

# Evaluating Electronic Products for Dossiers: Guidelines for Unit Heads, Directors and Candidates

University Libraries, University at Buffalo  
The State University of New York

*Approved by University Libraries Faculty by resolution on June 14, 2004*

Given the increasing popularity and acceptance of the World Wide Web and other digital media as a viable means of scholarly communication, increasing numbers of library faculty come before the Appointment Promotion and Tenure Committee (APT) with electronic publications. Many institutions have recognized that scholarly work available through technological media should be evaluated as an integral part of a faculty member's accomplishments.

The American Association for History and Computing in cooperation with the Modern Language Association and American Political Science Association state that:

“Institutions and, when appropriate, departments should develop their own written guidelines so that faculty members engaged in research and teaching with digital media can be adequately, fully, and fairly evaluated and rewarded.”<sup>1</sup>

This document describes guidelines developed by the APT Committee and accepted by the library faculty. Its purpose is to help Unit Heads and candidates consider electronic publications in the context of promotion and tenure.

Librarians under consideration for reappointment, promotion, and tenure still require a well-rounded dossier that includes evidence of scholarship and particularly, refereed publications. Scholarship is the creation of new knowledge or organization of knowledge in a new framework that shows research, reflection, analysis, and synthesis. Current practices define “refereed” as undergoing rigorous peer review **prior** to publication. This includes published books, which, while not refereed in the same way as journals, are also rigorously reviewed prior to publication.

Refereed electronic products are evidence of scholarly accomplishment. Non-refereed electronic products supplement one’s vitae and may show evidence of contributions to the libraries or the profession, but without external evaluation, they are not sufficient evidence of scholarly accomplishment.

## **Refereed Electronic Publications**

Publications in refereed electronic sources, such as e-journals and e-books are evaluated in the same way as publications in paper format. For example, publishing in an online, peer-reviewed journal is equivalent to publishing in a peer-reviewed print journal. Experts in the field review the materials carefully to determine their scholarly nature and contribution to the discipline.

Refereed electronic products are treated as other scholarly material in the dossier preparation.

---

<sup>1</sup> “Guidelines for Evaluating Digital Media Activities in Tenure, Review, and Promotion (Draft),” *Journal for the Association of History and Computing*. III:3 (November 2000). <http://mcel.pacificu.edu/JAHC/JAHCIII3/EDITORIAL/tenrec.html>. Viewed December 12, 2000. See also “Guidelines for Evaluating Digital Media Activities in Tenure, Review, and Promotion” on the AAHC website. [http://www.theaahc.org/tenure\\_guidelines.htm](http://www.theaahc.org/tenure_guidelines.htm) (viewed May 10, 2004).

### **Non-Refereed Electronic Publications**

In the past in-house publications by Libraries faculty were not considered scholarly contributions, unless they presented new ideas or research and were subjected to external review. These materials included guides, bibliographies, and instructional or administrative materials that described a subject, a specific source, or a process. Today such materials are predominantly prepared as electronic products. The global nature of the World Wide Web makes electronic information more publicly accessible outside the University and potentially more valuable.

Thus, although they may not undergo rigorous review prior to publication, in-house electronic products may merit higher consideration than printed in-house publications when documented by outside review or evaluation as explained below.

### **Preparing the Dossier**

Dossiers should include copies of electronic products as part of the supplementary materials. Only those items where significant intellectual contribution has been made should be included.

When appropriate, Unit Heads/Directors should solicit external reviews from experts in the field, and specifically request evaluators to:

- Evaluate the product in the medium in which it was produced rather than from a static print copy.
- Address the value, benefits, advantages, and disadvantages of the product in its electronic form.
- Evaluate the intellectual content of the product within the context of the discipline.
- Describe the originality and significance of new contributions to learning or the profession; and the duration and usefulness of what is learned.
- Describe how the electronic product enhances the reputation of its author, the University Libraries, and, if possible, the University at Buffalo.

The Unit Head/Director should:

- Summarize the evaluators' credentials. Since APT and PRB rely on evaluators' letters to document scholarly or professional contributions, it is incumbent on the Unit Head to explain and give credibility to the evaluators' position in the field.
- Show that the piece was validated by peers, communicated to peers and broader audiences, recognized, accepted, cited, and adopted or used by others including unsolicited comments or feedback.
- Include published reviews and documentation of leading institutions' links to the materials created at UB.

Candidates must be able to justify their work:

- Incorporate personal descriptions of the electronic product, such as its purpose and common themes, how it is related to previous research in the area, and any collaborative relationships with other faculty members and students, in the Statements of Research and Service Interests.

