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April 9, 2018

Professor Ethan Tsai
Department of Chemistry
SI-3062, Campus Box 52

Dear Professor Tsai:

I am responding to your portfolio for tenure and promotion during this year's application cycle. I am not recommending tenure and promotion at this time. However, I am recommending to President Davidson that you be reappointed to a fifth probationary year. My recommendation to the President is based on my assessment of your career at MSU Denver and of the portfolio you submitted. I have also taken under advisement the recommendations and evaluations of the previous levels of review. Chapter V of the *Handbook for Professional Personnel* sets forth the requirements and procedures for achieving tenure. I have rated your contributions and accomplishments in the three evaluation areas as follows:

Teaching: *Needs Improvement.*
Scholarly Activities: *Meets Standards.*
Service: *Meets Standards.*

You began your career at MSU Denver in fall 2014. In my evaluation of your portfolio, I have utilized the 2017 Chemistry Department Evaluation Guidelines. I have also considered the recommendations of all previous levels of review. I note that the Chemistry Department RTP Committee and the Chemistry Department Chair, Dr. Andrew Bonham, recommended against tenure and promotion, based on ratings of "Needs Improvement" in the area of Teaching. All other levels of review recommended in favor of tenure and promotion, assigning ratings of "Meets Standards" in all three areas of evaluation. I have reviewed your response letters to the Department RTP Committee, the Department Chair, and the CLAS RTP Committee.

Teaching: *Needs Improvement*

Since your arrival at MSU Denver, you have taught 18 sections of Chemistry courses. Your offerings were all upper-division preparations such as *CHE 3100 Organic Chemistry I* and *CHE 4950 Senior Experience in Chemistry*. You also mentored four students in supervised research. On average, there were 23 students enrolled in your classes. You taught in lecture and lab formats. In AY 2014-15, you received 3 hours of reassigned time to supervise the NMR facility. You received a rating of "Meets Standards" for this work. In AY 2015-16, you received 3 hours of reassigned time to develop the NMR facility and to enhance contacts with the UCD Chemistry Department. I was unable to locate an evaluation for this reassigned time.

In your narrative, you detail the steps you have taken to maintain currency in your course preparations. You have revised older courses in the Department curriculum, and "re-tooled" advanced courses to, "...provide our students with the best chance for success in developing the

critical thinking skills necessary to succeed in all aspects of their post baccalaureate career in chemistry.”

In response to student feedback, you have adjusted your course design and content delivery techniques. You make a range of additional materials available to your students, including all of your lecture slides, previous exams, and review materials. You have implemented a test “retake” policy, giving students the opportunity to correct errors and resubmit exams. You have begun incorporating a range of active learning exercises to maximize students’ retention of complex material. I note that you also have begun using an online Google document as another avenue through which students can anonymously express their concerns.

Your Department guidelines require faculty to “...thoroughly and accurately [advise] students.” I note that in her review of your third year reappointment portfolio, Dr. Joan Foster, Dean of CLAS, wrote, “I suggest that Dr. Tsai more thoroughly address his academic advising experiences in his narrative and portfolio.” Unfortunately, in your tenure and promotion portfolio and narrative, I was unable to find evidence documenting your advising activities.

The Chemistry Department RTP Committee and Dr. Andrew Bonham, the Department Chair, assigned a rating of “Needs Improvement” in the area of teaching. They based their rating on concerns regarding the nature of your interactions with students, as reflected regularly in student comments. Chemistry Department evaluation guidelines require a tenure candidate’s SRI scores to be consistently within 0.5 of the prefix average. During the probationary period, your scores on the Q2 “Faculty Contribution to Course” item ranged from 4.29 to 6.00. While the quantitative scores are strong, I find significant cause for concern in the student comments. As noted by the Department RTP Committee, “...student comments...point to Dr. Tsai’s arrogance, dismissive remarks, and/or indifference in his interactions.” Many of your students appreciate your teaching style, describing you as “well prepared,” “always available,” and “supportive.” However, a significant number of students describe you as “not helpful” and “intimidating.” One student wrote, “[he] uses fear to push people.” Obviously, one comment is not cause for concern. Unfortunately, that comment captures the tone of concerns expressed by many other students. I agree with Dr. Bonham when he wrote,

While for some students Dr. Tsai is an effective instructor, there is a sizable, consistent, and recurrent fraction of students for whom his instruction is ineffective, and it is apparently rooted in student perceptions of a condescending and/or intimidating attitude. This signifies a problem in both instructional delivery and in creating an environment conducive for learning.

These concerns, expressed by a significant proportion of students, are the basis for my rating of “Needs Improvement.” I acknowledge and appreciate that you have taken several steps to address these concerns. I hope these steps will yield positive outcomes. Evidence of sustained improvement in the area of teaching will strengthen any future applications for tenure and promotion.

Scholarship: *Meets Standards*

According to your Department guidelines, in order to meet standards for tenure and promotion in the area of scholarship, a candidate must publish at least one peer-reviewed article, engage in at least one refereed conference presentation, and participate in other scholarly activities such as grant writing or continuing education. You have met these standards. During the probationary period, you have published three peer-reviewed articles and one refereed book chapter. You have participated in two refereed conference presentations. Dr. Bonham notes that you were “a co-PI on a large (\$200K), funded NSF grant to advance NMR spectroscopy in the

classroom and which helped bring high-field NMR capabilities to MSU Denver.” I agree with the CLAS RTP Committee when they described your research agenda as “active” and “impressive.”

Service: *Meets Standards*

Your contributions in the area of service have been diverse. You have served as Chair of the Department Chemical Hygiene/Chemical Storage Development Committee. You also served on the Department Curriculum Committee and on multiple Department search committees. Your development of the NMR facility is particularly impressive. You served the University as co-Chair of the Eric Ball Scholarship Committee, as a member of the Differentiated Workload Task Force, and as a member of the MSU Denver delegation to the NSF. I appreciate your contributions to the Brewing Operations program. As described by Dr. Bonham, “Dr. Tsai has been a key player in the new Brewing Operations program, spending many hours building rigorous curricula, programs, facilities, and establishing frameworks for the future. This program has been well-received, and I am confident that this program would not be as successful without his efforts.”

Following my recommendation to President Davidson, she will contact you with her final decision. If reappointed to a fifth probationary year, I encourage you to work diligently with your Department Chair, senior colleagues, and/or the Center for Faculty Excellence to address the concerns raised in this evaluation. I wish you success as you move forward.

Sincerely,



Vicki L. Golich, Ph.D.

Provost and Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs

cc: Janine Davidson, President
Human Resources