DATE

Dear Colleague,

Thank you for agreeing to serve as an external reviewer for Professor \_\_\_\_\_\_’s application for promotion to Professor. This is a labor-intensive task, and your willingness to lend your expertise to assist us in this review is deeply appreciated. As each institution’s process differs with respect to promotion, this e-mail seeks to provide some insight into Skidmore’s process. Skidmore College is a selective, private liberal arts institution where teaching is paramount; on average, our faculty teach 5 courses or the equivalent each academic year. Promotion files are evaluated according to three areas: teaching, scholarship/creative work, and service, and we are asking you to specifically address the candidate’s scholarship/creative work.

Candidates for promotion select their own external reviewers. 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 promotion process at Skidmore has three stages. During the first stage, the applicant’s file is reviewed by the home department, and a recommendation regarding promotion is made to the Promotions Committee (PC). The PC is a multidisciplinary committee of five faculty representing various college divisions (i.e. humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, arts, pre-professional programs). The PC reviews the file along with the letters written by the candidates’ 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 PC, the Associate Dean of the Faculty, and the Dean of the Faculty, and colleagues in the candidate’s department. The candidate will not have access to your letter.

It is likely that the PC 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 PC depends heavily on the external reviews in their assessments. Once the file including all letters is reviewed, the PC makes a recommendation to the President regarding promotion. The President then makes his recommendation to the Board of Trustees for final approval.

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

* Provide a perspective on publishing or exhibition conventions in the discipline;
* Speak to the quality of candidates’ work;
* Position candidates’ work in the broader disciplinary context;
* Address the quality of candidates’ dissemination outlets;
* 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?

In addition, I have included language from our *Faculty Handbook* that specifies the criteria for scholarship that merits advancement in rank from Associate to Full Professor:

“a pattern of significant engagement with the candidate’s discipline(s), continued development as a scholar or artist, and evidence of success in completing some substantial aspect(s) of their research or artistic agenda beyond the accomplishments at the time of promotion to Associate Professor.”

I have also included the general criteria for evaluation of scholarship at Skidmore College from our *Faculty Handbook* in the Appendix to this letter. Please read through this language as well.

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

Please let ­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_ know, how you would like to receive the materials for review: either electronically in a shared file or hard copy. We will follow up with you.

Please address your letter to the Promotion Committee, and send it to the following address to the attention of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_. You may also scan the letter and e-mail it. **The letter is due on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_,**

Skidmore College

Department of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Attn: ­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

815 N. Broadway

Saratoga Springs, NY 12866

e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

In gratitude,

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix: General criteria for scholarship evaluation in our *Faculty Handbook***

Activities leading to the advancement of knowledge and/or the enhancement of the arts on the faculty's part redound favorably on Skidmore as an institution of higher learning. Skidmore expects members of the faculty to remain actively engaged–as participants and not just as observers–with the continuing conversations and innovations that constitute the lifeblood of an academic career. Specifically, Skidmore expects its faculty to cultivate, over the course of their careers, the scholarly or artistic maturity sufficient to define problems and issues in their areas of expertise, which they then engage in their work. Developing such a mature perspective on one’s discipline enables one to integrate and evaluate the elements that constitute both its history and its present developments. What is more, insofar as its results are normally published or exhibited, scholarship in particular invites the critical scrutiny of peers, who are in the best position to assess its worth, and ensures the college of the faculty's continuing involvement in the ongoing, self-critical discourse of their profession. Similarly, recitals, performances, and exhibitions afford teachers in the performing and visual arts opportunities to demonstrate their creativity and are the equivalent of scholarly publications and research. Effective teaching and sound scholarship are mutually reinforcing; in other words, Skidmore expects its faculty to be teacher-scholars: to be active in the profession because scholarly and artistic pursuits revitalize teaching even as teaching points scholars and artists in new directions.

For purposes of evaluation and in keeping with Skidmore's respect for diversity in the professional aims and accomplishments of faculty members, scholarship is to be defined broadly. It denotes, for instance, not only original research, that is, investigatory analyses of primary data leading to discoveries in one's specialization, but also work that crosses disciplinary boundaries toward integrating knowledge, studies that bridge theory and practice in applied fields, and work that reorganizes existing information in creative ways or interprets it for students and non-specialists, be they colleagues or laypersons. Without intending to be comprehensive, exhaustive

* Discovery encompasses traditional research that creates new knowledge through original investigation that may be theoretical or empirical, disciplinary or interdisciplinary, or some combinations of these. Construed broadly, this dimension of professional development also encompasses the creation of new works of art or musical composition and writing works of fiction, poetry, or creative nonfiction.
* Integration involves the critical evaluation, synthesis, analysis, integration, or interpretation of the research or creative work produced by others. It may be disciplinary, interdisciplinary, or multidisciplinary in nature and includes the varieties of artistic interpretation and performance.
* Application involves applying disciplinary expertise or the results of existing scholarship (produced by oneself or others) to the investigation or solution of intellectual, social, or institutional problems. In the arts it can involve mastering a new performance repertory or exploring a style of creative activity (e.g., unique approach to artmaking) developed by someone else. Such work involves activities that make use of one’s special areas of knowledge or expertise, and it demands the same levels of rigor and accountability traditionally associated with the scholarship of discovery or the scholarship of integration. Application may also include a scholarly focus on the nature and best practices of delivering the materials of one’s discipline to students and other audiences.

Scholarly achievement occurs along a disciplinary-specific continuum ranging from major accomplishments to smaller contributions. Evidence of scholarly achievement includes but is not limited to peer-reviewed books, monographs, and articles published in recognized scholarly venues and by reputable publishers; performances; exhibitions; peer-reviewed, external research grant proposals; conference presentations and invited lectures; and unpublished manuscripts, drafts, and works in progress. Evidence of professional development and engagement such as public scholarship, research grant proposal writing, and unpublished works is relevant but alone is not sufficient. The expectations, challenges, styles of presentation, and standards for research or creative activity can vary considerably by discipline and over time. Accordingly, the judgments of the members of ATC and PC and academic administrators regarding a faculty member’s research or creative activity should be informed by the advice of departmental colleagues and other knowledgeable peers (as expressed in letters of evaluation), especially regarding such factors as disciplinary norms, the importance and value of conducting research with undergraduate students, and the effect of doing work with undergraduate students on research productivity, and other relevant conditions within the discipline or the Skidmore department or program. Such advice is particularly important in setting expectations for the quantity of scholarly or artistic productivity in different disciplines.