TENURE LETTER TO DEPARTMENT CHAIR

DATE, 2020

Professor XXXX, Chair
Department of XXXX

Dear XXXX,

On October 1, 2020, your department will submit a tenure recommendation to the Committee of Six for Professor XXXX. I remind you that only tenured members of the department participate in departmental tenure deliberations. Tenure cases for fall 2020 should be prepared under the guidelines voted by the faculty, as articulated fully in the *Faculty Handbook* (excerpts appear in italics below).

Please note that we require electronic copies in Optical Character Recognition (OCR) format of all of the materials, in addition to hard copies (with the exception of published books and unpublished book manuscripts, which are only required to be submitted in hard copy, though electronic versions are helpful and welcome if available). Colleagues in my office will soon send templates to guide the formatting of both the electronic materials and the hard-copy dossier. These templates provide very specific information that may not be included in this letter. If the candidate's work includes creative or other non-print materials, please speak with me about the candidate's desired mode of submission.

Let me remind you of the materials the Committee of Six must receive by 12:00 P.M. on **Thursday**, **October 1, 2020**:

1. A departmental letter of recommendation containing a judgment about: (a) teaching effectiveness; (b) scholarship, creative work and growth; (c) contribution to the general life of the college community and to the profession; (d) any considerations of departmental structure.

This letter should make clear the bases of the department's judgment on the candidate's scholarship or creative work, teaching, and contribution to general college life, including how the department evaluated and weighed the accumulated evidence. This letter is most useful to the Committee of Six when it is balanced and engages fully with questions and concerns that emerge from evaluations by external reviewers and students. The departmental evaluation of scholarly or creative growth addresses the materials that the candidate chooses to include in the tenure dossier, which may be any or all of the following: published work, publicly presented work, projects currently under way, and plans for future projects. 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. Please also note that guidelines and suggestions for crafting the departmental letter of recommendation are included throughout this letter. (See items 6, 7, and 8 below for more detailed information.)

You must provide the candidate with a copy of the department's letter of recommendation that has been edited to protect confidentiality, and discuss that letter with the candidate. Written confirmation that this discussion has taken place must be signed by you and the candidate, and should be included along with the candidate's other materials in the dossier submitted by October 1 (note this deadline when crafting the letter and scheduling your meeting with the candidate).

2. A separately submitted, confidential letter from each tenured member of the department(s), including those on leave, assessing the candidate's qualifications. The substance of reservations expressed in individual letters should be reflected in the department's letter.

To be useful to the Committee of Six in its deliberations, confidential letters should fully elaborate arguments that faculty members have used to reach their recommendation. It is important that both scholarly or creative work and teaching effectiveness be addressed in this letter. Note that the substance of reservations expressed in individual letters must be reflected in the department's letter. It is acceptable for an individual letter to say simply that the faculty member, having helped draft the department letter, agrees fully with its recommendation. Each colleague's letter is confidential and must be signed. These letters must be submitted directly to my office.

3. Practice has been that departments inform other untenured members (tenure-track faculty only) of the department(s) that they may, but need not, submit a confidential letter assessing the candidate's qualifications. Such letters are confidential and should be sent directly to the provost and dean of the faculty. Note that departments may solicit letters from lecturers and visiting faculty as described below in item 8.

4. A current curriculum vitae

At times, it may be difficult for members of 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 present the courses that candidate has taught at Amherst during the tenure-track appointment in two formats. The first is a list of all courses taught at Amherst College by year and in chronological order. The second is a list of the courses indicating the semester is which each was taught. The pages of the CV must be numbered. It must also include a list of senior theses and special topics that the candidate has supervised. In addition, the candidate should include full citations for all the scholarly and creative work that will be considered. The following required information may be included in the CV or as an addendum: notations about whether the work was peer-reviewed and/or invited, the candidate's contributions to, and role in, collaborative work, and the status of unpublished work (e.g., published in print or online, forthcoming, revised and resubmitted, or just submitted). 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.

The candidate must provide full citations for all scholarly and creative work. References to published work must cite inclusive page numbers. Candidates should also include information about contributions they have made to the life of the college. Candidates must provide their departments with a current curriculum vitae by **Monday, March 2, 2020**, and they must submit to the department

the final version of the CV that will be sent to the external reviewers by **Tuesday, June 23, 2020**. If there is a change in publication status, an updated CV can be submitted with the dossier on October 1 with any updates noted; otherwise the document should not change.

