

# Writing proposals for peer review at Evergreen

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# Threshold requirements

Does this proposal:

- Meet the parameters of the request for proposals?
  - Is the work proposed in line with what's being funded?
  - Is the applicant eligible to apply?
- Respond to application requirements?
  - Is all the required information in the proposal?
- Meet formatting requirements?

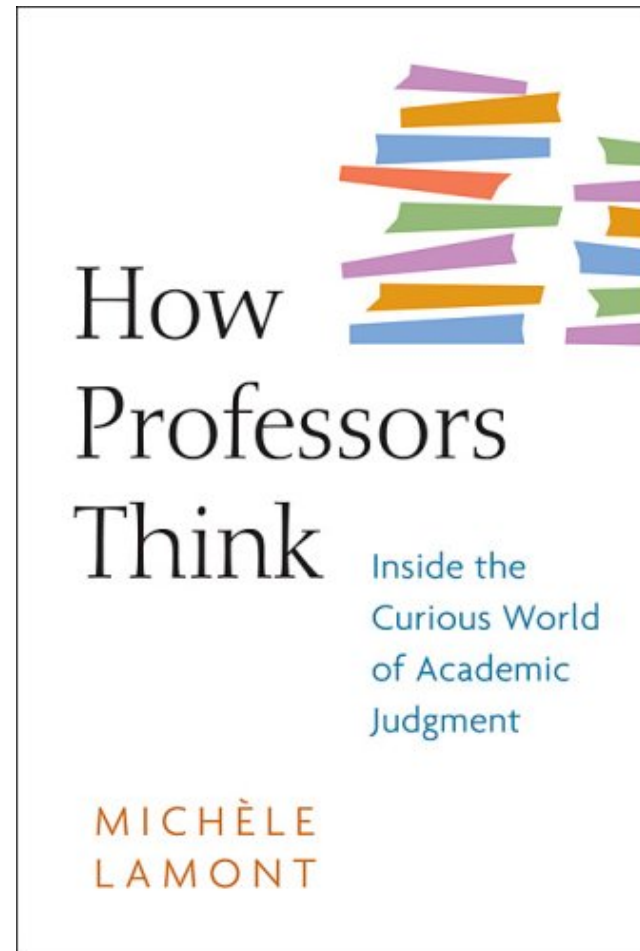
If it doesn't, there's a good chance it won't be reviewed

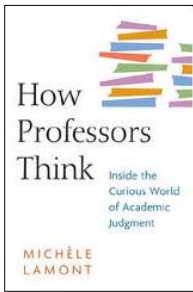
# Peer review process

- Faculty Foundation Grants and Sponsored Research Awards are peer-reviewed
  - Only faculty serve on the review committee and determine awards; grants staff provide support
  - Appointment is a rotating governance assignment; Agenda Committee seeks broad representation with 5-8 members.
- The committee looks at how proposals:
  - Respond to formal review criteria
  - Compare to other proposals in the pool

# Insights into Peer Review: A study

- Michèle Lamont studied funding processes for five academic grant and fellowship programs:
  - American Council of Learned Societies; Social Science Research Council, Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, and two others
- She conducted 81 interviews with panelists, panel chairs, program officers
- The following is some of what she found





# Factors influencing decisions

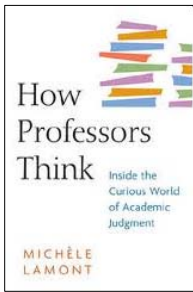
- **Clarity** is one of the most important factors
  - Clarity is often equated with quality
  - Good writing is seen as evidence of clear thinking

‘... quality manifests itself through “craftsmanship,” “depth,” “attention to details,” and “soundness.” These in turn are associated with “rigor” and “solidity” ...’

‘Particularly with respect to the proposal, form is as important as substance: it is a prerequisite for running the race’

‘A clear proposal, according to one English professor, “makes me feel confident they will write a good book...if it’s not carefully written, it makes me worry about thoughtfulness...the depth of thinking.”’

Source: Michèle Lamont. *How Professors Think: Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgment*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: 2009.



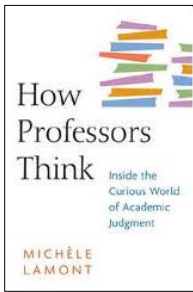
# Factors influencing decisions

- **Significance**—scholarly, political, social
  - Scholarly
    - Does the project add to the field?

‘Is the project likely to produce generalizable [sic] results or does it speak to broad theoretical questions or processes, as opposed to addressing narrowly defined or highly abstract topics.’
  - Political and social
    - Can be tricky; often considered secondary to scholarship; can even have negative impact

‘Overall, panelists are more concerned with the project’s likely influence on knowledge and on academia than with the social or political impact of research.’

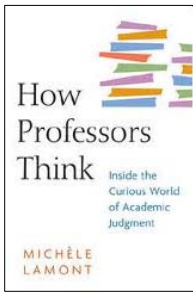
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# Factors influencing decisions

- **Originality**, freshness, new ideas lend a sense that the work is significant, important
  - New approaches/methods
  - New question(s)
  - New perspectives
  - New connections
  - New takes on a tired or trendy topic
  - New arguments
- Successful proposals root the case for **significance** and **originality** in literature

Source: Michèle Lamont. *How Professors Think: Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgment*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: 2009.

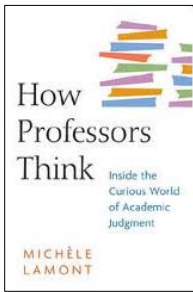


# Factors influencing decisions

- **Letters of recommendation**
  - They matter
  - The best are from scholars in a position to know the subject and the scholar
  - They address the scholar's abilities and the validity of the proposal's significance and approach and ground those assessments in the literature
  - They avoid effusive praise and come from individuals perceived as 'straight shooters'

Source: Michèle Lamont. *How Professors Think: Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgment*.  
Cambridge, Massachusetts: 2009.





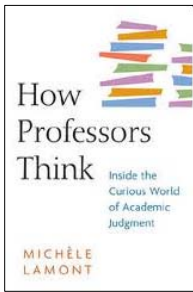
# Factors influencing decisions

- **Methods and theory**

- Reviewers like to see alignment of
  - Research question
  - Theory informing the research
  - Method proposed
  - Evidence to be found that will answer the question

It's risky to propose research without a clear question in mind, but it's been done successfully.

Source: Michèle Lamont. *How Professors Think: Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgment*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: 2009.



# Factors influencing decisions

- **Feasibility** – can it be done?
  - Scope of the project
    - Timeline; plan of work; budget
  - Preparedness of applicant
    - Past experience and background; necessary skills; resources

“If you haven’t got the tools, you’re going to write about something that’s cool and interesting, but you’re not going to do it in a scholarly way. That’s a waste of money.”

-Historian

Source: Michèle Lamont. *How Professors Think: Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgment*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: 2009.

# Cautions

Here are some common problems that can raise reviewer concerns about faculty grant proposals:

- Projects that appear **overly ambitious** for the time and funding requested
- Projects where the **primary purpose is curriculum development**, not the scholarly or creative advancement of the applicant

# Cautions (cont.)

- **Travel** that doesn't appear justified for the needs of the project
- **Costly instrument** purchases with long shelf lives for projects of short duration or minimal significance
- **Budgets** where costs aren't linked to project activities; where estimates aren't justified; that ask for too much or too little to get the job done