have established for tenure and promotion. Specific recommendations and suggestions for future professional development may also be included.

One member of the committee, the Chair for that individual review, will initially draft the letter, circulating it for revisions among the other committee members. Ideally, the faculty member being reviewed will have the opportunity to see this letter *prior* to the faculty meeting at which it will be presented. In any case, the faculty member being reviewed may offer corrections of factual material to the Chair. As per union guidelines, a formal, written response to the committee's letter may also be made once the letter is finalized. The finalized letter, addressed to the Dean, is signed by the Committee's Chair (identified as such) and the three (or four) other committee members, cc'd to the person being reviewed. The official signing-off of the letter typically does not occur until after the regular faculty meeting at which it is presented.

When a review occurs in the middle of a two-year contract and the committee has judged there to be satisfactory progress towards tenure, the committee's official letter need only be a brief statement that "no action is needed" – that is, they recommend that the person continue their employment into the second year of an existing contract. If the committee recommends other than a continuation of an existing contract, a longer narrative letter is needed to document the committee's concerns.

We have wrestled as a faculty with procedures for the satisfactory mid-contract pre-tenure reviews that, recommending "no action," do not required a full "narrative letter." Specifically, how can feedback on performance, and, more critically, suggestions for continued professional development that will likely be pertinent to future reviews be effectively conveyed *without* leaving such communication with ambiguous standing? In order to further strengthen the professional development function of these mid-contract reviews, the faculty have agreed that peer review committees will now generate in addition to the brief "no action required" letter, a separate, relatively short letter outlining specific recommendations for professional development options and activities over the next year. Similar to current practice around peer

classroom visit letters, this “professional development plan” letter may be added, or not, to future personnel presentations at the discretion of the person being reviewed.

### **Faculty meeting procedures following peer review committee meetings**

In those reviews utilizing a separate peer review committee (i.e., when recommendations regarding tenure and/or promotion are not involved), the faculty being reviewed do *not* again make an oral presentation at the regular faculty meeting scheduled for reports by their peer review committee. Rather, the Chair of each review will either read the committee’s letter or summarize its major components. As with the individual peer review meeting, a period of discussion with the person being reviewed follows. The person being reviewed then leaves the room while faculty further discuss the review and vote on the peer review committee’s recommendation. All faculty who participate in regular LAC faculty meetings are welcome to contribute to these discussions; however, under current LAC practice, only tenured and tenure-track faculty vote on personnel matters. Votes on personnel matters are by secret “ballot” – “yes” if in support of review committee’s recommended action, “no” if not. The results of the faculty vote are recorded by the LAC Faculty Chair (to be communicated by the Chair to the Dean), and the person being reviewed is brought back into the meeting room for report of the outcome.

### **Proxy votes**

Proxy votes on personnel actions have been entered in the past by the Faculty Chair, although not guided by any explicit policy. The faculty now supports our continuing to allow proxy votes, *so long as* we continue to embrace the principle that direct participation in such faculty meetings is of the utmost importance whenever circumstances can allow.

When attendance at faculty meetings involving personnel recommendations is not possible, faculty may transmit a proxy vote to the Faculty Chair before the day of the meeting, with allowance for unusual circumstances. Faculty on sabbatical leave can similarly, as they choose, participate in faculty meetings, vote on personnel actions, and submit proxy votes. The option of proxy votes does not apply to the peer committees constituted for reviews not involving tenure or promotion. All members of these smaller peer review committees must be present for discussion and deliberation.

### **After the faculty meeting vote**

The peer review committee’s letter may be modified as a result of the faculty meeting discussion and the factual corrections received from the person being reviewed. Again, the finalized letter, addressed to the Dean, is signed by the peer review Chair (identified as such) and the three (or four) other committee members, cc’d to the person being reviewed.

At the same time, the person being reviewed should be preparing a clean copy of his or

her personnel presentation for the Dean. The peer review committee, as well as other colleagues at the faculty meeting, are likely to have found needed corrections and/or have had suggestions for changes. The person being reviewed may continue to revise his or her personnel presentation until a date explicitly communicated by the Dean, a date sometime after peer review committee input and before the personnel materials must go forward to the Provost. An appointment for a follow-up conversation between the person being reviewed and the Dean should also be set up, timed for between the faculty meeting and the deadline for the Dean's transmittal of recommendations to the Provost.

One last step: The Chair of the peer review committee must sign-off on the cover sheet of the personnel presentation re: the committee's recommended action **AND** on the first page of the summary of student evaluations. Signing off on the summary of student evaluations requires that the Chair has spent some time looking over the original sets of student evaluations, quantitative and qualitative. There should be spot checks of the accuracy of the numeric compilations, including checks both that the percentages total reasonably close to 100%, and relative to data on the original print-outs.<sup>3</sup>

### **Modification of procedure for reviews involving tenure and/or promotion**

When reviews *do* involve tenure and promotion, the key modification needed of the above procedures is that they are conducted without a separate peer review committee: The oral presentation will be made to the entire faculty (vs. to a committee of four colleagues). Discussion and deliberations around tenure and promotion occur during the full, regular faculty meeting also. In addition, more time is allotted for the opening presentation by the faculty member being reviewed – twenty minutes as opposed to the ten-minute format for reviews not involving tenure and/or promotion. The Faculty Chair is responsible for identifying and scheduling the faculty meeting which will include the tenure/promotion presentation, discussion and vote, building in sufficient time for the drafting and circulation of the peer review letter prior to the deadline for receipt by the Dean.

