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## Six Years to Tenure

# Six Years to Tenure

*Nick Holland*

Tenure is truly an achievement worth celebrating for anyone with a career in teaching. The grant of tenure is the culmination of years of hard work and proving oneself as a qualified and worthwhile academic. However, tenure is only a beginning in another light. Dr. Ilaria Ossella-Durbal is no exception to this, as she has earned tenure this spring semester, 2005, at Illinois Wesleyan University.

The daughter of a student of economics, she mentions this as her first experience with the social science. After being exposed to it from her father, Dr. Durbal knew she wanted to pursue economics in college. At Cornell University, as an undergraduate, she pursued both her passions: economics and mathematics. As graduation approached she was not sure what she wanted to do but she knew she wanted to continue her education. Dr. Durbal would enter graduate school for economics.

After one year at NYU, Dr. Durbal returned to Cornell and earned her Ph. D. During this time she was a teacher's assistant for a microeconomics course. It was this experience and her experience as an undergraduate calculus tutor that helped her decide to become a collegiate professor of economics. She finished her Ph. D. with research in development economics. One article she wrote discussed opening up countries to trade and whether or not the growth would be a one time shock that would taper off or would be sustained for many years to come from looking at growth and trade models. While this paper was mathematical and not empirical, Dr. Durbal did write an empirical paper on the allocation of limited resources in poor countries. It looked at, amongst other things, the benefits of spending on education or infrastructure. Dr. Durbal concluded that infrastructure was a major concern for increasing efficiency, especially in regards to electricity.

After earning her Ph. D. degree, Illinois Wesleyan University was looking for a professor to fill a tenure track position. Knowing that she wanted to work at a small liberal arts school, Dr. Durbal applied for the position. After multiple interviews

with faculty, she was offered the position and thus began another phase in her life.

As described by both Dr. Durbal and Dr. Michael Seeborg, Robert S. Eckley Distinguished Professor of Economics and head of the economics department at IWU, the tenure process at IWU is a six year program that grants one year contracts until tenure is received. During this period, a professor is evaluated on his or her skills in teaching, research, and service to the university. According to Dr. Seeborg, the most important category is teaching, and he knows Dr. Durbal excels in this category from sitting in on many of her classes and considers her a "great teacher." As for service to the university, Dr. Durbal is "super active", says Dr. Seeborg, since she chairs the Development Studies Committee in the International Studies Program and has participated in other university committees as well. After this step, the evaluations are done by the department head and Tenure and Advancement Committee which is comprised of faculty throughout the university. This committee also considers current students' feedback through student course evaluations and recommendations from faculty, alumni, and experts in the field that have read the faculty member's research. Also considered is the faculty member's self reflection, for which Dr. Durbal wrote 30 pages that included her teaching philosophy and progress. Six years after teaching her first classes, which were Statistics and Economics of Developing Countries, at IWU Dr. Durbal was granted tenure and promoted to Associate Professor of Economics.

Both Dr. Durbal and Dr. Seeborg still see a need for tenure in today's society. Dr. Durbal believes it is always necessary to protect the freedom for professors to be able to focus on the areas of their interest. Dr. Seeborg shares this view, but takes it another step further. He sees tenure as being critical to preserving the quality of IWU. If professors cannot evaluate their peers honestly, the prestige of the university may be in jeopardy. Therefore, one's career needs to be secure from retribution from criti-

cism.

Dr. Durbal has certainly worked hard over the years; from college to graduate school, and her entire tenure process. Her dedication, charm, and research have earned her respect from her colleagues, students, scholars, and IWU. Now that she has tenure Dr. Durbal has further goals. She will continue her research and will be on sabbatical in the spring of 2006.