

Guidelines and Best Practices for Department Letters

Resources:

Department Chairs/Merit and Promotions Committees are encouraged to review the three resources listed below and be familiar with Step Plus Guidelines and recommended practices for departmental letters.

Department Chairs Workshop on Academic Advancement:

<https://aadocs.ucdavis.edu/training/department-chairs-workshop-and-events/department-chairs-bag-lunch-presentation-and-materials/2018-2019/2019-chairs-bb-academic-advancement-final---4-10-19.pdf>

Step Plus Guidelines for Advancement:

<https://academicaffairs.ucdavis.edu/guidelines-advancement-professor>

FAQ's: <https://academicaffairs.ucdavis.edu/step-plus-faq>

Department Letter Guidelines:

- The rank and step of the advancement proposed must be clearly stated, as determined by the vote outcome.
- The vote outcome/results should be clear and easy to determine/confirm the outcome
- The guidelines for advancement under Step Plus hinge on the degree to which performance exceeds expectations for a 1.0-step merit advancement, and in how many of the fundamental areas. **It is critical that the department letter identify which of the three primary areas: teaching, research, and/or service, in which the candidate has exceeded expectations for a normal merit.** The department letter must make the case, based on evidence presented in the dossier for the additional half steps.
 - Excellence in all three areas, research, teaching, and service is expected. Outstanding performance in one area plus excellent performance in two others, warrants a 1.5 step advancement. Outstanding performance in two areas, plus excellent performance in the third warrants a 2.0 step advancement.
- The data referenced in the department letter MUST match the data presented in the dossier. If the candidate's statement references data that is not included in the dossier, the dossier should be edited before the information is referenced in the department letter.
- The department letter should not reference data from outside of the review period.
- The department letter cannot contain the Chair's individual recommendation, but rather the department's overall recommendation. Chairs may write a Confidential Chair's Letter for inclusion in the dossier. The letter will be provided to the candidate at the conclusion of the review process.

Best Practices:

- The department letter should use the data presented in the dossier to provide an analysis of performance as it relates to "demonstrated excellence in all areas, and outstanding performance in any specific area; a rehash of the details of the dossier should be avoided."
 - An overall rating for each area should be provided in the letter that denotes overall performance (such as "outstanding, excellent, very good, good, fair, etc."), and how those performance ratings, in combination, support the proposed advancement. Low ratings in

any given area can affect the overall recommendation. The letter must make a very strong case for an additional half step advancement when one performance area is outstanding, while another does not demonstrate excellence.

- The department letter should explicitly state department teaching expectations.
- Evidence for intellectual/conceptual leadership, uniqueness, and creativity should be stressed over independence.
- Efforts by the candidate to improve teaching (e.g. by consulting with the CEE) should be noted.
- In the final version of the letter, the proposed rank and step should be stated and supported by the vote. The term “Step x.x and up” should be edited to reflect only the step recommended (remove “and up”).
- The department vote should be clearly reported, including the number of faculty eligible to vote and the total number of responding voters, from which the recommended step is determined.
- For those faculty who are not eligible to vote, but may comment on the action, the letter should note their comments as provided by those faculty “Ineligible to Vote” rather than “Advisory.” An accounting of the actual number of votes from the ineligible faculty members should not be reported.
- If candidates who were on a sabbatical, or received course buyout or a teaching release; these topics should be addressed not ignored.