

Mid-South regional comprehensive) is that we do a better job anticipating who will not proceed successfully to tenure. Most institutions now expect a more rigorous third-year review, which gives faculty members who may not be successful at tenure and promotion the time to migrate to institutions that better fit their academic priorities. At my current institution, the promotion and tenure committee and the department head both provide annual feedback to all tenure-track faculty members. Universities have become more precise at measuring and stating tenure and promotion expectations, and the committees have more precise guidelines as well as training about what they can and cannot consider in their decision making. We also allow for a wider range of types of institutions of higher education and accept a broader definition of a successful and productive academic; this means that the template of what is a promotable or tenurable faculty member allows for more variance. These factors could result in greater self-selection or midcourse corrections prior to tenure decisions or mean different types of academics (those who wish to focus on teaching over research, for instance) can now be tenured.

Another factor that has influenced this landscape is that a wider variance of universities now requires external reviewers as part of the tenure and promotion decision. As more insti-

Because this discussion relies so heavily on personal experience, I find it intriguing that many external reviewers—especially those from more elite institutions—want to determine whether my candidate for promotion could receive tenure at their institution—an unasked for and frankly irrelevant conclusion. We want to know the impact and potential of the candidate's scholarship, and we will decide if that evaluation meets our standards and expectations. As Weyland notes, these standards can hardly be universal.

The proposal for payment that he devises also raises concerns. For a department (like mine) seeking three external reviews for each candidate, the cost is \$6,000. When three of my colleagues go up for tenure and promotion in 2021, I would face an \$18,000 hit to my departmental budget. If this recommendation is only for well-endowed institutions, Weyland should be clear about that instead of assuming a universal scenario. More to the point, in the current system he describes, the strongest candidates (or best connected) are able to garner reviews regardless of their institution. In his "pay-to-play" proposal, there is no merit—merely the best endowed are reviewed. To me, this is an even less-reliable system for the discipline than what we currently embrace. If we collectively agree that we have a problem with the external-review process, then before we endorse a specific solution, we should bet-

I am concerned about these references to a time when higher education was so much better because (1) this critique of deterioration and frivolousness is made about every new generation by every aging one; and (2) people like me (based, in my case, on gender and class) typically were not included in higher education.

tutions demand these reviews, and because the recent waves of retirements have decreased the ranks of full professors who can meet this need, the pool of faculty capable of providing detailed, thorough reviews may have become shallower. The proposal of paying more for the external review of a faculty member's scholarship than we usually pay for an external program review may change only the nature of the problem, if one exists, rather than resolve it.

I am not sure why the inability to secure reviews of a faculty member's scholarly record does not serve as peer review. If a faculty member comes up for tenure and the department cannot find an adequate number of reviewers willing to evaluate their colleague's research output, the professor's network and significance of their contribution already may have been evaluated.

I have one other concern regarding the presentation of this proposal. Kurt Weyland assumes a perspective on academia in which universities that are "top" house "lead scholars with higher academic standards" and all the remaining academics are merely an "unimpressive list of evaluators." What a narrow and depressing way to view the diverse realm of higher education! Different institutions have diverging missions, and excellent—as well as mediocre—scholars can be found in all types of programs. In seeking reviews for my tenure and promotion candidates, I look for scholars familiar with the research questions on which my faculty publish and who know that literature well. The specific institution where the scholars are housed is less significant than their CV.

ter understand the problem. An empirical question can be better measured and more clearly defined than by mere conversations and reminisces with friends who most likely work in similar environments. The discipline is broader than the relatively few more-elite institutions, and the question of how to best determine the next generation of tenured political scientists is worthy of a disciplinary-wide answer. ■

RESPONSE TO SPOTLIGHT ON PROMOTION LETTERS: A SOLUTION IN SEARCH OF A PROBLEM?

Valerie Johnson, DePaul University

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I am pleased to have an opportunity to respond to Kurt Weyland's article titled "Promotion Letters: Current Problems and a Reform Proposal." The article addresses an important topic that is fundamental to the tenure and promotion process: the veracity of external-review letters. According to Weyland, external reviews have lost their value because they are disproportionately positive and devoid of thorough and candid critique. To resolve the problem, he recommends that the profession raise the honorarium for reviews to \$2,000. For Weyland, a more generous honorarium likely would give universities "the undeniable right to receive a thorough, professional evaluation, which would dispassionately measure accomplishments and promise, or the lack thereof" and make it more likely that "leading scholars" would be more

willing to provide an honest assessment of candidates for tenure and promotion.

