

PROMOTION RECOMMENDATION  
The University of Michigan  
School of Education

Carla O'Connor, associate professor of education, with tenure, School of Education, is recommended for promotion to professor of education, with tenure, School of Education.

Academic Degrees:

Ph.D.	1996	Administration, Institutional, and Policy Studies	University of Chicago
M.A.	1991	Education	University of Chicago
B.A.	1988	African-American Literature	Wesleyan University

Professional Experience:

2009-present	Co-Director, Center for the Study of Black Youth in Context, School of Education, University of Michigan
2007-present	Arthur F. Thurnau Professor, School of Education, University of Michigan
2004-present	Associate Professor, Educational Studies Program, School of Education, University of Michigan
1997-present	Faculty Associate, Center for Afroamerican and African Studies, University of Michigan
2004-present	Research Affiliate, National Poverty Center, Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan
1996-2004	Assistant Professor, Educational Studies Program, School of Education, University of Michigan

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching: Professor O'Connor has established a strong and multidimensional teaching portfolio. She has led efforts in curriculum revision in the undergraduate Teacher Education Program and the graduate program in Educational Studies. She is a highly respected, resourceful, and reflective classroom instructor and a dedicated mentor to graduate student instructors (GSIs), her advisees, and those whose dissertations she supervises.

At the undergraduate level, Professor O'Connor has not only taught multiple sections of "Teaching in a Multicultural Society" (EDUC 392) and supervised GSIs assigned to assist with the course, but also led the major redesign process for this required teacher education course. Professor O'Connor's efforts to reconceptualize and standardize this course have led to greater coordination with other elements of the Teacher Education Program and resulted in substantially improved evaluations from students.

At the graduate level, Professor O'Connor has taught "Sociology of Education" (EDUC 643) four times and "Education and Cultural Studies" (EDUC 645) five times since being granted tenure. She uses these courses to develop the intellectual clarity and sophistication of her students and prepare them for their future work as scholars. Professor O'Connor demonstrates a thoughtful, considered approach to her teaching and students have consistently evaluated both of these courses favorably.

Professor O'Connor also has had a significant advising and mentoring load since 2004, drawing students inside and outside of her home program area. She has served on eleven students' qualifying exam committees and thirteen students' dissertation committees, chairing eight of these.

Research: Since being granted tenure in 2004, Professor O'Connor has published one co-authored book, four peer-reviewed articles, five book chapters, and one book review. Professor O'Connor also has five peer-reviewed conference presentations. Every external reviewer noted that Professor O'Connor's publications appear in top-tier peer-reviewed journals and described her publications as being of high quality. Professor O'Connor's program of scholarship is focused on advancing the theoretical and conceptual discourse of Black student achievement in schools. Her approach to understanding Black achievement is nuanced and layered. For example, her body of work contains studies of high-achieving Black youth, the placement of Black youth in special education curriculum, and conceptual examinations of race as a social construct and its relationship to how students are defined as being "at risk." Professor O'Connor's conceptual and empirical work straddles two related areas in the research on Black student achievement: (a) how previous researchers of achievement have socially constructed the concept of "at risk"; and (b) how students show agency and promise independent of school structure.

In addition to Professor O'Connor's strong conceptual and empirical work, she has been quite successful in acquiring external funding for her research efforts. During her post-tenure years, she has served as the principal investigator (PI) or co-PI on two major grants. She completed a three-year grant from the William T. Grant Foundation on "Black Identity, School Performance, and the Transition to Adulthood" and the National Science Foundation funded her most recent grant for the Center for the Study of Black Youth in Context. In her scholarly statement, Professor O'Connor's discusses her plans for manuscripts that will result from the grant. Her planned activities are consonant with her published scholarship: examining the roles of institutional structures and family environment on students' academic achievement.

Recent and Significant Publications:

- O'Connor, C. & Fernandez, S. D. (2006). Race, class, and disproportionality: Reevaluating the relationship between poverty and special education placement. *Educational Researcher*, 35(6), 6-11.
- Mueller, J. & O'Connor, C. (2007). Telling and retelling about self and "others:" How pre-service teachers (re)interpret privilege and disadvantage in one college classroom. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23 (6), 840-856.
- O'Connor, C., Mueller, J., Rivas-Drake, D., Lewis, R. L., & Rosenberg, S. (2011 - on line first). "Being" Black and strategizing for excellence in a racially stratified academic hierarchy. *American Educational Research Journal*.
- O'Connor, C., Hill, L. D., & Robinson, J. (2009). Who's at risk in school and what's race got to do with it? *Review of Research in Education*, 33, 1-34.
- O'Connor, C., Lewis, A., & Mueller, J. (2007). Researching Black Educational Experiences and Outcomes: Theoretical and Methodological Considerations. *Educational Researcher*, 36 (9), 541-552.

Service: Professor O'Connor's record of service is exemplary. She is an active member of the school and university communities and she has a strong record of national service. Within the School of Education, Professor O'Connor has served on a number of committees including the Search Advisory Committee for the dean of the School of Education, the Executive Committee, the School of Education Social Justice Committee, and search committees for the Director of Teacher Education and Instructional Leadership faculty position.

