

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. If you believe that you are well-positioned to comment on teaching or service as well, please feel free, but note that this is not necessary.

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*

SCHOLARSHIP:

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 or categorical, the following are offered as broadly descriptive of types of scholarly and artistic activity:

- 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.

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.