As outlined above, the person responsible for the first draft of the letter is the designated "Chair" of the tenure/promotion committee for an individual review. The faculty member being reviewed may request any colleague (who is eligible to vote at faculty meetings) to serve as their review Chair. In the absence of such a request, the Faculty Chair will frequently serve as the Chair for reviews involving promotion and tenure.

A letter-writing committee (three other faculty in addition to the review Chair), informally assembled by the review Chair, most often through volunteers the day of the review,

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<sup>3</sup> While, as illustrated in the template on the Provost's website, there is latitude in choice of quantitative items and format, whenever there is a compilation of scores across courses or semesters, the calculation should be based on total number of individual student responses – not a raw average of the *Means* found on each course print-out. Calculating an unweighted average of the raw *Means* one gets on each course's print-out results in percentages that do not add up to 100% unless, coincidentally, every class had exactly the same number of students.

is responsible for working with the review Chair on the required narrative letter. At least one person on the letter-writing committee should have his/her primary appointment outside of the program area of the person being reviewed. Two letters, both addressed to the Dean and cc'd to the person being reviewed are generated: The first, a brief statement of the recommended action and the faculty vote, is signed by all faculty. While only the four members of the letter-writing committee sign the second, narrative letter, the letter should be circulated among the rest of the faculty. The faculty member being reviewed should have the opportunity prior to the finalization of the letter to identify factual information that is in error.

One additional requirement for reviews involving tenure and/or promotion concerns the assembling of letters (see Provost's website for full details). Faculty being reviewed for promotion and/or tenure should submit a list of approximately six names of potential reviewers "external to the university" to the Dean. These should be individuals not employed by UMS, and, in addition, the majority should be from out of state. When the "external" letters are from within the state, it is especially important that the individuals involved do not have close, vested relationships with the faculty member being reviewed, and that they are, in the Provost's words, "aspirational peers." The individuals should be at least at the academic rank under consideration in the review. To increase the likelihood of timely solicitation – and return – of review letters, this step should occur before the end of the May prior to the scheduled Fall review. The requests for these review letters, along with a packet of the faculty member's materials and a cover letter explaining the context of LAC's mission and the nature of the faculty appointment, is mailed out of the Dean's office. As indicated in the "Guidelines for Completing Forms" on the Provost's "Faculty Resources" website, the faculty member being reviewed should not solicit letters directly from the individuals they propose as external reviewers.

### **Post-tenure reviews<sup>4</sup>**

Post-tenure reviews involve a review committee constituted by procedures similar to those used for pre-tenure reviews not involving promotion or tenure. The committee will make its recommendation, to be presented to and voted on by the full LAC faculty prior to submission to the Dean. Post-tenure reviews occur on a four-year cycle. Provost Wood's March 15, 2004 memo on "Post-Tenure Review Compensation Program" (see the Provost's website) outlines the key steps in the process. LAC's Staff Associate for Personnel should be consulted to confirm the year in which each faculty member's post-tenure review occurs.

As per the Provost's memo, the peer review recommendation, or "first-level" of post-tenure review, centers on evaluation of evidence of "satisfactory performance" (and the associated "satisfactory performance faculty increase"). However, "[b]y contract, peer committee members are not asked to make a recommendation on augmentation for stellar performance or for salary compression or salary inequity in post tenure review." (Those recommendations, as part of the "second-level" of the review, are made by the Dean.)

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<sup>4</sup> The Provost's memo confirms that this program of "post-tenure" reviews and associated salary increases is available also to untenured faculty "who have earned just-cause protection."

A narrative letter outlining the criteria and basis of the evaluation of “satisfactory performance” should be part of the committee’s recommendation to the faculty as a whole. As with other reviews not involving tenure and/or promotion, the peer review committee’s recommended action is voted on by the faculty as a whole, that vote being conveyed to the Dean by the faculty Chair. The associated narrative letter, addressed to the Dean and cc’d to the person being reviewed, is signed by the four (or five) members of the peer review committee.

### **Review of faculty with extended, “regular,” non-tenure track contracts**

Faculty with extended, “regular,” non-tenure track contracts may also undergo peer reviews. If a faculty member has earned just-cause protection and is eligible for the above four-year review cycle, then that process would apply. When a faculty member has a non-tenure track appointment, but has not yet held the appointment for more than six years, then the same general procedure for pre-tenure peer reviews can be utilized, though typically there is no “recommended action” to make and the review is complete at the level of the Dean – the Provost and President are not involved. In the past, the *timing* of such reviews has varied from case to case. Appointment letters may indicate expectations for review cycles in these cases.