

## The Four Deadly Sins of File Organization *or*

A Pretty Cover Doth Not Make for a Good Book, but a Pretty File Doth Make for a  
Smoother Promotion Review

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Adding insult to injury, faculty members about to undergo promotional review, either for tenure or for the rank of full professor, must create a file in addition to that onerous summary vita. For those colleagues who have created and maintained well-organized files from the very beginning, this article most likely is not for you. However, I suspect that you are in small company. If you are more like I was, you probably started off with the best of intentions, but when life (and academia) got in the way, the file began to more closely resemble the chaos of an office during finals week. Thus, when the time comes to present the hard evidence of all of one's teaching, scholarly and service efforts, the difficult task of creating a file can be time consuming and frustrating. Furthermore, the expectations about what to include as evidence, and what the finished product should look like, is not always clear.

Having served both on the Personnel Council and the Committee of Six Full Professors, I have seen many variations of files and levels of presentation. In terms of their content, the productivity, creativity, and significance of the work of my colleagues truly is inspiring. That being said, there frequently is a mismatch between content and structure (i.e., the file). The purpose of this article, therefore, is to provide *my* advice on how to put one's best foot (or file) forward for promotion, as well as to emphasize that presentation does count.

Candidates for promotion need to remember that the members of the Personnel Council and Committee of Six come from the entire campus, and thus are not necessarily familiar with the genre of material that is put into a file. As we all are, these committee members are pressed for time and want to be as efficient as possible in reviewing files of the candidates. It would behoove candidates, therefore, to organize their files to be as “user friendly” as possible. Prior to writing this piece, I informally interviewed the University Services Program Associate for the Secretary of the Faculty and Academic Staff who has seen them all. On the basis of our observations, what follows are the four deadly sins of file organization and their possible remedies.

#### Deadly Sin #1: Paper Glut

I have seen the equivalent of the Himalayan Mountain Range of paper sitting in boxes in the Secretary of the Faculty Office, and it is indeed overwhelming. Candidates need to be selective about what they include in their files, because it is easy to miss the important materials in a mountain range of duplicate copies, printouts of every e-mail message received in the six years at UW-Green Bay, and committee memos. The ability to make the distinction of what or what not to include is a difficult one. Should a candidate include every syllabus for the same course, dating back to his or her first semester? If the intent is to document progress and change in the course, by all means do so. However, if the syllabus has remained fairly constant, only several representative samples are necessary. The same is true for course assignments, exams and activities. One easy way to reduce paper glut is to place documentation in only one section (i.e., teaching, scholarship, or service) of the file. Your colleagues who

are reviewing your file do not have to be hammered repeatedly by the same documents appearing multiple times.

#### Deadly Sin #2: The Rickety Box

There are some very sorry excuses for receptacles for the documentation for tenure and promotion. Files tightly jammed into a tearing cardboard box can make for an unhappy reviewer. Whereas it certainly is not necessary to hire Gucci to design the ultimate crate, a box that is easy to open and that accommodates *hanging* files reduces the frustration of trying to locate documents

#### Deadly Sin #3: Population Explosion of File Folders

Not every piece of paper warrants its own file folder. I personally advocate combining related work into the same file folder, which should be clearly labeled. For example, within the hanging file of “scholarship,” one could have a separate file for journal articles, book chapters, or unpublished manuscripts. Unless an entire book is written by the candidate for promotion, only include the front page matter and a copy of the chapter (s) in the file. Although not required, having sections of the file color coded also simplifies digging for documents.

#### Deadly Sin #4: The Disconnect Between Summary Vita and File

Most of the time, reviewers of the file begin with the candidate’s summary vita, flagging what they would like to look up in the file. I have seen very complicated coding systems that require graduate-level courses to understand. Candidates for promotion should ensure that the summary clearly indicates where the supporting documents can be found. For example, a list of what documents are in the file and where they can be found can appear at the end of each section of the summary vita. If the candidate

wants to make sure that certain pieces are seen by all reviewers, include the location in parentheses in the actual text of the summary vita—sometimes it is okay to repeat oneself!

### The Remedy: Promotion Tutors

As a result of my frustrations reviewing files, last year I proposed, as Chair of the Committee of Six, that we create a group of faculty, *Promotion Tutors* (PT), who are interested in serving as mentors in the file preparation process. PTs would be interested tenured faculty from any unit who have had experience serving either on the Personnel Council or Committee of Six, and would be willing to be an informal resource for faculty preparing a promotion file. The PT would be paired with an interested faculty member who is coming up for promotion. The PT would go through the materials that the candidate has placed in the SOFAS office, making sure that they are appropriate and appropriately organized. The PT would not take the place of the candidate's own mentor, serving in a more specialized and specific capacity. Although it is not mandatory that a candidate for promotion have a Promotion Tutor, I did find research suggesting that multiple mentors led to faculty reporting overall higher job satisfaction (Wasserstein, Quistberg, & Shea (2007).

Sometime in the near future, I envision much of faculty documentation appearing in digital format. Instead of boxes and hanging files, we would have websites where all could be accessed from the convenience of our computers. No doubt that there will be better ways to organize a promotion file in cyberspace, and I hope to write that article as well. Until that time, if you meet the criteria for a Promotion Tutor, and would like to

mentor our colleagues in this way, please send me an e-mail and I will forward the list to the SOFAS who will make the list available to upcoming candidates for promotion.

Wasserstein, A.G., Quistberg, D A., & Shea, J.A. (2997). Mentoring at the University of Pennsylvania: Results of a faculty survey. *Journal of General internal Medicine*, 22, 210-214.