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Proper Handling of Candidate Dossiers Who Has Control? Who Can Alter the Contents?

While it is clear that the candidate for reappointment, promotion and/or tenure (RPT) has primary responsibility for the development of the dossier (see Section 7.4.1), there are often misunderstandings about what happens to the dossier once it has been submitted.

The most common questions we receive on this point are: "How is the physical dossier to be controlled and maintained?" and "Who can add or subtract material?"

The dossier must be submitted no later than the deadlines dates specified in Section 7.4.12, although academic units may set earlier submission dates so long as everyone in the unit receives adequate notice of such (see Section 7.4.13). **Once the dossier has been submitted, the candidate no longer has possession of it and the dossier should not be returned to the candidate until the process has been completed or the candidate has formally withdrawn, in writing, from candidacy.**

Through the RPT process, the dossier is in the possession of the various levels of review which forward the dossier to the next level, along with their recommendation. **It is important to maintain this chain of control in order to accurately follow what has been added to the dossier, and when.**

While the dossier is no longer in the

possession of the candidate once it has been submitted, the candidate does have the right to inspect the dossier "in accordance with University policies on access to personnel files and must be given the opportunity to review and respond in writing to any material in or added to the file" (see Section 7.4.2). This right is elaborated in Sections 7.4.3 through 7.4.5 and in Section 7.4.8 where the candidate's right to ask for reconsideration at the first level at which there is a negative recommendation is described.

Section 7.4.3 contains what is probably the most misunderstood provision on RPT dossiers. Section 7.4.3 provides that if new material becomes available, "the candidate, academic unit head, Dean, or appropriate administrator may add such material to the dossier until the appropriate Provost renders his or her recommendation." **This section allows the candidate, department head, and dean (or library director or other administrator at that level) to add material to the dossier, but it does not allow others to do so.** RPT committees (academic unit and college) do not have the right to add material to the dossier, other than their letters of recommendation.

No one has the right to remove any material from the dossier (except, in rare cases and as ordered by the Provost's office, to correct a procedural error).

However, Section 7.4.3 does not mean that candidates themselves should directly be adding material to the dossier. They should not be in possession of the dossier once it has been submitted. Rather, any material added to the dossier should be added by the level of review in possession of the dossier at the time upon request of the candidate, academic unit head, or dean. (Of course, the unit head and the dean can add material when the dossier is in their possession.) In all cases there should be a cover letter requesting the addition or indicating the addition so that it is documented, and any added material must be copied to the candidate and to all levels of review that have already made recommendations. For example, if a candidate wants to respond to the recommendation letter of the College RPT Committee, the candidate should address the response to the Dean, asking that it be placed in the dossier, and should also copy the Department RPT committee, Department Head, and College RPT Committee.

While not described in Section 7.4, it is standard practice for the college office to prepare a “short file” for the Provost’s Office. The “short file” contains only the basic information in the dossier and not all of the supporting documents. It allows the Provost’s Office to make initial assessments much more quickly. Some College RPT committees may similarly start off with a review of a “short file.”

Once the RPT process is complete, the dossier will be returned to the candidate. This is usually done indirectly, through the college office.

The main point to keep in mind is that the dossier cannot be altered except through established contractual procedures, and the physical dossier should follow an established path that allows everyone to see what has happened to it throughout the process.

If you have any questions on this procedure, please do not hesitate to contact us.

— Dave Rubin, PhD.
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