Dear __

This year marks my 41st as a member of the Amherst faculty. I could not have imagined when I arrived in 1974 that the College would be as interwoven into the fabric of my life as it has become. Like most of Amherst's faculty and staff, I do not think of myself as an employee as much as a member of a community of people fully committed to the College and the work we do with Amherst students. It is as if I am a member of an extended family composed of generations of students who may not know each other, but who are united by their distinctive Amherst experience.

Two years ago, I persuaded the Admissions Office to let me lead an admissions tour or, more precisely, to let me accompany one of the regular tour guides and co-lead his tour. I loved it. One parent buttonholed me and asked what was distinctive about Amherst and the education it provides.

In response, I mentioned several things. First, the commitment of staff and faculty to the success and well-being of our students. This place offers both a demanding and rigorous education and a caring community. We challenge students by seeing not just who they are but imagining who they might become.

Second, I said that while Amherst has an open curriculum, it has a coherent educational idea, an idea that animates teaching across the College. At Amherst, skills are more important than substance. Among other things, we want our students to learn to write well, to weigh and evaluate evidence, to respect facts, and to speak without using "like" after every other word. Long after information is forgotten, the skills cultivated and refined here endure.

Third, Amherst cultivates a disposition to be reflective, to resist the temptation to speak first and think later.

I concluded my answer by saying that if we get the balance of rigor and caring right, students who graduate with an Amherst degree will be creative and persistent and also committed to the well-being of the communities in which they live and work.

Forty-one years into my Amherst career, I see as much continuity as change in the education the College provides. The Amherst of today is adapting as it must, but, while the College adapts, it remains true to an educational idea that endures and serves our students well. The generosity of alumni plays a large role in sustaining this educational idea. Thank you.

[Signature]

Austin Sarat