

February 22, 2011

Dear Ashley,

This letter updates my progress following our discussions in November 2010 about my fourth-year review by the College. The feedback I received at that time was that my teaching and service were outstanding but that my research was considered weak. I was advised to focus on writing my book and secure a publishing contract before my tenure review, to draw back from excessive service commitments, to re-teach courses rather than continue to design new ones, and to take advantage of guidance from tenured members of the Department. I have made progress on each of these fronts:

Research

- 1) Over winter break (2010-11) I wrote a draft of the Introduction to my book, *James Baldwin and the Queer Imagination*, and received written feedback on it from Professor Schulman. I received word in January that a shortened version of Chapter 1 was accepted for publication in *American Notes Quarterly* (summer 2011). Also over break I made substantial progress on Chapter 2 and will finish that chapter by mid-spring. Chapters 3 and 4 are basically finished, with only minimal reformatting needed. The Conclusion remains to be written. I project that the book will be finished by the end of summer 2011.
- 2) Also over break I identified 8 publishers that would be appropriate houses for my book. With the help of samples from Professor Gray, I wrote my inquiry letter and book proposal to send to these publishers. I will send out these materials to gauge publishers' interest in the late spring or early summer. I met with Professor Gerstner in January to discuss submitting to presses with whom he has worked in the past and who have strengths in queer black literary studies, as well as to discuss how to become more a part of my tenure process.
- 3) In January I applied for a PSC/CUNY research grant to subsidize my writing this summer (as opposed to teaching, as I have done in past semester breaks).

Teaching

- 1) After my fourth-year review, I worked with Professor Bardsley and Dean Saulnier's office to reassign the Winter 2011 course I was scheduled to teach so that I could redirect my energies toward research and writing.
- 2) At the time of my fourth-year College review, I had already agreed to teach two new courses in the spring of 2011. Thanks to new faculty release time, however, I am only teaching those two courses. My schedule for future semesters (when I hope to be working with a press to revise my manuscript) includes no new courses, and I have four hours of release time left to lighten my teaching load.

Commented [MB1]:

The road to tenure can be bumpy. My fourth-year review did not go well. In the years leading up to this crucial review, I had put a lot of time and energy into designing new queer studies courses and creating an LGBT-friendly campus through service work. This put my research and publishing behind schedule. My poor fourth-year review emphasized the excellence of the first two aspects of my work, but it made clear that research and publishing carry much greater weight in tenure and promotion decisions. I needed to make a major course correction if I wanted to succeed at the College.

One of the strategies I used to get myself back on track was to open the communication floodgates with my senior colleagues. I sought their advice about how to prioritize research, how to step back from service, and how to more judiciously plan my teaching. And crucially, I communicated my new blueprint for success to my department chair.

This letter is an example of how I began to more intentionally and frequently engage with my chair so that he could represent me and my work accurately at the next year's review. I needed him to inspire confidence in the colleagues who would be evaluating me, and so I needed to inspire confidence in him that I was re-balancing research, teaching, and service.

Communicating with colleagues about how my research was progressing proved to be incredibly helpful—if a bit daunting. As it turned out, doing research and writing “in the dark,” so to speak, had been making me less productive. Making that work more public made me more accountable to the writing, and it also allowed me draw on my colleagues' extensive experiences of navigating the publishing process. Ultimately, I completed my book, *James Baldwin and the Queer Imagination*, placed it with a high-quality academic publisher, and earned tenure and promotion.

Service

- 1) With the help of Professors Dawson, Miller, and Reda, I stepped away from my work with the writing program.
- 2) Professor Chin and I now split time on the Verrazano School committee.
- 3) I continue to work in a variety of capacities for the improvement of LGBT life on our campus (participating on “coming out” panels each semester, speaking to the Gay-Straight Alliance, working with the Dean’s office), and I will continue with that aspect of my service to the College.

Finally, based on feedback I received from you in our November meeting, I will revise my CV to bring it in line with College expectations; augment my review binder with my book manuscript, inquiries from publishers, and my recently accepted journal article; and revise my personal statement to offer a more coherent narrative of my progress at the College. I would be happy to receive any further advice as I progress toward tenure.

Sincerely,

Matt Brim
Assistant Professor of English
College of Staten Island, CUNY