PROMOTION RECOMMENDATION
University of Michigan-Dearborn
College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters

Nitya Sethuraman, assistant professor of psychology, Department of Behavioral Sciences, College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters, is recommended for promotion to associate professor of psychology, with tenure, Department of Behavioral Sciences, College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters.

Academic Degrees:

Ph.D.   2002   University of California, San Diego
M.A.   1997   University of California, San Diego
B.A.   1993   University of California, Berkeley

Professional Record:

2008 – present Assistant Professor of Psychology, Department of Behavioral Sciences, University of Michigan-Dearborn
2007 – 2008   Lecturer, Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, Indiana University
2003 – 2007   Post-doctoral Researcher, Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, Indiana University
2002 – 2003   Adjunct Professor, Liberal Studies Program, California State University, San Marcos

Teaching: Professor Sethuraman is rated excellent in teaching. She is highly committed to student learning, emphasizing finding creative ways for students to learn the core material of her courses. She is extremely valuable to the discipline, teaching courses in two key sub-areas within psychology, including developmental, for which she was not explicitly hired. She has supervised twelve undergraduate research projects, an honors student thesis, and has been a member of three other thesis committees. Her course evaluation scores have steadily increased since coming to campus, now averaging above 4.0 (out of 5) for the key questions of overall evaluation of course and instructor. This is all the more impressive, because while her course evaluations have steadily improved, the evaluations of course difficulty have steadily increased.

Research: Professor Sethuraman is rated excellent in research. She has published four peer-reviewed articles and one book chapter since coming to the University of Michigan-Dearborn and has another article currently under review. Of these, she has been the first author of three articles, and the second author of the other two. Her main research area is the cross-linguistic study of language acquisition. Most research in this field has focused on English and other Indo-European languages—a serious limitation since one of the burning issues in this field has been the question of universality of language learning. Professor Sethuraman has studied Tamil, which is a Dravidian language. Furthermore, she has focused on the process of language acquisition, investigating how a skill develops and why it develops in that particular manner. Too many studies in this field have merely focused on when in development or in what context a skill is acquired. Her most important work is perhaps her most recent—"Verbs and attention to relational roles: A cross-linguistic study" published in the highly influential *Journal of Child Language*.

<u>Recent and Significant Publications:</u>

Gasser, M., Sethuraman, N., and Hockema, S. (2010). Iconicity in Expressives: An Empirical Investigation. In S. Rice and J. Newman (Eds.), <u>Empirical and Experimental Methods in Cognitive/Functional Research</u>, *CSLI Publications,* Stanford, CA, pp. 163-180. (Book Chapter)

Maouene, J., Sethuraman, N., Laakso, A., and Maouene, M. (2011). The body region correlates of concrete and abstract verbs in early child language. *Cognition, Brain, Behavior: An Interdisciplinary Journal,* XV:4, 449-484.

Sethuraman, N., and Smith, L.B. (2010). Cross-linguistic differences in talking about scenes. *Journal of Pragmatics,* 42, 2978–2991.

Sethuraman, N., Laakso, A., and Smith, L.B. (2011).Verbs and syntactic frames in children's elicited actions: A comparison of Tamil- and English-speaking children, *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research,* 40, 241-252.

Sethuraman, N., and Smith, L.B. (2013). Verbs and attention to relational roles: A cross-linguistic study, *Journal of Child Language,* 40, 358-390.

<u>Service</u>: Professor Sethuraman is rated excellent in service. She has served on a number of committees, including the Student Affairs Advisory Committee (2009-2012, the Scholarship Committee (2010-2013), and the Women's Resource Center's Transitions Mentoring Program (2010-2012). She is currently the Behavioral Sciences alternate to the CASL Executive Committee. Perhaps most importantly, she has chaired the Behavioral Sciences Major Program Review, leading the committee in conducting a complete self-study of the Behavioral Sciences program. The committee identified the program goals and developed a curriculum matrix, showing how the learning objectives of each course map to both the program goals and the college goals. It completely restructured the major requirements to match the new program goals and the college goals. Two of her significant ongoing commitments are membership on the Psychology Assessment Committee and the Vision 2020 Pillar I, Improvement 3, Task 3 Committee: Deepen Academic Excellence.

<u>External Reviewers:</u>
Reviewer A: "I expect that Dr. Sethuraman's 2013 article in the *Journal of Child Language* will have a substantial impact in changing our view of how language typology affects verb learning."

Reviewer B: "... the papers are well presented, interesting, and add significantly to our knowledge of language acquisition. ... The papers on Tamil verb argument structure are valuable because, for languages that have a lot of ellipsis of core arguments (including Tamil); child acquirers do not always hear the full constructions..."
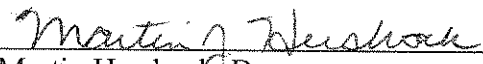
Reviewer C: "Professor Sethuraman is an excellent scholar and researcher, whose research on the acquisition of argument structure and constructions is outstanding. In my opinion, her work on ellipsis makes the most original, significant contributions to this area that I have seen in the past two decades. The quality of her scholarship is exceptional."

Reviewer D: "Dr. Sethuraman's experimental approach is meticulous and elegant and she uses it to answer questions in a very comprehensive way. She is not seeking to obtain 'just publishable units' but rather does all the hard work of conducting appropriate control and follow up studies to truly nail down her conclusions."

Reviewer E: "Nitya is among the top-ranking [junior] scholars in the area of developmental psycholinguistics. ... This research is exciting because it tells us something important about the relationship between verb meaning, argument structure and relational roles... I was impressed to note that in Sethuraman and Smith (2013) that a Tamil version of the vocabulary section of this questionnaire had been developed just for the purposes of the study—a remarkable (and time-consuming) achievement in itself."

Reviewer F: "I see this work a trailblazer, expanding the limits of the scientific study of language development beyond the 'tunnel vision' that has characterized it for several decades. I consider this work to be truly transformational. ... Her work on the acquisition of argument structure constructions in English is well-considered and cited. Her work on Tamil is too recent to gain many citations as yet but I predict that it will become required reading in the field."

<u>Summary of Recommendation</u>: Professor Sethuraman is a prominent researcher and leader in the cross-linguistic study of language acquisition. She has demonstrated both a strong commitment to and superior performance in teaching. Her service contributions are exemplary. We are very pleased to recommend, with strong support of the College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters Executive Committee, Nitya Sethuraman for promotion to associate professor of psychology, with tenure, Department of Behavioral Sciences, College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters.

Martin Hershock, Dean
College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters

Daniel Little, Chancellor
University of Michigan-Dearborn

May 2014