Dear XXXX,

I write to encourage your department to begin to prepare for the recommendation it must make by noon on February 8, 2019, on the reappointment of XXXX. Colleagues in my office will be in touch very soon to schedule a meeting with chairs and academic department coordinators to discuss the reappointment process. Reappointment guidelines can be found in the Faculty Handbook, which is online. I remind you that only tenured members of the department participate in departmental reappointment deliberations. Please note that we require electronic copies in optical character recognition format (OCR) of all of the materials specified below. I’ve attached a copy of the letter sent to candidates describing the steps that they must take to prepare for this process.

In preparation for its recommendation concerning reappointment, the department will gather evidence and conduct a full and rigorous review of the candidate’s teaching effectiveness, scholarly or creative growth, and other contributions to the life of the college. The results of the department’s review are conveyed to the Committee of Six in the form of a detailed and considered letter, which should be seen by all tenured members of the department before it is sent to the Committee of Six. Although individual letters from tenured members of the department are not required in this process, it is imperative that all views, especially dissenting views, be represented in the department’s letter. We ask that three hard copies and an electronic copy of this letter be submitted as part of the reappointment dossier to my office by February 8, 2019. Those tenured members of the department on leave should, under ordinary circumstances, be offered the opportunity to participate in this review process. The departmental letter may be signed by the chair on behalf of the tenured members of the department. It has been the practice for many years that, at the time of the tenure review, the Committee of Six has access to the department’s letter of recommendation from the time of reappointment.

The departmental letter will be informed by a letter submitted by the candidate for reappointment to the department by December 3, 2018. In this letter, candidates are asked to describe their teaching experience at the college, the present state of their scholarship or creative work and their aims and plans for the future, and their engagement in college life. Recognizing that Committee of Six members are usually not experts in candidates’ fields, candidates for reappointment may choose to write a modified version of this letter for the Committee of Six, in which they describe their work and its significance in a less specialized idiom. The letter to the department, or the modified version addressing non-specialist readers, will be included in the reappointment dossier and forwarded to the Committee of Six. The candidate’s letter(s) will not become part of the individual’s tenure dossier.

The candidate’s letter to the department will serve as the basis for a conversation between the candidate and tenured members of the department(s) before the department meets to finalize the reappointment recommendation. Please submit to my office as part of the dossier three paper copies, as well as an electronic version, of the candidate’s letter. To reiterate, candidates may choose to submit the same letter that they submitted to the department or a modified version of it that addresses non-specialist readers.
Since scholarship is not reviewed by outside experts at the time of reappointment, it is essential that the promise and progress of the candidate’s scholarship or creative work be evaluated fully by senior colleagues. The Committee of Six does not undertake an independent review of candidates’ scholarship or creative work at the time of reappointment, so copies of scholarship or evidence of creative work should not be included in the reappointment dossier. That said, the departmental evaluation of scholarly or creative growth takes on great importance in guiding the Committee of Six’s review of the reappointment case and provision of feedback to the candidate. The departmental evaluation should take into account any or all of the following: published work, publicly presented work, projects currently under way, and plans for future projects.

Also included in the reappointment dossier is the candidate’s up-to-date curriculum vitae. At times, it may be difficult for the Committee of Six, as non-experts, to interpret a candidate’s CV. The document should therefore be as complete and informative as possible. It must include a list of all courses taught at Amherst College by year and in chronological order. It must also include a list of special topics courses and senior honors theses supervised. In addition, full citations must be made for all scholarly and creative work that the candidate wishes to be considered. References to published and forthcoming work must include page numbers. For forthcoming work, please include a word count. The following information is also requested and may be included on the CV or as an addendum: notations about whether work was peer-reviewed or invited should be indicated, as should the candidate’s contributions to, and role in, collaborative work; conference presentations and invited seminars should be included when appropriate; and the candidate should explain the status of unpublished work that is included on the CV (e.g., forthcoming, in revision prior to resubmission, or published online and scheduled for print publication, etc.). Candidates may also provide a description of their other contributions to the life of the college. The department should review the candidate’s CV for conformity with these requirements. Please submit to my office as part of the dossier three paper copies, as well as an electronic version, of the candidate’s CV.

I turn now to the procedures governing student evaluations of teaching. All student evaluations of teaching collected for purposes of reappointment are to be submitted to the Committee of Six as part of the reappointment dossier; both retrospective letters and end-of-semester evaluations must be submitted. Please submit three hard copies of all evaluations. If there are handwritten end-of-semester evaluations, they must be typed. The handwritten originals should be submitted along with the typed copies, and we ask that end-of-semester evaluations and retrospective letters be submitted electronically as well. Student retrospective letters and end-of-semester evaluations sent via email will be acceptable provided the student’s name is clearly shown. All other semester-end evaluations and letters from students must bear the students’ signatures. Academic department coordinators will receive specific instructions regarding procedures for letters and evaluations sent by email, as well as guidelines for organizing letters and evaluations in the candidate’s dossier. Note that unsolicited letters from students cannot be accepted.

