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Short Communication

Utilization of external reviews by colleges of pharmacy during the promotion and tenure process for pharmacy practice faculty



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ABSTRACT

Objective: To evaluate the use of external reviews by colleges of pharmacy (COP) during the promotion and tenure process for pharmacy practice faculty.

Methods: A 25-item web-based survey was sent to 112 Pharmacy Practice Department Chairs. Results were analyzed via descriptive statistics.

Results: Fifty-four of 112 colleges (48%) responded to the survey, although respondents had the option to skip questions. Of those who responded, 82% utilize external review in their Promotion and Tenure evaluation. At the majority of colleges that responded, reviewers are selected from a combination of sources including the candidates' personal list and in most circumstances someone other than the candidate contacts the reviewer to determine interest and availability. At almost all responding colleges, the reviewer receives the candidate's curriculum vitae and specific guidelines for completing the review. Based upon 40 respondents, colleges request the reviewer(s) to evaluate the candidate's research (100%), teaching (80%), clinical practice (73%) and external service (73%).

Conclusion: The goal of this project was to examine the current use of external review during the Promotion and Tenure process for pharmacy practice faculty. This data is a sample of what is being done at the schools that responded. The majority of responding COP utilize external reviews, however methods and requirements vary considerably.

Background

Promotion and tenure are a part of academic life. Although the majority of academic institutions require faculty to pursue promotion, processes vary among institutions. Colleges often develop detailed requirements and procedures that are unique to their environment and not fully understood by those not employed by the institution. External review is a common piece of the promotion and tenure process. External reviews are defined as "a review of a candidate's supportive documentation for promotion, tenure, or appointment conducted by persons external or outside the candidate's institution."¹

A review of the literature found very little published on the use of external review for the promotion and tenure process in higher education. Only one study was found in a health-care field, and none in the profession of pharmacy. In 1996, a twenty-two-item survey focusing on external review for promotion and/or tenure was distributed to nursing programs that award a doctorate degree.¹ A total of 34 out of 53 institutions participated in the survey. Results found that 73.5% (25/34) of nursing schools used external review for promotion and 67.6% (23/34) of schools used external review for tenure. Of the 25 nursing programs that utilized external review, the candidate participated in the identification of external reviewers at 44% (11/25) of the programs, however at

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eight of those programs, initial contact with the reviewer was initiated by an administrator at the candidate's institution. Seventy-six percent (19/25) of programs sent promotion and tenure criteria to the reviewers along with the candidate's curriculum vitae (88%) and publications (80%). The average number of reviewers required for each candidate was 3.5 (range 2–8) and reviewers had approximately six weeks to complete the review (range 2–12 weeks).

In 1997, Schwartz and Schroeder² published the results of a survey looking at the current utilization of external reviews within academic accounting programs. A total of 728 full professors or administrators were mailed a copy of the questionnaire, with 46.4% (338/728) responding. A total of 48.5% (164/338) of respondents were affiliated with institutions that require an external review for promotion and/or tenure. A total of 602 reviews were performed by the 338 respondents in the previous 2–3 years. In 48% of cases (291/602) the reviewer was only asked to comment on the candidate's research, while 17% (103/602) of reviews included only research and service, 7.5% (45/602) included only research and teaching, and 26% (157/602) included a combination of teaching, research, and service. Teaching and service alone was assessed by four (0.7%) programs and two (0.3%) programs, respectively. Fifty percent (303/602) of external reviews were based on institution-specific criteria provided to the reviewer, while 27% (162/602) of evaluations were performed without specific guidelines, and 16% (97/602) of programs inquired if the individual would be granted tenure or promotion at the reviewer's institution. The survey included an open-ended question looking at the major problems experienced in completing external reviews. A lack of knowledge of the requesting schools criteria, standards, and expectations was noted by 42% (65/156) of respondents. This held true even for programs that provided guidance because specified criteria are still too vague. A limitation of this trial is the potential for multiple respondents from the same school or who reviewed for the same institution, resulting in a skewed picture of what the current practice truly is.

