



**Amherst College**  
Office of the Provost and Dean of the Faculty

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DATE

NAME OF CHAIR  
NAME OF DEPARTMENT

Dear **NAME OF CHAIR**,

I write about the procedures that the department will follow to assemble the reappointment dossier of **NAME**, which will be due to my office **by noon on Friday, February 2, 2024**. I remind you that only the tenured members of the department participate in reappointment deliberations and vote on the departmental recommendation. Reappointment dossiers are prepared under the guidelines voted by the faculty, as articulated fully in the [Faculty Handbook](#). Please review the *Faculty handbook* language carefully.

**Pilot: Electronic Submission of All Materials for Spring 2024 Reappointment Cases**

On a pilot basis, with the goal of making the submission of reappointment materials less labor-intensive for departments, reappointment materials will be submitted to my office in an electronic format only next spring. As part of this pilot, my office will create (from the electronic files) the archival hard-copy binders that were submitted previously by departments. Google templates for electronic submission and related instructions will be provided, and colleagues in my office will meet with all candidates and, separately, with chairs and their academic department coordinators (ADC)s, to review the reappointment process later this month.

\*Please note that my letter to the candidate about the reappointment process, attached here, provides additional details about the documents that the candidate will submit to the department. References to those documents have an asterisk in this letter.

**The dossier that the department will submit comprises the following materials:**

**1. \*Candidate's CV**

The candidate will submit a CV to the department that will be included in the dossier. The chair will discuss with the candidate the dates by which the department needs the CV in order to meet the departmental submission deadline. Please refer to my letter to the candidate for more details about this CV.

**2. \*Candidate's Letter(s) to the Department/Tenure and Promotion Committee**

The departmental letter will be informed by a letter submitted by the candidate for reappointment to the department by December 1, 2023. Recognizing that Tenure and Promotion Committee members are usually not experts in candidates' fields, candidates for reappointment may choose to write a modified version of this letter for the Tenure and Promotion Committee, in which they describe their work and its significance in a less specialized idiom. If two letters are written, the

candidate must share both letters with the department, and both must be included in the reappointment dossier and forwarded to the Tenure and Promotion Committee. The candidate's letter(s) to the department will serve as the basis for a conversation between the candidate and all tenured members of the department before the department finalizes the reappointment recommendation. Please submit the candidate's letter(s) as part of the dossier.

### **3. The Departmental Letter of Recommendation**

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 and/or creative growth, and other contributions to the life of the college. The results of the department's review are conveyed to the Tenure and Promotion Committee in the form of a detailed and considered letter, which all tenured members of the department are asked to review before it is provided. Those tenured members of the department who are on leave should participate in this review process. Although individual letters from the tenured members are not required in this process, it is imperative that all views, especially dissenting views, be represented in the department's letter. It has been the practice for many years that, at the time of the tenure review, the Tenure and promotion Committee has access to the department's letter of recommendation from the time of reappointment.

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 tenured colleagues. The Tenure and Promotion Committee 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 Tenure and Promotion Committee'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. The department's letter should explain norms in the field, including publication or performance venues, conference and workshop participation, and co-authorship on articles or presented papers. It would be helpful to the committee if the department provides a succinct explanation of how the candidate's discipline conceptualizes "forthcoming" (e.g., does this mean that work is under contract, though it might not be complete? Or does this term mean work is actually complete and in press?) and any other terms that might vary by field. If the work is co-authored, the candidate's contributions should be described.

In regard to the departmental evaluation of the candidate's teaching, I remind you of the following faculty vote: "The departmental evaluation of teaching effectiveness should draw upon a representative range of teaching activities in addition to evidence described in [6] below [student letters]. 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. 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." Note that "some members" refers to more than one but not necessarily all tenured members of your department. "A representative range" of teaching activities refers to more than one type of class, a seminar and a lecture class, for example.

In keeping [with the recommendation of the Ad Hoc Faculty Committee on Academic Structures During COVID-19](#), please address if and how the pandemic had an impact on the candidate's research and teaching, and on the field, if the department has knowledge of this. Please continue to discuss these issues in annual conversations going forward.

#### Some Details about the Departmental Recommendation

- The chair may sign on the tenured members' behalf.
- If quotations from student evaluations and/or retrospective letters are included in the departmental recommendation, it may be helpful for the department not to refer to students by name, as these names will later need to be redacted in the version of the departmental recommendation that is provided to the candidate.

You must provide the candidate with a copy of the department's letter of recommendation that has been edited to protect confidentiality, and review that letter with the candidate. If candidates wish to comment on the departmental recommendation, they may send written commentary, in confidence, to the Tenure and Promotion Committee **by noon on Friday, February 16, 2024**.

#### 4. Evidence Used to Evaluate Teaching Effectiveness

Included in the dossier is all written evidence used to evaluate teaching effectiveness, including the semester-end evaluations solicited from students in all courses and the retrospective letters solicited at the time of the reappointment review from all current and former students taught since the time of the candidate's appointment at Amherst. Both retrospective letters and end-of-semester evaluations must be submitted.

The Tenure and Promotion Committee requests that departments demonstrate what they have done to increase the overall return of student retrospective letters. This will require that several solicitations be sent to the students. One copy of each iteration of the department's solicitation of retrospective letters must be included in the dossier and must include the date when each solicitation was sent. The solicitation written to students should not include any leading or potentially biased questions. They should communicate the importance of the task at hand and should give students sufficient instruction as to the nature of response desired. Persons who are asked to write an assessment should be informed that their letter will be treated as confidential. It is important that retrospective letters indicate which course(s) students are evaluating and in which year(s) they were taken. 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. Chairs and ADCs will receive instructions regarding procedures for letters and evaluations sent by email, as well as guidelines for organizing letters and evaluations in the candidate's dossier. Detailed letters from honors and special topics students have proven to be particularly helpful (see below for information about new requirements for evaluations from honors students, as well as research students). Unsolicited letters from students cannot be accepted.