Although it is an interesting read, my candid assessment is that the article introduces a solution that is sorely in need of a problem. Having overseen and participated in several tenure and promotion cases, I am frankly unaware of any difficulties associated with receiving honest assessments of a candidate's scholarly record. If, in fact, the external-review process is in need of reform, suggestions for improvement should focus on (1) the institutional processes whereby external reviewers are selected, and (2) reviewers' frequent disregard for the guidelines that they receive from the institutions of candidates up for promotion.

Our very careers are dependent on feedback that is given objectively, without regard for reward or compensation. If we predicate reviews and evaluations on substantial honoraria, we will create a different system—a system that could be ripe for abuse.

In my experience, the reviewer acceptance rate exceeds 75%—hardly evidence that scholars are unwilling or reticent about participating in this most significant task. If I were to catalog the problems associated with the external-review process, the list would be relatively short and include the following: (1) reviewers rarely adhere to the deadline without some degree of prodding from the candidate's department chair; (2) reviewers often go off script and gratuitously answer questions that were not asked; and (3) rather than being overly positive or vacuous, as Weyland suggests, some reviewers go beyond an assessment of a candidate's scholarship and include nasty comments about a colleague's prospects for future success. Let me address the latter two problems succinctly. My department's guidelines given to reviewers include the following statement:

We have internal mechanisms for assessing teaching and service contributions, so we request that **your review not recommend conclusions concerning whether or not tenure and/or promotion should be awarded.**

Despite this guideline, it is not uncommon for reviewers to weigh in on the candidate's qualifications for tenure and promotion by utilizing the standards of their own institution. This is a mistake. When we consider the variability of requirements for promotion and tenure across institutions (and even within institutions), such an assessment may not bode well for a candidate if the requirements at the reviewer's institution are more stringent. Reviewers must take into account that there is no "one-size-fits-all" tenure process. Institutions are different and assess certain factors differently. The following statement is also included in our guidelines:

Our promotion rules ask that a reviewer assess an applicant's work in terms of its scholarly merit, originality, and significance within and beyond the academy. Your assessment will play a crucial role in how our department and university will evaluate [Candidate X's] scholarly performance.

Far from an adherence to the "Zeitgeist pervading US academia in the third millennium" and its purported concern with trigger warnings, this statement asks reviewers to adhere to the merits,

originality, and significance of the candidate's scholarship. That's all. This guideline is particularly important at institutions, such as my own, in which candidates are permitted to view redacted copies of their external reviews. I have read reviews that are an assault on a candidate's dignity. There is a significant difference between the tone and content of reviews that are honest and substantive and those that are downright mean-spirited. The latter leaves readers (i.e., faculty and administrators throughout the tenure and promotion process) wondering about the emotional stability of the reviewer or whether the reviewer perceives the task to be akin to hazing. To be sure, our enterprise has the capacity to irreparably harm a person's self-esteem. Most of us possess a degree of

self-doubt. A mean-spirited review may require that faculty members overcome tremendous trepidation to submit their scholarship for future review. In fact, some candidates never recover.

Another important critique concerns the internal processes that institutions use to select external reviewers. In my view, institutional processes may be the culprit associated with the concerns raised by the author. At my institution, DePaul University, unit personnel committees are encouraged to solicit three external-review letters per candidate. Candidates for promotion are asked to submit a list of suitable reviewers; the personnel committee submits a list of potential reviewers; and, finally, the personnel committee selects two reviewers from its own list and one from the candidate's list. It is the responsibility of the personnel committee to ensure that three important guidelines are followed to the letter: (1) the candidate and potential reviewers do not have a significant working relationship; (2) potential reviewers are capable of assessing scholarship in the candidate's subfield; and (3) to the extent possible, external reviewers are from comparable institutions. Failure to adhere to these important assurances may result in external-review letters that are slanted in one direction or another. Failure on the part of the personnel committee, however, should not be interpreted to mean that today's scholars are unwilling to carry out their responsibility to the profession. That surely has not been my experience in soliciting external reviews.

In conclusion, it is likely that every person reading this response owes a debt of gratitude to scholars who have taken the time to review and evaluate their work. One of the many benefits of membership in a profession dedicated to ideas is feedback. Our very careers are dependent on feedback that is given objectively, without regard for reward or compensation. If we predicate reviews and evaluations on substantial honoraria, we will create a different system—a system that could be ripe for abuse.