Nationally, Professor O'Connor served on the Publications Committee for the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and is on the editorial board for the *American Educational Research Journal* (AERJ). Several of the external reviewers were aware of her work with AERA or AERJ and commented on how impressed they were with her service.

The service in which Professor O'Connor has typically engaged exemplifies her intellectual leadership, both locally and nationally, and closely integrates with her teaching and scholarship.

External Reviewers:

Reviewer A: "Having conducted evaluations for promotion to Professor among the leading academic departments in her field, I am confident that she would achieve the rank of Professor in the top-ranked departments across the nation. Without question, we would dearly love to have her here as a full Professor. The quality and originality of her scholarship, the prestigious places of publication, and, above all else, the high regard in which she is held by the nation's leading scholars on race and achievement underscore her reputation as an original and mature scholar."

Reviewer B: "Although it is difficult to determine which of Dr. O'Connor's publications is most outstanding ... I would identify the chapter, 'Who's at risk' ... as a particularly seminal one. The chapter addresses the tendency on the part of education researchers to 'aggregate demographic data in ways that mask the variation in achievement that occurs within and across racial groups but also selectively highlights some achievement gaps and indices of underperformance and not others' ... I believe the central question that the University of Michigan School of Education must ask itself is 'what would our scholarly community lack if Dr. O'Connor were not here?' I am sure that is not a scenario you want to contemplate."

Reviewer C: "I cannot overemphasize the importance of Dr. O'Connor's program of research as it stands in such stark contrast to the meta-narratives that dominate educational research on race and equity. These meta-narratives vary along a single set of deficit assumptions – at one end are arguments of cultural inferiority associated with some combination of race/ethnicity and class and at the other end arguments of structural inequalities that are deterministic where marginalized populations are simply pawns. Dr. O'Connor takes a cultural and ecological perspective on structural inequalities and uses a human development perspective to understand agentive responses to such structural inequalities. ... Perhaps most impressive is her record of funded research, totaling over 5 million dollars. It is especially impressive for a sociologist of education to receive two major grants from the National Science Foundation. In addition, both the Ford Foundation and W.T. Grant are very competitive awards. Her leadership role in the Center for the Study of Black Youth in Context is equally important as her leadership colleagues at the Center are all psychologists."

Reviewer D: "At my institution, she would be a very competitive candidate for promotion and would most likely receive it. I would support it enthusiastically. At this point, O'Connor is among the most important and creative thought leaders in efforts to conceptualize and study race in ways that point to better social practice."

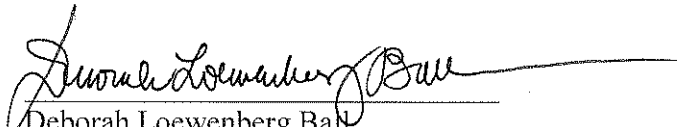
Reviewer E: "...I am particularly struck by the continuity and quality of her research agenda. ... I am compelled by the ways in which these articles are so tightly interwoven philosophically and empirically. Her line of research appears purposefully tightly configured, and I am exceedingly impressed with the ways it collectively contributes to new understandings about race, schools, and student achievement."

Reviewer F: "In summary, Professor O'Connor is making serious contributions to research on urban education and the sociological study of traditionally underserved students. She is a leading thinker on matters of education, geography of opportunity, and human development. I consider her to be one of the important social scientists working in the field of education."

Reviewer G: "I am very impressed with the quality of argument and insight in the article 'Researching Black'.... The significance of this article is its elucidation of the dynamism of the meaning of race in space and time. The article pushes us beyond the static categorical use of race as some immutable attribute or fixed condition. It poses a substantial problem for sociologists trained as I was in the tradition of statistical modeling that treats race as control/causal variable. This kind of conceptual challenge is significant and moves the field in important ways. ... In closing, I am very pleased to recommend Dr. O'Connor for promotion to the rank of Professor. I do so without reservation knowing that I can look forward to a long fruitful and productive career from her."

Reviewer H: "I am...highly familiar with promotion and tenure standards at AAU institutions across field and rank, and can state, without any hesitation, that Dr. Carla O'Connor is fully deserving of the rank of Professor at the University of Michigan."

Summary of Recommendation: Carla O'Connor's post-tenure career is notable for the cohesion of her scholarship, teaching, and service. She is a leading scholar of Black student academic achievement and, as the external reviewers note, her work is distinguished by its quality and originality. Her framing of the structural and individual components comprising Black student achievement contributes to how she has conceptualized her role as an instructor and mentor of pre-service teachers and graduate students. She has shown particular strength in the area of teaching, both in terms of her own teaching and in leading efforts to restructure undergraduate curricula. Professor O'Connor also is an effective mentor to students at the graduate level, and she has actively served her professional community, within and beyond the School of Education and the University of Michigan. It is with the support of the School of Education Executive Committee that I recommend Professor Carla O'Connor for promotion to professor of education, with tenure, School of Education.

  
Deborah Loewenberg Ball  
William H. Payne Collegiate Professor of Education  
Arthur F. Thurnau Professor, and Dean  
School of Education

May 2012