Dear NAME OF THE COLLEAGUE TO WHOM YOU’RE WRITING,

Thank you for agreeing to serve as an external reviewer for NAME OF THE TENURE CANDIDATE’s application for tenure. This is a labor-intensive task, and your willingness to assist us in this review is deeply appreciated.

As each institution’s process differs with respect to the tenure, this letter provides some insight into Skidmore’s process. Skidmore College is a selective, private liberal arts institution where teaching is paramount; on average, our faculty teach five courses or the equivalent each academic year. Tenure and promotion files are evaluated according to three areas: teaching, scholarship, and service, and we are asking you to address the candidate’s scholarship.

Skidmore candidates for tenure typically select their own external reviewers with few departmental exceptions. We encourage candidates to choose expert reviewers who have the knowledge base and vantage point to critically evaluate their work fairly and objectively. While this does not preclude candidates from choosing reviewers that they know, we recommend candidates select a range of letter writers that have the expertise, stature in the field, knowledge of the candidate’s research, and familiarity with the liberal arts setting to write the most effective letters. It is helpful if you would contextualize your relationship to the candidate in your letter and briefly describe your credentials.

The tenure process at Skidmore has three stages. During the first stage, the applicant’s file is reviewed by the home department or program, and a recommendation regarding tenure is made to the College’s Appointments and Tenure Committee (ATC). ATC is a multidisciplinary committee of seven faculty representing various college divisions (i.e., humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, arts, and pre-professional programs). The ATC reviews the file along with the letters written by the candidate’s colleagues in their home departments/programs, other colleagues within the College, and the external reviewers. In terms of your letter, it will be read by members of the ATC, the Associate Dean of the Faculty, the Dean of the Faculty, and in some cases depending on the individual department or program policies and procedures, by colleagues in the candidate’s department or program. The candidate will not have access to your letter unless the individual is denied tenure.

It is likely that ATC members are not familiar with the candidate’s disciplinary conventions, so external letters are of the utmost importance in helping them understand the importance and relevance of the candidate’s work in the discipline. The ATC depends heavily on the external reviews in its assessments. Once the file, including all letters, is reviewed, the ATC makes a recommendation to the President regarding promotion and tenure. The President then makes his recommendation to the Board of Trustees for final approval.

Letters that are most useful to the ATC do the following:

* Provide a perspective on publishing or exhibition conventions in the discipline; for example:
  + Co-authorship
  + Rate of publication or completion of works
* Speak to the quality of candidate’s work; for example:
  + Rigorous and appropriate methodology
  + Conceptual sophistication
  + Aesthetic value
* Position the candidate’s work in the broader disciplinary context, for example:
  + How does the work push the disciplinary discourse forward?
  + In what ways does it build on extant knowledge?
  + Are the candidates’ professional contributions creative and useful to the broader discipline?
* Address the quality of the candidate’s dissemination outlet, for example:
  + Journal rankings
  + Quality of book presses
  + Prestige of artistic venues
* Illuminate the nature of the scholarly or artistic process, for example:
  + What sort of intellectual, scholarly, or artistic effort was necessary to produce the work?
* Evaluate the candidate’s promise in making important, meaningful contributions to the discipline in the future

In sum, we hope to receive evaluative letters that help illuminate the strengths and/or weaknesses of the candidate’s work in appropriate disciplinary contexts. These kinds of letters are valued and most welcome.

Again, we understand that reviewing a colleague’s body of work takes time and considerable effort. Thank you for your assistance in this review.

In gratitude,

NAME OF CHAIR/ PROGRAM DIRECTOR