

NOTE TO DEPARTMENT CHAIRS AND CHAIRS OF PROGRAM PERSONNEL COMMITTEES: External letters that address teaching or service provide useful context and are considered complementary to the required letters on scholarship or creative work. They are no substitute for letters focused on scholarship or creative work.

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. Your willingness to assist us in this review is deeply appreciated.

As each institution's process differs with respect to 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. We are asking you to specifically address the candidate's [TEACHING/SERVICE].

Skidmore candidates for tenure typically select their own external reviewers with few departmental exceptions. We encourage candidates to choose reviewers who have the knowledge base and vantage point to critically evaluate their work fairly and objectively. 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.

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.

I have included the general evaluation criteria at Skidmore College from our *Faculty Handbook* in the Appendix to this letter. Please read through this language and provide feedback on the categories most relevant to your experience or perspective. This may include experience with the candidate's [TEACHING/SERVICE] at a previous or different institution.

We hope to receive evaluative letters that help illuminate the strengths and/or weaknesses of the candidate's [TEACHING/SERVICE]. These kinds of letters are valued and most welcome.

In gratitude,

NAME OF CHAIR/ PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Appendix: General criteria for teaching and service evaluation in our *Faculty Handbook*

TEACHING:

Any evaluation of the teaching of Skidmore faculty should take into account the following four features of successful teaching: motivation and mentoring, expertise, course design and delivery, and fostering student learning. Evidence of these may include but is not limited to:

- *Motivation and mentoring.* Through their commitment to and enthusiasm for their subject matter, successful teachers stimulate their students' intellectual curiosity or artistic vision and cultivate intellectual humility. They model for their students the high standards of performance and professionalism appropriate to their disciplines, provide them guideposts toward attaining those standards, and hold them consistently accountable. Successful teaching inspires, guides, and supports students in their courses as well as in their self-directed and collaborative research, independent study, and senior projects.
- *Expertise.* Representing the current state of a discipline or field is crucial to successful teaching. Knowledge informs not only the range and depth of course materials, but also pedagogical methods and goals. Knowledge nourishes the imagination and deepens the appreciation for the complexity and interconnectedness of materials. In short, knowledge makes comprehensiveness and rigor in teaching possible, and by acknowledging the limits to their own expertise, faculty members model academic integrity and demonstrate the need for lifelong learning.
- *Course design and delivery.* Courses should be designed with well-structured content that reflects disciplinary standards and Skidmore's standards and expectations for learning. The relevant elements of course design may include integration of course components, laboratory/studio exercises, assignments, and examinations. The development of these elements, and the generation of new courses, is itself a feature of successful teaching.
- *Fostering student learning.* Successful teaching brings students to engage course materials in a manner that broadens and deepens their intellectual horizons, and may do so employing a variety of strategies and techniques, such as lectures, discussion, group activities, writing, etc. But all successful teaching creates an environment that leads to the students' successful mastery of the course materials and furthers them as independent learners. Successful teachers continue to develop materials and pedagogical techniques that further this end. Successful presentation of course materials includes responsiveness to student participation, providing timely and helpful feedback on assignments and examinations; being available to students outside of class; offering advice and counsel about students' education paths forward in the near and long term. Ultimately, the litmus test of successful teaching is a faculty member's ability to enable students to develop as self-guided, critically engaged scholars and/or artists. Such success will be marked primarily by students' active engagement with the discipline and the quality of their resulting work. It is true that students must do their part as well, but a faculty member's fundamental job is to encourage and help them do so. No amount of expertise or attention to the individual activities that go into teaching can compensate for an overall lack of success in fostering student learning.

Informed judgments about a colleague's teaching should be based on evidence relating to the preceding features of successful teaching that takes into consideration the arc of a candidate's career and development, and work done at the various levels of the curriculum. Such evidence may be obtained in a variety of ways, including, but not limited, to reviews of syllabi, class visits, informal observations of colleagues outside the classroom, products of student research or creative work, discussions of pedagogy, and careful readings of student course evaluations. This scarcely exhausts the ways effective teaching might manifest itself, of course, and candidates may wish to present other evidence.