5. Copies of the candidate's scholarly and creative work with, when applicable, a characterization of the journals in which, or the press by which, the work was published

Both electronic and printed copies of the candidate's scholarly and creative work must be submitted to the Office of the Provost and Dean of the Faculty, by **June 23**. (One exception, we do not require electronic copies of books and unpublished manuscripts—see below.) The provost's office will contact departments by **June 26** to inform chairs that they may move forward with submitting materials to the external reviewers. In the case of published books, the department is responsible for ordering ten copies for the Committee of Six and for providing them to the provost's office. (It is also responsible for ordering books and sending them to the external reviewers. The provost's office will pay for the Committee of Six's ten copies and for the cost of providing books to the external reviewers. Departments are responsible for the cost of providing books to department members.) Please also provide ten hard copies of unpublished book manuscripts. If there are electronic versions of books or manuscripts available, submit them with the other electronic materials. We ask that unpublished manuscripts, if accepted or under contract, be accompanied by the acceptance letter or contract. Contracts and acceptance letters are **not sent** to the external reviewers, however. If there are updated contracts or acceptance letters at the time of submission of the tenure case in October, please submit those documents.

Having this work in June will enable the Committee of Six to read the bulk of the candidate's scholarly and creative work over the summer. Academic department coordinators will be given instructions about the format of submission that is required. They should take care of necessary photocopying and forward the charges incurred to my office for reimbursement. Candidates are responsible for submitting a master list of all of the scholarly and creative work included in the tenure dossier, along with the scholarly and creative work itself, to their department chair. Books must be included on the list. Once submitted, this document cannot change; however, if the publication status of one or more works changes, an addendum may be included in the candidate's final dossier. In addition, the department must provide as full a characterization as possible of journals, presses, and other modes of publication. We ask that the department, and not the candidate, prepare this information. Although this information can be included with the scholarship submitted by **June 23** to the provost's office for the Committee of Six, it is **not sent** to the external reviewers. If it is not provided in the summer, it must be submitted as part of the candidate's final dossier on October 1. Note that materials submitted by **June 23** (with the exception of the candidate's CV) will not be submitted again in the fall.

6. All written evidence used to evaluate teaching effectiveness, including the semester-end evaluations solicited from students in all courses, the retrospective letters solicited at the time of reappointment review and the retrospective letters solicited at the time of tenure review from all current and former students taught since the time of reappointment. The department letters soliciting letters from students should be included with their responses. Solicitation of retrospective letters must include all students from every course, including every honors and special topics course taught by the candidate. Each person asked to write such a letter should be informed that his or her response will be treated as confidential by the college. (Reviews and ratings from informal and commercial websites or other anonymous materials are inadmissible as evidence.)

Both retrospective letters and end-of-semester evaluations must be submitted. The Committee of Six requests that departments demonstrate what they have done to increase the overall return of student retrospective letters. One copy of each iteration of the department's solicitation of retrospective letters,

both at the time of reappointment and tenure, must be included in the dossier. The letters 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. 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. Detailed letters from honors and special topics students have proven to be particularly helpful. Note that unsolicited letters from students cannot be accepted.

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. If, during annual conversations or at the time of reappointment, 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, whether the candidate adopted new approaches and/or made adjustments. In the case of co-taught courses, please 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.

7. Letters from no fewer than six (6) and normally no more than eight (8), or in the case of joint appointments ten (10), external reviewers who are leading scholars or practitioners in the candidate's field to be chosen equally from lists compiled by the candidate and the department(s); the department's letter of solicitation to them; and a description of the process by which these persons were chosen as external reviewers, their qualifications, and their relationship, if any, to the candidate.

The department should solicit the judgments of leading scholars or practitioners in the candidate's field; these letters are a crucial element in any tenure case. The provost's office will provide you with a sample letter of solicitation to reviewers. The Committee of Six has drafted this document, and asked that I urge all departments to use it, in the interest of equity and consistency. The candidate should provide the department with a single ranked list of suggested external professional reviewers (normally no more than eight) from which the department makes a selection of several names. In addition to those names, the department should ask an equal number of other external professional reviewers not named by the candidate for review of the scholarship. The external reviewers should be actively engaged in or near the candidate's field of research though not all confined to the candidate's specialty. The Committee of Six has often found it particularly valuable to have at least one letter from a reviewer at a liberal arts college. The candidate's dissertation and/or postdoctoral advisor may serve as reviewers. However, at least six reviewers should not have a close personal or professional relationship with the candidate. In addition, at least half of the reviewers should not have a close personal or professional relationship with any member of the department(s). If a close professional or personal relationship exists between a department member and an external reviewer, that relationship must be disclosed. After reviewing the letters from the external reviewers in the early fall, the Committee of Six may ask that additional external reviews be solicited to give candidates' cases the fullest possible consideration and to address any concerns raised by any member(s) of the Committee of Six.