The faculty has voted that evaluations of teaching are to be requested of all students from every course, including every honors and special topics course, taught by an untenured faculty member. These evaluations are normally solicited in essay format in all classes in the final week.
of each semester on a form to be devised by the instructor in collaboration with the department. The evaluations should be solicited by the chair of the department, or by another senior colleague in the department, and not by the instructor. After the submission of grades, they are made available to the instructor without the names of the respondents. In addition, all departments are required to solicit from all students in the instructor’s courses retrospective letters to inform the reappointment review.

The Committee of Six requests that departments do all that they can to increase the overall return of end-of-semester evaluations and student retrospective letters. The committee urges departments to employ strategies that ensure that virtually all students submit an evaluation in each of the candidate’s classes. Such strategies include requiring students to fill out and submit evaluations during class time and/or withholding grades until a student’s evaluation is submitted. One copy of each iteration of the department’s solicitation of retrospective letters must be included in the dossier. The letters written to students should be in neutral terms, clear of any tendency to lead students. They should communicate the importance of the task at hand and should give students sufficient instruction as to the nature of response desired. Persons asked to write an assessment should be informed that their communication will be treated as confidential. It is important that retrospective letters indicate which course(s) students are evaluating and in which years they were taken.

I remind you that the departmental evaluation of teaching effectiveness at the time of reappointment should draw upon a representative range of teaching activities in addition to student evaluations. Evaluation should derive from, but need not be limited to, conversations about courses with some members of the department; attendance by some members of the department at a number of class meetings at mutually agreed upon times; and assessment, by the candidate with at least one senior member of the department, of the accomplishments of at least one of the candidate’s courses at the end of a semester. Note that “some members” refers to more than one but not necessarily all tenured members of the candidate’s department. Evaluations of teaching effectiveness should also be informed by the discussions of the tenured members of the department, the substance of which is conveyed during annual conversations.

It is often helpful to the Committee of Six in reading the student-evaluations in a broader context to have in the department letter a paragraph or two based on collegial observation of teaching, formal and informal pedagogical collaboration, and annual conversations with the candidate about teaching. If, during annual conversations, the department shared any concerns with the candidate about teaching and/or scholarly progress, please comment on how the candidate responded to this feedback. Please describe, for example, new approaches and/or adjustments that the candidate may have implemented. In the case of co-taught courses, please describe the balance of responsibilities of the candidate the co-teacher(s), including, when relevant, the candidate’s and co-teacher’s (s’) relative contributions to the genesis of the course.

Reappointment is a time for serious reassessment of teaching and scholarship in preparation for the tenure decision. Whether the recommendation is positive or negative, this is an occasion for candid advice and review. It falls to you, as chair of the department, to discuss with a candidate for reappointment the frank assessment of both strengths and weaknesses of professor’s teaching,
as evidenced by student retrospective letters and end-of-semester evaluations, and scholarship, as judged by senior colleagues. You should take the opportunity to discuss with the candidate departmental expectations between the time of reappointment and tenure review. The faculty has voted that the chair of the department will provide the candidate with the text of the department’s letter, which has been edited to protect confidentiality, and will discuss that letter with the candidate. I ask you to send to my office written confirmation that this discussion has taken place, signed by both the chair and the candidate, when you forward the departmental recommendation (three hard copies and an electronic copy). If candidates wish to comment on the departmental recommendation, they may send written commentary, in confidence, to the Committee of Six by February 22, 2019.

Finally, let me remind you of the following statement in the Faculty Handbook on the meaning of reappointment:

The decision to reappoint is important, but should not be confused with the decision on tenure. A decision to reappoint is an expression of satisfaction with past performance and of confidence in the faculty member’s potential for continuing development. At the time of the department’s recommendation concerning reappointment, the chair of the department will discuss the department’s recommendation (whether positive or negative) with the particular faculty member; if the decision is made to reappoint for a second term, the chair will discuss considerations which may enter into a subsequent tenure decision.

Following the reappointment decision, a letter about reappointment will be sent by the president to the individual under review, with a copy to the department chair, indicating the recommendation that the president intends to make to the Board of Trustees. Formal notification of reappointment will follow confirmation by the Board of Trustees. I will invite each candidate who is reappointed to meet with me soon after the reappointment process is completed to discuss the Committee of Six’s reading of the candidate’s case. I will also discuss the Committee’s view with the department chair.

Sincerely,

Catherine Epstein
Dean of the Faculty
Winkley Professor of History

cc: Candidate
ADC