SERVICE:

Participation in faculty and shared governance is especially important, requiring skills and commitment that answer the needs of the college. Other common and clear examples of service are contributions that directly stimulate the intellectual atmosphere of the college or sustain conditions for stimulating it—arranging field trips and symposia, presenting and attending public readings or lectures, sitting on panels, and, on a less formal day-to-day basis, exchanging ideas and debating issues of common concern. Community service also includes the various ways one renders service to one's discipline or profession such as reviewing manuscripts, serving as an external reviewer, or holding professional office. Although reappointment, tenure, or promotion should not be considered as a reward for administrative or committee work, the skills, counsel, or vision so demonstrated may answer real needs. These and other special aptitudes or achievements will strengthen a candidate's case.

For the purposes of evaluation, effective service is defined as applying one's time, talents, and energy to perform or assist others in performing the necessary work of advising; faculty governance; departmental or programmatic administration; oversight of adjunct faculty and other personnel; development, assessment and oversight of curriculum; and other extra-curricular activities such as attending community events. As citizens of an academic community, faculty are responsible for performing their fair share of this labor, which must be accomplished if departments and the college are to function effectively and students are to be well served. Because of the importance of service to the educational mission of the college, satisfying the appropriate standard relating to this criterion is a necessary condition for contract renewal, tenure, or promotion. Whether a particular form of faculty service is required or elective, its quality and quantity are subject to evaluation.

The broad categories described below encompass the range of professional activities that faculty members can undertake in order to fulfill their responsibilities in service. Faculty members are not expected to perform active service in all of these categories in any one review period or even across an entire career. However, they are expected to demonstrate that they are effectively performing their fair share of this important faculty work.

- *Service to students.* The demands of mentoring fall unequally across the faculty. The concern for the personal and academic well-being of students that this work requires is expressed in the time and care that faculty invest beyond routine advising. In performing this work, faculty need to attain and draw upon knowledge of programmatic and general education curricula and academic policies.

- *Service to departments or academic programs.* This area of service encompasses the various forms of shared work that are particular to academic departments and programs. This includes developing, vetting, delivering, and assessing a department's or program's curriculum. The effectiveness of this work is guided by a faculty member's knowledge of disciplinary practices on a national level, the particular goals of a department at the college, and the contribution of a department to the general curriculum at the college. Such work can be ongoing (e.g., attending department meetings, managing an endowed fund, sponsoring a student organization, directing student honors projects and independent studies) or episodic (e.g., assisting in a departmental review, participating as a member of a search committee, or other standing or ad hoc groups formed to accomplish the goals of the department or program, advising students, and writing letters of recommendation). Effective faculty help to advance this important shared work.

- *Service to the college.* Faculty participate in governance by attending college assemblies and Faculty Meetings, as well as meetings of their departments or programs. Faculty can serve the college as a whole by taking on formal responsibilities such as serving on governance committees, task forces or work groups, or taking on administrative duties, such as chairing a department, directing a program, or assuming some other administrative post. Service includes informal activities such as assisting at Admissions events, directing a student research symposium, performing or speaking at an alumni event or at an event on campus, or advising student organizations. Faculty may also serve the college by undertaking activities with external groups in Saratoga Springs and beyond that increase the visibility of the college or otherwise advance the College's mission.

- *Service to the academic profession.* This area of professional service includes, but is not limited to, holding office or some other position of responsibility in a state, regional, or national professional or disciplinary organization; serving as an evaluator, officer, or consultant for an accrediting body, or as a member of a departmental accrediting body, or as a member of a departmental evaluation team at another institution; serving as a member of a program committee or conference planning committee; refereeing manuscripts for publication; or engaging in other forms of consulting in the service of one's discipline or professional community.