Reviewers should be informed that we are interested in knowing what they think of the quality of the candidate's work. Does it address important questions in the field, and has the candidate made significant contributions toward answering, refining, or extending these questions? In writing the evaluation, it

would be helpful if reviewers would compare the candidate's work to that of others at the same stage in their careers. We would like to know reviewers' opinions (and the criteria and metrics by which they made their judgment) of the candidate's scholarly contribution thus far and potential for future growth. It would also be useful for the reviewer to comment on (relative to the standards of the field) expectations for the rate of progress by the time of tenure, typical patterns of scholarly productivity, stages/formats of publication (the role and weight of working papers and/or co- and lead authorship, for example), and the role of peer review. If the candidate's scholarship includes work produced through and/or published in emerging media, or exploring new scholarly methodologies in the field, the department is encouraged to invite external reviewers to consult any guidelines for evaluating such scholarship that may have been developed by the discipline's scholarly association or learned society. We ask that the department also comment on these issues. The committee would also like to know of anything reviewers might like to share with us about service that the candidate may have provided the profession. Reviewers should be informed (and I remind departments) that, at Amherst, faculty members typically stand for tenure after completing ten semesters of teaching, excluding any authorized leaves.

It may also help the reviewers to be informed of the function and composition of the Committee of Six, and particularly of the fact that they are addressing two sets of readers: colleagues in the candidate's department who have some expertise in the candidate's field and members of the committee who in the context of tenure discussions may constitute a lay audience. The quality and depth of these letters is obviously critical. Outside scholars should engage the candidate's work in some detail. A letter of generalized praise lacking in specificity is likely to be discounted no matter how distinguished the external reviewer. Letters from the outside authorities will be most helpful and persuasive if they can point to strengths and weaknesses in the work and relate these in nontechnical language that may be understood by scholars not expert in their particular field. Where appropriate and relevant, external reviewers also may take into account possible differences among institutions. Letters from expert colleagues from the Five Colleges may be included in this group if the Five-College colleague is an authority in the candidate's field.

The material you forward to the Committee of Six must explain the process of selection of external reviewers and their associations (if any) with the candidate. Again, if a close professional or personal relationship exists between a department member and an external reviewer, it must be disclosed in this material. Those asked to write an assessment should be informed that their communication will be treated as confidential. It is also essential for the committee to have a characterization (i.e., a short biographical sketch) of each reviewer, as well as each reviewer's CV. Finally, all evaluators—department members, external reviewers, and Committee of Six members—should be reviewing exactly the same scholarly or creative material.

The Committee of Six has voted to compensate reviewers at a rate of $250.00 per review. Please let reviewers know that if they would prefer not to receive the honorarium, they should let you know prior to commencing their review. The college is required to report the honorarium to the IRS once the reviewer has commenced review of the tenure file, even if the reviewer subsequently declines payment or requests that the honorarium be used for some other purpose.

8. Letters from colleagues in other departments, including those who have served on committees or taught with the candidate, as well as departmental lecturers, visiting faculty and visiting lecturers.

When appropriate, letters from Five-College colleagues may also be solicited. Whether such a letter offers evidence chiefly on the candidate's contribution to the general life of the college and Five-College communities, teaching effectiveness, or scholarly promise, or some combination thereof, will of course depend on the relationship of the writer to the candidate (as fellow committee member, teaching collaborator, fellow member of a Five-College seminar, etc.). It is appropriate to ask the

candidate for potential sources of such letters, though others may also be solicited. It is important that the department, in its solicitation of colleague letters, as well as in its compilation of the dossier, make every effort to ensure an unbiased collection of data. The process is aided when the departmental letter reflects, insofar as possible, the range of voices and views of individual department members. Polyphony is generally preferable to a forced homogeneity, however well intentioned. Remember that unsolicited letters cannot be accepted or considered in tenure deliberations.

Given the importance of the decision both for the individual and for the college, the preparation of a tenure case must be made with equal care whether the recommendation is positive or negative. I ask that you get in touch with me as soon as possible should any of these procedures present difficulties of any kind. The candidate will receive a copy of this letter. I also attach for you a copy of a letter I have sent to the candidate.

Many thanks for undertaking a process that is so central to all that we do at Amherst.

Sincerely,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty
Winkley Professor of History

cc: candidate
ADC
Janet Tobin

Attachment