



MEMORANDUM

Office of the Provost

Lloyd Armstrong, Jr.
Provost

To: The Faculty

From: Lloyd Armstrong *lad*

Date: November 24, 2003

Subject: Teaching, Promotions and Honors

We properly place great emphasis on excellence in scholarship, but sometimes I'm asked whether teaching ever counts decisively in decisions on promotions, tenure, and bestowal of honors. We are a research university, and it is a bedrock for us to emphasize outstanding research and scholarship in decisions about faculty. No assistant professor should have any confusion on that, and our longstanding criteria are reaffirmed in this year's edition of the guidelines on promotion and tenure (recently sent to schools and shortly to be available at www.usc.edu/policies.)

Nevertheless we have important concurrent responsibilities to our students. I'm writing to give you a few examples of how teaching does count in decisions about faculty, when there is reliable evidence of its quality and impact. All these examples are just within the past year.

Bill McClure is the most recent recipient of the Presidential Medallion, the University's highest honor. Bill is an eminent scholar; but an essential part of the contribution for which he was recognized is that he is an acclaimed and gifted teacher. By contrast, another outstanding faculty member was considered for designation as Distinguished Professor, an honor otherwise well deserved, but that title was not approved at this time largely because of insufficient contribution as a teacher.

While the key issue in promotion cases of course is quality and impact of scholarship, some decisions do turn on excellence of teaching and mentoring. For example, an associate professor whose scholarship met our standards for full professor was initially denied promotion because of apparent weakness in mentoring graduate students. In that case, promotion to full professor was approved only after the school was able to explain the special circumstances of a field with few graduate students. Within the last year, a colleague was denied tenure because of weaknesses in teaching, which were not outweighed by the quality of scholarship. Another assistant professor was initially denied tenure though the scholarship was good, until documentation that the teaching was demonstrably outstanding at the national level tipped the scales.

The University Role and Mission Statement declares parallel responsibilities of research and teaching. High quality research is fundamental to our mission. Our first priority as faculty is the education of our students, and we strive constantly for excellence in teaching. Our aspiration is that there will be mutual benefits rather than trade-offs: strengths as a scholar can and should contribute to strengths as a teacher.