

External Manuscript Review Workshops for Assistant Professors

Rationale

Many assistant professors find active mentors and colleagues on the Northwestern faculty who may provide valuable feedback on work in progress and who provide advice about the profession. Other assistant professors may work in a field that is underrepresented at Northwestern or for other reasons desire advice from an external evaluator in the field who is able to review a book manuscript or corpus of articles at a critical point in the probationary term.

Funding

Weinberg College supports such external mentoring by providing the option of a single, focused manuscript review workshop and will cover half the documented expenses up to a total contribution of \$1500. The Department provides the other half of the needed funding. This combined amount should cover transportation, meals, hotel, and possibly a modest honorarium for an external faculty reviewer to visit campus. Departments and/or programs may request this funding once per probationary term for each tenure-line assistant professor. If a department wishes to be considered for support from the Dean's Office for such a workshop, please contact Elizabeth Kim, Assistant Dean for Faculty Advancement, at least six months before the workshop is scheduled to take place.

General Framework

- The assistant professor whose research is to be the subject of the workshop identifies one or possibly two tenured colleagues in the field whom the candidate believes would be strong, constructive critics of the work in progress. The individual(s) should not have previous association with the candidate (e.g. graduate teacher, collaborator, etc.).
- The department chair or possibly program director would make the contact with the external reviewer(s), describe the program, and issue invitation(s), offering to cover transportation, meals, and hotel. If appropriate, the chair may also offer an honorarium of up to \$300. A general budget for the travel portion should be discussed in advance to ensure shared expectations. The department documents all expenses and eventually itemizes them. After the manuscript workshop is over, the Department Administrator submits to the Dean's Office the itemized expenses and receipts, along with the department's chart string.
- The date for the workshop is agreed to in consultation with the assistant professor and the external reviewer(s).
- The materials to be discussed should be sent to the external reviewer(s) far enough in advance of the meeting to allow the reviewer adequate time to read and critique the work.
- The reviewer(s) should be expected to mark up the manuscript. During the visit, the candidate, a tenured Northwestern faculty member, and the external reviewer(s) participate in a workshop session (typically 2-3 hours long) to discuss issues raised by the work. Other Northwestern faculty may also be invited to listen in, depending on the candidate's wishes. The candidate may wish to authorize their departmental

representative for the tenure review or other departmental mentor to make the final call on who is invited to observe the workshop.

- The external reviewer(s) provide a written response for the assistant professor's reference. It might be helpful to advise the visitor(s) to think of this as a careful reader's report for a press, one that would catch weaknesses or oversights in the writing that could trigger a "revise and resubmit."
- The tenured Northwestern colleague who is present should follow up with the assistant professor to continue the discussion and provide ongoing advice. The goal is to help projects reach completion and for assistant professors to maintain momentum. It is especially important in cases where the workshop results in significant feedback and advice for revisions that the author in question is encouraged to tackle any changes that they deem necessary in an efficient manner. The workshop should not become a reason for hesitation or delay.
- The workshop should be absolutely severed from any departmental, evaluative, tenure-related judgments; it is an employee benefit and not a relevant record for their evaluation. The document and content of the workshop must be solely the "property" of the manuscript writer, not the department.

Comments from Participants

Within this framework, there are variants on how the sessions might be held. Here are some comments from three assistant professors who held such a session:

Colleague A brought in two external scholars and a senior critic from another Northwestern department. A describes the session:

I chose to have an informal and private session rather than a public one. I originally intended a public session, but after consulting with colleagues, I was convinced a smaller and private discussion would be more productive for me.

Indeed, a public session would have meant that critics would start by giving a summary of my argument before criticizing it, and/or that I would need to circulate the manuscript to interested parties so that they have a look. After a 5 minute introduction by myself, the two external mentors each gave a 20 minute comment. We had planned to move on to a chapter by chapter discussion, but instead decided that I should answer the main points right away. The discussion took very interesting paths, and we decided to drop the tight schedule that we agreed upon at the beginning, and to focus on the main theoretical and methodological questions addressed by the book manuscript. Even though the discussion lasted 4 hours of intense discussion, we did not have time to really go over the empirical chapters one by one. This was not a problem as two of the reviewers gave me their annotated printed versions of the manuscript, so that I could see what their precise comments were. I think this is of great help as I revise the manuscript, and that others should ask panelists to do the same, provided that the extent panelists agree.

To sum up, first, I think the timing of this kind of session is essential. Ideally, it should come after one has already triggered the attention and interest of an editor with whom the author might want to discuss the comment, and that it should not come too late in the tenure track. Otherwise, the author won't have the time and energy to respond to

the comments. Second, I think the interdisciplinary composition of the panel can be very rewarding (it was in my case), but that privacy rather than publicity of the meeting will ensure that comments remain focused on the manuscript.

Colleague B brought in two external scholars and invited a few people to be non-speaking members of the audience.

The visitors were incredibly helpful. Two scholars whom I chose read the manuscript. The workshop was just me, the two readers, the Chair, and a few people I invited (but it was open to faculty within the department). It was private, only—no public colloquium component, and I would leave it like that so that the sole focus of the senior invited scholars is the manuscript. The workshop was quite long, facilitated by the Chair, but mostly run by me. I had questions I had asked them about. They then gave me their copies of the manuscript with their notes on it, and/or a readers report. I incorporated the comments into my revisions (I already had a contract), and they made the book enormously better, and passed the next round of reader's reports.

It's great for post-docs and new faculty to attend (but not to speak). I would suggest *requiring* the audience members to write up readers reports (one did, one didn't). Then we went to dinner after, which was a nice finish.

Colleague C is in an article field where it is important to bring in grant support. Because of the lack of close colleagues at Northwestern, C invited one advisor to campus.

I decided on making it a private session where my external advisor only met with the chair and me. The focus of my meeting was to discuss my past and ongoing research in an area of common interest. As a result of the session, the external colleague and I decided to collaborate on writing a grant proposal. I used some of my start up money to travel to the external reviewer's institution three times for further consultation on our joint project. A manuscript is currently in the early stage of preparation. I only wish I had arranged this visit earlier in my career here at NU.