At a time when many institutions are struggling to keep their doors open due to declining enrollment and negative views about the significance of higher education, it is unfeasible to expect that institutions will expend considerable resources on generous honoraria. My institution assesses upwards of 45 tenure and promotion cases annually, each requiring three external reviews. I think it is safe to say that my institution may not be willing to commit

approximately \$270,000 (the equivalent of several faculty lines) to the external-review process, particularly because it has not identified it to be broken.

If done correctly, external reviews and other academic evaluations are time consuming and require a degree of dedication. However, we do it because it is a reciprocal process. We desire substantive reviews of our own work, so we provide substantive reviews of the work of other scholars in the profession. Considering that our very life's work requires the assessment of others, it does not make sense to monetize it beyond the nominal stipend. If we go down this road, we may unwittingly subordinate the camaraderie associated with service to the profession. ■

RESPONSE TO SPOTLIGHT ON PROMOTION LETTERS: THE DEVIL IS IN THE (FINANCIAL) DETAILS

Jane Junn, *University of Southern California*

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Kurt Weyland articulates a sensible proposal for providing monetary incentives to improve response rates to requests for dossier review for promotion to tenure and rank in political science at research universities. The absence of systematic data makes it difficult to know whether and with precision to what extent the rate of decline responses has changed over time. However, through experience, I share Weyland's perspective that it has become increasingly difficult to find willing, thorough, and frank dossier reviewers. At issue, then, are two challenges to the proposal based in feasibility and unintended consequences. Despite these challenges to Weyland's argument, I endorse his proposal as a

The realities of the variation in feasibility as a function of type of institution create the conditions for the obvious unintended consequence of further advantaging already advantaged departments at wealthy research universities. Whereas we might reply that paying for the best reviews of the best scholars is a predictable redundancy in a free market, a persuasive counterpoint privileges equity and fairness in the scholarly marketplace of ideas. A second possible unintended consequence is that although paying evaluators may provide an incentive to do the review, it does so without ensuring higher quality of the evaluation. Reviewers in high demand may accept 10 requests with compensation and write the same letters they would have written regardless of payment. Whereas Weyland's proposal might be most effective in altering the distribution of letters in the mix—including more detailed and frank evaluations from reviewers previously absent—payment alone simply incentivizes already permissive reviewers to agree to do more evaluations.

Questions about feasibility, fairness, and unintended consequences can be mitigated with two modifications to Weyland's proposal: one simple and one difficult. The simple amendment reinforces the principal-agent relationship with the provision of a monetary incentive by clarifying the task at hand for the reviewer and encouraging compliance. In my experience, requests for evaluation are widely varied; some come with explicit definitions of criteria for promotion and tenure, specific questions to answer about the work of the scholar in question, and a list of comparators. Others are widely defined and ask in broad terms about the quality of the research and other traits of the candidate. Colleagues I interact with sometimes chafe at the former; they feel constrained by the articulation of the request and therefore often disregard detailed instructions. Ignoring

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potential worthy solution—with the proviso to consider a pair of friendly amendments.

From the perspective of faculty and department leadership at highly ranked research universities, the proposal to induce compliance with a monetary incentive is reasonable. External evaluation of scholarly research is among the most valued information in a promotion case for these types of institutions. As a result, the provision of resources to collect evaluations by independent experts is likely to be prioritized. At the same time, political science departments at up-and-coming research universities outside of the top 15 or 20 may find the Weyland proposal less feasible given more modest resources, as well as a stronger demand for resource allocation for research support of faculty and graduate students. Similarly, political science departments in institutions that are more evenly balanced with respect to teaching and research productivity for evaluation in promotion may be under more pressure to prioritize department funds for student learning and teaching enhancement. Finally, well-endowed public and private institutions will have a systematically stronger advantage in providing monetary incentives compared to those with budget pressures.

specific questions would be more difficult to both undertake and countenance if the letter-writer is being paid; indeed, absent responses hewing to the queries can be requested to receive payment. Thus, enumerating specific instructions, comparators, and evaluation criteria combined with payment for completing the assigned task will enhance the useable information provided by external evaluations. Although it is without question more effort for departments to articulate their evaluation criteria and identify comparators for reviewers, the payoff to the task of assessing the candidate once letters are returned outweighs the initial effort.

The more difficult-to-achieve amendment is to create a discipline-wide pool of resources for the provision of evaluation of candidates. Individual institutions might contribute annually to an APSA fund for dossier review and then draw on that fund when evaluations are needed. Well-endowed institutions also can be encouraged to contribute to the fund while providing resources of their own to evaluations required for their individual review requirements.

Weyland articulates a reasonable and well-intentioned proposal to improve how political scientists evaluate our scholarly research.