

To: llehman
From: "Peter J. Hammer" <hammerp@umich.edu>
Subject: a request
Cc:
Bcc:
Attached:



Dear Jeff,

As you know, this has not been an easy year for me. Besides issues of tenure, there have been health scares with my mother, an unscheduled set of spot biopsies for Suny's eye, and legal complications with family immigration matters. Finally, upon returning home from the Association for Health Services Research meetings in LA three weeks ago, I learned that the undeveloped lot next to my house had been sold to someone who plans to put in a commercial nursery this fall. What's more, their land survey puts the boundary 50 feet closer to our house than our mortgage survey suggests - so now I am living out a first year property problem complete with claims of adverse possession and acquiescence. Fortunately, many of the serious crises that could have emerged from these problems did not emerge, and the boundary issues have served mainly to erode my previously deep attachment to my house and land (not a small cost), and to reconcile myself to the fact that moving may be the only real option in the face of development.

This long introduction is a way of saying that the concern I expressed in our last meeting in your office in the spring is still very real and fairly raw. My existing contractual relationship with the University makes it impossible to separate the tenure issue from the need to make plans for serious and substantial life changes in the event of the an adverse outcome. If not the actual intent of the original six year commitment with tenure consideration in your fifth year, then one of the primary virtues of the arrangement is the safety net it provides, which permits one to mentally compartmentalize what you need to do to get tenure, from the issue of what plans you need to make if things do not work out.

The trigger for this letter was a call I received yesterday from Lynn at the University Treasurer's Office. The 20,000 dollar 7% loan I took out to place a down payment on the house we purchased for Suny's family is due in full at the end of July. Although inexcusable and highly irresponsible, this had completely dropped off my radar screen. At some point, decision making triage reduces one to simply fighting fires. This is the latest fire. The options are either repayment, refinance, or a Departmental extension of the due date with continued monthly payments.

My request is two-fold. First, I would ask that you interpret the faculty's decision to defer my tenure decision for two years as authorizing you to provide a two year extension of what was left of my existing contract. In effect, this would reestablish the pre-existing safety net. If the faculty votes to extend tenure, then it becomes a non-issue. If tenure is denied, then it gives me a year to orchestrate what could be a very complicated family departure from Ann Arbor. Second, I would ask that you extend the loan period in the same fashion, so the decision whether to refinance can be based on the knowledge of whether or not we will be staying.

The potential downside for the Law School is the possible disruption for colleagues and students of having me around for an extra year in the unfortunate event that tenure is denied. While certainly awkward and perhaps unpleasant for all sides, I think people know me well enough to understand that if I ever reached a point where I felt that I could not constructively engage with the community, I would withdraw from it rather than see it divide. Moreover, as I have stressed with numerous students in the course of the deferral, I adamantly do not want to become anyone's cause. I strongly believe that my students respect me enough to honor that wish.

I actually believe that this is a case where the decision is very significant in terms of "process" and the psychological comfort it brings, while it will have little substantive effect. If I was in a serious bind and needed the time, I take it on faith that this community would be forthcoming and help me out. On the other hand, if things do not work out here, it will be in my strong self interest to plan a quick and graceful exit, regardless of what time may be left on my contract.

I have tried to understand why I have obsessed so much about not having an extra year on the contract. My best answer is as follows: Whatever happens with tenure and my professional reputation affects mainly me, for better or for worse. Moreover, I am confident enough in my own talents and abilities to believe that things will work out, if not here then somewhere else. The logistics of where I will be and the continuity of my employment, however, affects my partner and our family. It directly threatens my ability to take care of and to provide for my family. This has turned out to be a far greater source of stress and anxiety than concerns about the tenure process itself, although the two are obviously connected.

Temporarily staggering the issue of tenure and employment, as done in the original arrangement, would go a long way in helping me focus on my work and scholarship, even as I juggle many of life's problems that are beyond either your or my control.

I would appreciate hearing your thoughts. I view this more as an invitation to continue the conversations we started last spring than as a request for a quick decision. I will be out of town from the 22-27 visiting my family in Washington State.

Peter