

COSFAP: Guidance for Letters of Evaluation and Endorsement

To assist in our assessment of the candidate's accomplishments and contribution to the field, the Committee on Senior Faculty Appointments and Promotions (COSFAP) requires letters of evaluation (i.e., impartial, at arm's length letters from experts in the candidate's and related fields) and letters of endorsement (i.e., letters from individuals who have worked directly with the candidate). A minimum of three letters of evaluation for the proposed rank of Associate Professor and a minimum of five letters of evaluation for the proposed rank of Professor must be provided. While there is no upper limit on the number of letters of endorsement that can be provided, COSFAP recommends at least three letters of endorsement for candidates for promotion to associate professor and at least five letters of endorsement for candidates for promotion to professor.

I. Letters of Evaluation

Letters of evaluation must be written by individuals with expertise in the candidate's or related disciplines who can provide an impartial assessment of the candidate's accomplishments in the criteria selected for promotion (clinical excellence, education, research and/or service). The majority of the letters of evaluation must be authored by individuals with expertise in the candidate's discipline.

Letters of evaluation must be written by faculty whose academic or equivalent rank (e.g., experts at institutions such as the NIH or CDC that do not provide academic rank) is comparable to or higher than the candidate's requested level of promotion.

In order to demonstrate a regional reputation for candidates for promotion to Associate Professor and a national reputation for candidates for promotion to Professor, the majority of the letters of evaluation must come from institutions outside of the Chicagoland area. Letters of evaluation must come from at least three different academic institutions for candidates for promotion to Associate Professor and from at least five different academic institutions for candidates for promotion to Professor.

To ensure that letters of evaluation are at arm's length, potential authors of letters evaluation must be able to answer "no" to the following questions:

1. Could you be perceived as having a current or prior personal or professional relationship with the candidate that affects your ability to provide an impartial review (e.g., current or former mentor, mentee or close collaborator)?
2. Could you or your institution be perceived as having the potential to benefit from the outcome of the candidate's appointment or promotion?

The writer of the letter of evaluation should state their relationship, if any, with the candidate. Authors of letters of evaluation need not know or know of the candidate. However, they may know or know of the candidate in one of the following ways:

1. Current or former interaction with the candidate at professional meetings including attending the candidate's presentations
2. Current or former participation in a symposium or panel with the candidate
3. Current or former service on committees, study sections, advisory or editorial boards
4. Current or former review of the candidate's abstracts, manuscripts, grant applications or conference submissions
5. Current or former editor of a journal or book for which the candidate wrote an article or chapter
6. Current or former work as co-investigators on large, multi-site trials without direct collaboration or as co-authors with multiple authors and without direct collaboration
7. Current or former patient referrals to the candidate for medical care or consultation.

Authors of letters of evaluation must assess the candidate's accomplishments in the criteria selected for promotion (clinical excellence, education, research and/or service) and determine whether the candidate meets Rush's criteria for the proposed faculty rank. In addition, letter writers should comment on the candidate's regional or national reputation, contributions to the field and whether they believe the candidate would qualify for the proposed faculty rank or its equivalent at the evaluator's institution.

II. Letters of Endorsement

Letters of endorsement are authored by people with whom the candidate has worked directly including faculty and former trainees. These letters provide information about the candidate's accomplishments in the criteria selected for promotion (clinical excellence, education, research and/or service) from the perspective of the people who've worked with them closely, as well as the impact of the candidate's accomplishments on the local, regional, national and/or international medical community.

Because letters of endorsement are not at arm's length, authors of letters of endorsement may know the candidate in one or more of the following ways:

1. Collaborator, co-author, co-investigator, co-instructor, co-developer of academic projects or products or co-presenter of academic projects or products
2. Former teacher, advisor, supervisor or mentor during the candidate's training
3. Former trainee, advisee, supervisee or mentee of the candidate during the letter writer's training
4. Current or former colleague at the same institution as the candidate

However, to avoid any potential appearance of coercion, faculty, colleagues or staff who report directly to the candidate and current or former patients of the candidate may not author letters of endorsement.

In order to protect the integrity of the appointment and promotion process and to ensure reviewer confidentiality, the names of those who have agreed or declined to write letters of evaluation and endorsement should not be shared with the candidate, nor should the letters of evaluation or endorsement be shared with the candidate.