6-29-2016

2016 Tenure and Promotion Lunch

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Good afternoon, tenured faculty and newly promoted faculty specialists, associate professors and professors of Western Michigan University!

You did it, and the board, senior leaderships and I wanted to be among the first to offer our congratulations and best wishes for continued success as members of this university community.

Your feeling of achievement today is something that will remain with you throughout your career. I speak from experience. An occasion like this when I see you celebrating reminds me of my own feeling of pride and accomplishment at earning tenure and being promoted. For me, it was a while back. Your euphoria may not remain at this level, but it will always be a source of deep satisfaction—a signature moment in your academic career.

This is a moment best enjoyed among your colleagues who truly do understand what it took to achieve. That's another reason why we wanted to bring you all together for a celebratory event right after the board vote was taken. I suspect the celebration does not stop here, and that's just fine.

You know, in recent years, tenure and promotion celebrations have taken on a life of their own, with YouTube celebration videos and online sites to purchase the appropriate tenure paraphernalia. And there's even the story about the reasons God couldn't get tenure—only one major publication to his credit, and the scientific community wasn't able to replicate his results.
But my favorite story that puts tenure into perspective is about Luis von Ahn. He's an associate professor of computer science from Carnegie Mellon University and his work is all about massive-scale online collaboration and he's considered one of the pioneers of crowdsourcing--even has a popular TED Talk to his credit. In 2006, when he was an untenured, young academic focused on cryptography, he won a MacArthur Fellowship--you know, the one commonly known as the genius award. Here's how he described his place in the universe at that point:

"When I found out that I had won the MacArthur Fellowship, I had been a professor at Carnegie Mellon for a week. I probably shouldn't be saying this on TV, but I stopped worrying about tenure."

• It's time for you to stop worrying. You did it. Now it's time to take some time to celebrate and reflect on your accomplishments and set your path for the future. Now that you are among our senior faculty members, we're counting on you to set your research and creative goals to match and extend that sense of pride you have today.

• Congratulations and enjoy your new status. Thank you for all you do and all you will accomplish in the future.