

Writing the Chair's Letter for the Promotion to Full Professor Review Process

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The Office of the DOF/VPAA, in consultation with the Promotions Committee (PC), provides the following information as guidance for chairs, program directors, and chairs of personnel committees writing the Chair's departmental evaluation letter required in Skidmore's Faculty Handbook as part of the promotion to full professor review processes. This guide is not meant to be prescriptive or exhaustive but to provide a framework to approach the writing of this letter.

General Recommendations

Clear and Comprehensive: Strive for clarity and provide a comprehensive assessment, discussing both the strengths and weaknesses of the candidate's file.

Show, Don't Tell: Instead of making general statements, provide specific, measurable examples as evidence to support claims.

Sustained Engagement: Provide evidence for sustained engagement in teaching, scholarship, and service.

Interpreting the File: Interpret and synthesize the file's content rather than merely repeating it. Provide context that cannot be gleaned from a close reading of the file.

Filling Gaps: Fill in gaps left by the candidate's file and clarify any issues that could be problematic or unclear. Provide context for anything that is unusual, unclear, or disputed in other sources of evidence

Connecting Evidence to Criteria: Speak to the candidate's work in relation to the Faculty Handbook criteria (Part I, Article VIII, Sections A and F).

Departmental/Program and College Needs: State the extent to which a candidate's particular abilities and profile will continue to fulfill projected departmental and college needs.

Mentoring and Support: Discuss the mentoring and support received by the candidate, including the impact of developmental feedback on the candidate's work.

Individual Context

Trajectory: Summarize the candidate's trajectory since the last promotion and explain any notable ebbs and flows since the last promotion.

Timeline: Contextualize any special circumstances around the faculty member's timeline and candidacy (e.g., leaves of absence, administrative leaves, administrative assignments).

Departmental/Program Context and Recommendation

Departmental/Program Procedures: Describe the department's/program's evaluative procedure and relevant department/program policies. Explain any unique departmental/program personnel procedures, policies, and evaluative processes as they relate to teaching, research, and service.

Departmental/Program Norms: Explain the norms, values, and culture of the department/program as they relate to teaching, research, and service.

Contextual Insights: Provide insights into expectations within the department/program that may not be obvious from the candidate's CV or other materials.

Departmental Recommendation: The letter must reflect the department's recommendation regarding promotion to full professor, accurately representing the department's collective opinion and reasoning behind it.

Teaching

Departmental/Program Teaching Context: Contextualize the candidate's teaching within the department/program, addressing specific pedagogical norms and innovations, the role of the candidate's courses in the curriculum, and any challenges associated with teaching those courses.

Course Assignment Process: Explain how core courses get assigned and how the candidate has contributed to service/core teaching. Describe when there is instructor choice about what they get to teach. Give details about any unique circumstances that explain the number of preps, depth, and breadth of courses that the candidate has taught.

Enrollment Patterns: Provide enrollment context or other department-specific enrollment information, including structural aspects of the major/minor that explain course enrollments. If there are concerns related to enrollment patterns, address them directly.

Pedagogical Norms: Describe typical pedagogies in the discipline/field and how the candidate aligns with and deviates from these norms. Describe as well ways in which the candidate's pedagogy is innovative relative to disciplinary norms or department/program norms or standards.

Classroom Observations: Summarize the departmental/program procedures for peer observations. Provide a synthesis of peer teaching observations.

Teaching Development: Discuss specific evidence that speaks to the candidate's teaching development during the period evaluated. Reference how the candidate has incorporated feedback in teaching assignments, activities, and pedagogies.

Atypical Teaching: Discuss any atypical patterns or circumstances that could affect the candidate's teaching (e.g., COVID-19).

Student Feedback: Provide an attentive and nuanced explanation of student feedback (both student ratings and departmental long forms). It is not necessary to restate or provide quotations from long-form teaching evaluations.

Addressing Concerns: Address and clarify issues that could raise questions, such as a smaller number of courses taught than those the committee is accustomed to assessing. Address also specific patterns in student feedback.

Scholarship/Creative Work

Discipline-Specific Norms: Describe norms or context specific to the discipline/field that may not be obvious to someone outside of it, helping external reviewers assess the candidate's work.

Scholarly Expectations: Do not just provide a list of scholarly/creative work but explain the candidate's scholarship/creative work in the context of the department/program, including what types of scholarship/creative work are most valued and which channels (e.g., journals, publishers, venues, exhibition type) are considered top-tier. Discuss measures of quality relevant to the field (e.g., journal impact factors).

Professional Accomplishments: Comment on the candidate's professional accomplishments relative to the department's/program's standards and broader disciplinary expectations.

Addressing Concerns: Address and clarify issues highlighted in other sources of evidence, such as external letters.

Service

Highlight Evidence: Point to evidence in the file that speaks to "a record of sustained, significant, and effective contributions" and how the candidate has played "a leading role in the service that sustains the college community" (Part I, Article VIII, Section F, number 1, b).

Departmental/Program Norms: Explain the norms for department/program service for tenured faculty and how the size of the department/program affects the candidate's service file.

Service Responsibilities: Explain the candidate's service roles and how they align with department or college-wide needs.

Filling Gaps: Address any gaps or peculiarities in service responsibilities.

Service Workload: Contextualize the workload associated with service roles, particularly for those roles the committee might not be accustomed to assessing.

Professional Service Context: Contextualize professional service for someone not familiar with the discipline or field.

Scholarship/Service Line: Provide a rationale when professional service activities cross into scholarship/creative work (e.g., journal editor, book series editor, grant reviewer, academic conference organizer, public-facing communication and dissemination).