Writing the Chair's Letter for the Tenure Review Process
Skidmore College
Last Update: 12-10-2024

The following information is provided 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 tenure review process. This guide is not meant to be prescriptive or exhaustive but to provide a framework to approach the writing of this letter.

General Recommendations

- Strive for clarity and provide a comprehensive assessment, discussing both the strengths and weaknesses of the candidate's file.
- Instead of making general statements, provide specific, measurable examples as evidence to support claims.
- Interpret and synthesize the file's content rather than repeating it. Provide context that cannot be gleaned from a close reading of the file.
- 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.
- Speak to the candidate's work in relation to the Faculty Handbook criteria (Part I, Article VIII, Preamble & Sections A and E).
- State the extent to which a candidate's particular abilities and profile will continue to fulfill projected departmental and college needs.
- Discuss the mentoring and support received by the candidate, including changes in department/program leadership, the impact of third-year reviews, and developmental feedback on the candidate's work.

Individual Context

- Summarize the candidate's trajectory prior to the tenure moment.
- Contextualize any special circumstances around the faculty member's timeline and candidacy (e.g., accelerated timeline, extensions).

Departmental/Program Context

- Describe the department's/program's evaluative procedure and relevant department/program policies. Explain any unique departmental/program personnel procedures, policies, and evaluative processes.
- Explain the norms, values, and culture of the department/program as they relate to teaching, research, and service.
- Provide insights into expectations within the department/program that may not be obvious from the candidate's CV or other materials.
- The letter must reflect the department's recommendation regarding tenure and/or promotion, accurately representing the department's collective opinion.

Teaching
- Summarize the departmental/program procedures for peer observations. Provide a synthesis of peer teaching observations.
- 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 (e.g., how courses are designed, how the candidate's courses complement departmental and all-college offerings, appropriateness of student learning goals, delivery of classes with respect to the stated goals, and student learning outcomes).
- Highlight evidence related to the four features of successful teaching indicated in the Faculty Handbook: motivation and mentoring, expertise, course design and delivery, and fostering student learning (Part I, Article VIII, Section A, 1).Discuss specific evidence that speaks to the candidate's teaching development during the period evaluated.
- Discuss any atypical patterns or circumstances that could affect the candidate's teaching (e.g., COVID-19).
- Provide an attentive and nuanced reading of student feedback (both student ratings and departmental long forms).
- Address and clarify issues that could raise questions, such as a smaller number of courses taught than the committee is accustomed to assessing or specific patterns in student feedback.
- Describe typical pedagogies in the discipline/field and how the candidate aligns with, deviates from, or innovates these norms.

Scholarship/Creative Work
- Describe norms or context specific to the discipline/field that may not be obvious to someone outside of it, helping those outside the discipline/field to assess the candidate's work.
- 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 describe the relative quality of the publication channels within the discipline that the candidate has chosen to use to disseminate their work (journals, publishers, venues).
- Comment on the candidate's professional accomplishments relative to the department's/program's standards and broader disciplinary expectations.
- Address and clarify issues highlighted in other sources of evidence, such as external letters.

Service
- Explain the candidate's service roles, addressing any gaps or peculiarities in service responsibilities and how they align with department or college-wide needs.
- Contextualize professional service for someone not familiar with the discipline or field.