October 29, 2012

To: Henri Jansen, Chair of the Faculty Senate P&T Committee
From: Dudley Chelton, Chair of the 2012 CEOAS P&T Committee

Subject: External Letters for P&T

I am following up on the question about Conflict of Interest (COI) on external letters for P&T that I asked at the October 26 P&T Forum held by you and Rebecca Warner.

To reiterate, the present OSU policy for external letters as stated in Section IX Letters of Evaluation in the Faculty Handbook for Promotion and tenure guidelines states the following:

> Letters should generally be from leaders in the candidate's field, chosen for their ability to evaluate the candidate's scholarly work. Letters should not be solicited from co-authors, co-principal investigators, former professors, or former students. If such letters are necessary, include an explanation and state why the evaluator can be objective.

The 2012 CEOAS P&T Committee appreciates that the intent of this policy is to avoid conflict of interest. However, coauthors and co-PIs are sometimes precisely the leaders in the candidate’s field whose input is most valuable to the P&T review. Indeed, a P&T candidate who is coauthoring papers with the leaders in their field is likely to be doing cutting edge research. Moreover, coauthors and co-PIs can provide a perspective that could be valuable to the P&T review process about the candidate’s role in a collaboration and the candidate’s ability to work with a group on a coauthored paper. There is no guarantee whatsoever that evaluations from coauthors and co-PIs will be positive. It is very conceivable that they will be the opposite.

We would like to propose changing the OSU policy for disallowing external reviews by anyone who has ever been a coauthor or co-PI by adopting the same definition of Conflict of Interest that the National Science Foundation uses for proposal reviews. As per the text highlighted in yellow on pages 12-13 of the attached Chapter II from the NSF Grant Proposal Guide, NSF defines potential conflicts of interest or bias in the selection of reviewers as:

> ... all persons ... who are currently, or who have been collaborators or co-authors with the individual on a project, book, article, report, abstract or paper during the 48 months preceding the submission of the proposal. Also ... those individuals who are currently or have been co-editors of a journal, compendium, or conference proceedings during the 24 months preceding the submission of the proposal.
With this definition, the P&T Committee would be able to use coauthors as external reviewers, as long as the coauthorship was more than 4 years prior to the initiation of the P&T review.