In 2000, Rhoades-Catanach and Stout³ expanded on the initial work of Schwartz and Schroeder. The main goal of their study was to collect descriptive information highlighting the strengths and weaknesses in the current practice of external reviews for accounting faculty. A total of 118 institutions were contacted, with a total of 35 respondents representing 53 degree programs. Twenty-two of the 35 respondents were from doctoral-granting institutions (67%), while the remaining 13 institutions provided a master's degree in accounting or business administration as their highest degree. The respondents were asked to comment on the types of review requested for promotion to associate professor (n=20), promotion to full professor (n=11), and tenure decisions (n=22). In 58.5% of cases (31/53 programs) the reviewer was only asked to comment on the candidate's research, while 7.5% (4/53 programs) of reviews included only teaching and research, and 34% (18/53 programs) included the combination of teaching, research, and service. Approximately 75% of schools provide a benchmark for reviewers to use when evaluating. The candidate's *curriculum vitae* was the most common item sent to the external reviewer (30/35 respondents), followed by published research papers (29/35 respondents). Of the 13 programs that requested a review of the candidate's teaching, only nine respondents described sending additional teaching-related materials to the reviewers. Five send a teaching statement, three send teaching evaluations or evidence of teaching effectiveness, and only one send course materials. The confidentiality of the reviewer's comments varied among the 35 institutions with six programs promising complete confidentiality, six attempting to maintain confidentiality, but not assured, four stating the candidate will have complete access, three stating that the candidate may waive access, 11 institutions do not address confidentiality in their materials, and the remaining five programs did not respond to this question. The authors used their findings to develop guidance for the external review process for accounting faculty, but can be useful for any program that utilizes external review. Some of the recommendations include: 1) external reviewers should be limited to the research dimension of the candidate's performance; 2) if service is to be assessed, the request for comments should be limited to national-level service; 3) use of a formal peer evaluation instrument for assessment with specific questions aimed at assessing the particular dimension in question; 4) provide reviewers with specific criteria for evaluation, institutional information (mission statement, P & T guidelines, etc.), sufficient materials to allow an informed judgement without overwhelming them with unnecessary materials; 5) reviewers should be informed of any institutional policies affecting the confidentiality of their comments.

Concerns about the external review process are seen in many areas of higher education. In 1998, the American Political Science Association (APSA) published the results of two surveys that were developed in response to members' concerns of how external reviews are solicited, written, and used in their field. One survey was sent to members who were full professors (the reviewers, n=467) and one to the department chairs of the APSA members (the requestors, n=216). Schlozman⁴ found that of the 85 Ph.D. programs that responded, 90% require external review for faculty undergoing promotion and 91% for those undergoing tenure review. In contrast, 48% of Masters of Arts programs (22/45) request external review for tenure and 43% (19/45) for promotion and Bachelor of Arts programs request external review in 30% (26/86) and 26% (22/36) of cases, respectively. No information on whether schools had multiple programs was included. The mean number of external reviews requested differed by department type, with Ph.D. programs requesting an average of eight reviewers, compared to four request for faculty teaching in the Masters and Bachelors programs. Of the full professors surveyed, 61% (285/467) had been asked to perform a review in the past 12 months and of those, 92% (262/285) accepted the request. Regardless of the type of program, greater than 90% (194/216) require the candidate going up for promotion or tenure review to provide a list of potential reviewers, whereas, approximately 60% of Ph.D. programs (51/85) require faculty to provide a list of potential reviewers that would be inappropriate reviewers. Results of the study also found that 7% (32/467) of the respondents were at some time offered an honorarium for completing a review.

Most recently, Clemons and Goldberg⁵ developed a survey looking at the use of external reviews in the promotion and tenure process for academic librarians. A total of 1885 survey invitations were sent to librarians at 166 academic institutions with a 20.5% response rate. No information was provided on how many respondents came from the same academic institution. Of the respondents, 78% (149/191) were at institutions where the librarian was given faculty status and 52% (100/191) had tenure opportunities. A total of 80% (153/191) of respondents were from institutions that require external review for promotion; however, almost half (180/379) had never completed an external review. Of those that have participated in the external review process, 90%

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