

February 12, 2004

TO: COCC Staff

FROM: Eric Buckles
Director of Human Resources

Serving as a Reference for Internal Candidates

- Agreeing to provide a reference is purely voluntary. There is no legal requirement or policy that says anyone is due or entitled to a reference. If someone is uncomfortable with providing a reference, he/she can always decline. It is perfectly okay to tell the person making the request that given your role on the committee you're not comfortable with providing a reference. However, you may also tell the person that writing or not writing the letter is separate from the selection process and does not mean they have an advantage or disadvantage in the actual selection process.
- If a letter of reference is requested, it may be more appropriate (and comfortable) for a faculty member to offer his/her name to be listed for personal contact rather than provide a letter. A confidential phone reference can allow for more candor. Agreeing to be a reference doesn't necessarily mean that it will have to be positive.
- When someone (who is serving on a committee) is considering a request to provide a letter or be listed as a reference, here are some things to think about:
- A committee member's responsibility is to help find the person best suited for the position. Being a reference isn't necessarily in conflict with that goal. Other than supervisors, committee members don't see candidate files (and personnel files of internal applicants) until the position is closed. Letters of reference are submitted before the deadline and are based on observations and interactions. A review of the file may indicate things that the person providing the reference was unaware of. A reference letter in no way obligates the writer to support that candidate throughout the process, especially after he/she has reviewed all of the applicant files.
- Before providing a letter or agreeing to be a reference, it is perfectly okay to talk with the candidate about what you are willing to say, or not say, about the candidate. This may change the request or, at least, prevent any surprises.
- Finally, in our effort to find the best person for the job, a fellow faculty member and/or the supervisor are often the best sources of relevant information regarding internal candidates. Their observations and opinions are going to part of the discussion regardless of whether they are listed as a reference. Again, being a reference doesn't obligate anyone to support that person.