



March 6, 2007

Dear colleagues,

The Tenure and Promotion process at the University of South Florida requires the Chair to render an opinion regarding each candidate's tenure and promotion. The Chair's recommendation can, in theory, be independent of the recommendations made by the Promotion and Tenure committee and the vote of the faculty. In general, it has been my inclination to base my recommendations on the outcome of the departmental review process. This attitude reflects, to a large extent, my conviction that in a well ordered department the tenure process should be launched only when the outcome is likely to reflect a strong consensus. Our annual evaluation process, and the feedback we provide, should (and, in my experience, do) lead candidates with doubtful records to withdraw from the process before the review is launched.

Yet, I will be called upon to render an opinion and it seems to me useful, therefore, if I sketch some of the views that guide my decisions regarding promotion and tenure. I emphasize that the following statement represents my own personal principles and does not represent a formally binding departmental policy. Given that I am called upon to play a specific role in the process, my personal guidelines should be made explicit. So, here they are.

a. Promotion and Tenure of Assistant Professors

The granting of tenure is a prediction of future performance rather than a reward for past achievements. There appear to be two models that may guide the tenure process and tenure decisions. One model views tenure as a reward. According to this model, it is the task of the tenure committees, the Chair, and ultimately the faculty, to determine if a tenure candidate's achievements during the probation period have crossed a certain, possibly demanding, threshold. If the total achievement satisfies the threshold, tenure should follow. Tenure is awarded, then, because the candidate has established a record of outstanding productivity during the probationary period.

An alternate model emphasizes the inescapable fact that the award of tenure commits the University to employ the individual for the next several decades.

An Assistant Professor who is thirty years old receives a commitment for the following 40 years or more. The award of tenure implies that in the judgment of the Department and the University the candidate will continue to be an excellent scholar, a first-rate teacher, and a good citizen of the Department. While we may, no doubt, err, in either direction, the long term consequences of a tenure decision cannot be ignored. In making these decisions, it is important to note that the cost of a Type I error to the institution (i.e. granting tenure when we should not) is infinite, while the cost of a Type II error (to the Institution) is minimal. This means that we must avoid Type I errors, even if this means that we will make a few Type II errors,

If one views a tenure decision as a prediction, then the total accomplishment of the faculty member, while extremely relevant, is not necessarily the determining factor. It goes without saying that the quality, rather than the quantity, of the publications is important. Equally important, however, is the pattern of accomplishment as gleaned from the candidate's record. An "adequate" number of publications, all very good but scattered across many problem areas with no indication of a coherent program, or a central theme, might be less predictive of future success than a smaller number of good publications, all focused around a central theme from which a programmatic, sensible approach to problems can be inferred. Important contributions made very early in an individual's career but without substantial follow-up, will be evaluated quite differently than the same contribution if made as a culmination of a programmatic research program leading, over the six probationary years, to a major contribution. The promotion process must, in this view, extrapolate from the trend of an individual's career, as displayed over the probationary period, the trends for the future.

If tenure is a prediction rather than an award, such considerations must override a strict counting of publications, teaching awards, and committee service. Of course, in most cases there will be a very strong correlation between the total record of achievement and the predictions we would like to make for the future. But in any event, and in all cases, the prediction aspect of the tenure decision has to, and will be, predominant. These predictions are made as a matter of personal judgment by those participating in the promotion review at all its levels.

The Department does not, and will not, maintain a tenure quota. Any individual hired as an Assistant Professor in this Department can hope to receive tenure regardless of tenure decisions made with respect to other Assistant Professors.

Assistant Professors are evaluated entirely on their own personal merit and tenure is awarded whenever we feel confident that we can predict that an individual's career in the future decades will be consistent with our goals.

We strive to recruit faculty at the leading edge of their chosen areas of scholarship. Within the inevitable limitations on our ability to judge and predict human behavior, we shall continue to so strive. To assure this, tenure must be awarded not as a matter of course in compensation for a certain number of years of probationary service during which a certain number of publications has been produced. Rather, the progress of the candidates must be scanned for information that allows a prediction of success.

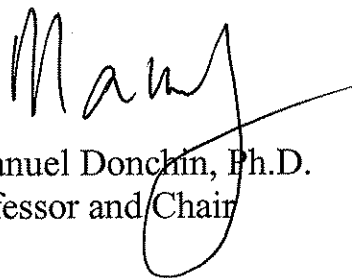
a. Promotion to Full Professor.

The criteria for promoting Associate Professors to the rank of Full Professor present some interesting difficulties. Unlike tenure decisions, promotion decisions are indeed rewards for past performance. We grant only one such reward in an individual's career in the Department. Other University-related rewards for excellence, such as an appointment as a Distinguished University Professor, are not under the Department's control. One need ask, therefore, what are we rewarding by a promotion to Full Professorship. One model assumes that if an individual has been an Associate Professor for a certain number of years conducting a programmatic, sound, productive research enterprise then promotion must come as a matter of course.

This model deflates the value of the promotion to Full Professorship. If such promotion is mainly a matter of longevity and its timing depends more or less on the accumulation of a sufficient number of papers, there is not much distinction associated with such a promotion. In the normal course of things, just as one expects one day to retire, one would expect under this model one day to become a Full Professor.

A more attractive model views the promotion to the rank of Full Professor is an award for exceptionally outstanding contributions. An individual, to achieve promotion to the rank of Full Professor, must have a certain clear cut and widely recognized achievement that goes beyond the mere accumulation of acceptable publications. What we look for are developments in the areas of scholarship chosen by the individual wherein one could see that the work has changed, or is likely to change, the field of Psychology in a creative and productive manner. Making such judgments is no easy matter and one cannot

produce a simple formula that will say “do this or that and you will be promoted.” Somehow, however, the mark of excellence is quite obvious when brought into focus. When this happens, the totality of the record, the letters received from outside referees, and the general perception by members of the relevant committees and the faculty converge to a favorable and largely unanimous decision.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Manj", written over the printed name and title.

Emanuel Donchin, Ph.D.  
Professor and Chair