*I want to draw your attention (below) to changes regarding honors students and research students that were approved by the faculty in May 2022. For a full description, see the Faculty Handbook (III., E., 4., (5). Chairs will receive separate detailed instructions about the solicitation of annual and retrospective letters from honors and research students.*

### **Honors Students** (information shared last spring)

#### **End-of-semester evaluations are no longer solicited from honors students.**

Instead, on an annual basis, departments solicit from all honors students advised by a tenure-track faculty member that year, whether the students complete their honors work or not, confidential "annual" letters, after students receive a final grade (after one semester, if students do not complete honors work, or after two semesters, if they do). For honors students, the new process of soliciting annual letters began with the class of '23E. Departments were asked to have students who completed their degree requirements in December 2022 write a letter whether they completed their honors work or not.

Going forward, students who "drop" a thesis mid-year will be solicited for annual letters in December, after they receive a grade. Otherwise, honors students should be solicited in May, after they receive a grade.

The process for soliciting retrospective letters from honors students has not changed.

Annual letters and retrospective letters from honors students become part of the candidate's dossier at the time of reappointment and tenure and are summarized in the departmental recommendation, a redacted version of which is shared with the candidate. Candidates are not provided with the letters themselves. Department letters soliciting retrospective letters from students are included with their responses.

### **Research Students** (information shared last spring)

In addition, on an annual basis, departments are required to solicit from all research students who were supervised by a tenure-track professor for 240 hours (the equivalent of six weeks of full-time work) or more that year confidential "annual" letters. Departments solicit annual letters from research students in the year in which the research experience took place—at the end of the \*academic year for research students who worked during the academic year, and at the end of the summer (July or August) for those who worked during the summer. In all cases, annual letters from research students are solicited before the start of the next academic year. \*(For purposes of this process, the academic year is defined as the start of classes in the fall through June 1; summer is defined as June 1 through August 31.)

Annual letters from research students taught through the end of the spring semester before the tenure review become part of the candidate's dossier at the time of tenure. The first cohort of research students for whom annual letters were solicited were those doing research during the summer of 2022. These letters were solicited in July or August 2022 (if students had completed 240 or more hours of research work).

In addition, at the time of the reappointment review, departments are required to solicit retrospective letters of evaluation from research students who were supervised by a tenure-track professor for 240 hours. For those standing for reappointment in spring 2024, the cohorts of research students who will be solicited are those who were supervised for 240 hours in the summer of 2022 and those who were supervised for 240

hours over the course of fall 2022, Interterm 2023, spring 2023, summer 2023, and fall 2023.

Annual letters from research students and retrospective letters are summarized in the departmental recommendation, a redacted version of which is shared with the candidate. Candidates are not provided with the letters themselves. The department letters soliciting retrospective letters from students are included with their responses.

It is helpful to the Tenure and Promotion Committee 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. 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. For example, describe whether new approaches were adopted and/or adjustments were made. For co-taught courses, describe the balance of responsibilities of the candidate and the co-teacher(s), including, when relevant, the candidate's and co-teacher's (s') relative contributions to the genesis of the course.

The committee is also interested to know if departments have any observations about the effect of the new common teaching evaluation form. For example, has moving to the use of this form generated different kinds of knowledge about teaching that the Tenure and Promotion Committee should note? Has the new form encouraged or produced different kinds of praise/critique?

#### [Documents Related to the Evaluation of Teaching](#)

The department will submit the following teaching materials:

- Semester-end evaluations from all students in all courses, including honors (prior to the adoption of the new procedures for honors students) and special topics courses, organized by semester in chronological order (first semester of teaching first, through the fall semester prior to the spring in which the candidate stands for reappointment). If semester-end evaluations were typed because there were handwritten evaluations, please submit both the typed and handwritten documents to the provost's office.
- Class lists of students solicited with appropriate end-of-semester evaluations received from students behind each list. The ADC indicates with a check mark those students who provided evaluations. If a class has more than one section, a separate class list is provided, with evaluations behind it, for each section.
- The ADC's letter certifying email evaluations (my office will provide a sample of this document).
- Retrospective letters solicited from all students in all courses, including honors and special topics courses, organized in chronological order (first semester of teaching first, through the fall semester prior to the spring in which the candidate stands for reappointment); a sample of all iterations of letters of solicitation; and class lists of students solicited with appropriate letters received from students behind each list, with those who wrote letters indicated with a check mark.

- Retrospective letters are submitted in one file with a sample of each iteration of the letter of solicitation, which includes the date sent.
- Please note: retrospective letters **must** be solicited from students in courses from the semester immediately preceding the semester in which the candidate is considered for reappointment. Unsolicited letters from students must not be included in the dossier.
- Please see above for detailed instructions about the solicitation of annual and retrospective letters for honors and research students.

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 the individual's teaching, as evidenced by student retrospective letters and end-of-semester evaluations, and scholarship, as judged by tenured colleagues. You should take the opportunity to discuss with the candidate departmental expectations between the time of reappointment and tenure review.

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 that may enter into a subsequent tenure decision.

Following the reappointment decision, the president will send a letter about reappointment 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 to meet with me soon after the reappointment process is completed to discuss the Tenure and Promotion Committee's reading of the candidate's case and to provide the candidate with the committee's minutes. I will also discuss the committee's view with the department chair and provide the chair with the minutes.

Sincerely,



Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty  
Henry Steele Commager Professor of History

CE/pk  
cc: Candidate and ADC