## Appendix

APT surveyed the peer institutions listed in the Appendix to the Criteria Document for current practices regarding the evaluation of web products in the personnel review process:

**University of California Libraries** <http://libraries.universityofcalifornia.edu/>

While no specific dossier preparation information was found, useful discussion on Scholarly Communication and the new models of publication, particularly regarding peer-review and journal quality, is available at <http://libraries.universityofcalifornia.edu/scholarly/scholcommfaq.html>

**University of Florida at Gainesville**

No references found to e-scholarship or web products.

**University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**

Currently developing guidelines for electronic publications. Wide variance between departments but promotion and tenure committees follow recommendations of the departments who presumably know the e-journals in their field. Web publishing by librarians tend to be listed as part of librarianship or public service [Section Two of our Criteria Document] unless they fall clearly under “research and publication.” [Section Four of our Criteria Document]. (from a personal contact.)

**Indiana University**

No written guidelines. Web products are considered in conjunction with the documentation that describes their value. Evaluations remain within the Libraries as there is no PRB equivalent. (from a personal contact in Human Resources.)

**University of Iowa**

No information available.

**University of Michigan**

No reference in their staff manual at [http://www.lib.umich.edu/hr/lib/staff\\_manual\\_promotion\\_lib.html](http://www.lib.umich.edu/hr/lib/staff_manual_promotion_lib.html)

**University of Minnesota**

No information available.

**Ohio State University**

The Libraries AP&T Committee’s excerpted recommendations on e-scholarship (Jan. 2002): <http://www.lib.ohio-state.edu/Staff/apt/e-scholarship.html>

AP&T submits the following recommendations concerning electronic scholarship:

1. Electronic publications will be considered by AP&T in the same way as publications in print format. Publications that have received the imprimatur of the process of peer review are highly desirable.
2. As with print articles, electronic journal articles should be published in a high-quality journal of a scholarly nature, with a strong archival and documentation system for future access and retrieval.
3. In addition to electronic publications, Web pages which are a substantial part of the candidate’s dossier will be reviewed by external reviewers.
4. The faculty members being reviewed are responsible for placing print copies of electronic publications in their files, and should include the URLs.

AP&T also refers colleagues to the *Criteria* document, which already provides for consideration of electronic publications. Excerpts follow, and you can see the entire document at: <http://www.lib.ohio-state.edu/Staff/apt/critproc00.html>.

*VI.C.1.a. Evidence of librarianship/teaching*

*iv.* organization, retrieval, and manipulation of data in print, non-print, and electronic forms to assist Libraries users

*VI.C.1.b. Documentation of librarianship/teaching for promotion and/or tenure*

*viii.* Documents illustrating activities, such as bibliographic aids, pages from web sites, internal documents written as part of assigned duties and special projects, detailed description of activities reported in the FAR, etc.

*VI.C.2. Scholarship*

Scholarship is the creation of new knowledge or organization of knowledge within a new framework or presentation. In the University Libraries, scholarship usually takes the form of a publication, but it can also be evidenced in other ways, e.g., exhibits, public performances, electronic resources, papers at professional meetings, etc. Creative works not related to the candidate's responsibilities will be considered as supplemental evidence of contributions to the University and/or broader community. Scholarship should be consistent with the mission of the libraries.

*VI.C.2.a. Evidence of scholarship*

In general, regardless of their formats, works that demonstrate command of a subject, collect and analyze new data, undergo rigorous peer review prior to publication, and are widely disseminated are particularly important as evidence of scholarship. . . .

*v.* creative works, performances, exhibits, and electronic resources (to be evaluated in terms of the depth and degree of scholarship demonstrated)

*VI.C.2.b. Documentation of scholarship for tenure and/or promotion*

*iv.* For electronic resources, a printed representation of the work with the date and url or other appropriate citation

**Pennsylvania State University**

See page four of this document: <http://www.libraries/psu.edu/pubinfo/tenure.pdf>

Halfway down the first paragraph: "Contributions will be evaluated in the following areas: publication in peer-reviewed journal, books and other significant publication media..."

**University of Texas at Austin**

Librarians do not have faculty status nor any review process similar to ours. (from a personal contact)

**University of Washington**

Librarians do not have faculty status but do have requirements for continuing appointment. Professional contributions are viewed liberally and there is nothing specific about web publications. Teaching faculty handbook offered no insight on web publication. (from a personal contact)

**University of Wisconsin-Madison** <http://wiscinfo.doit.wisc.edu/secfac/divcomm/General.htm>

Librarians do not appear to have faculty status. Each academic division sets its own tenure criteria. A brief excerpt from the Physical Sciences Division tenure requirements describes how to list research publications: "The journals may be either print or electronic, but electronic journals must be refereed, archived and accessible for reference."