



The Tenure Review Committee for Professor
 Andrew P. Black
 Computer Science Department,
 Maseeh College of Engineering and Computer
 Science
 Post Office Box 751
 Portland, Oregon 97207-0751
 USA

November 11, 2004

— Dear Tenure Review Committee.

Concerning Andrew Black as a teacher and mentor.

I have had the pleasure of having Andrew Black as an advisor and mentor during my Ph.D. studies at the University of Washington. Andrew Black was one of the main driving forces behind the Eden project both in terms of scientific contributions, especially to the language aspects of the project, and as an advisor for, and motivator of, students. His ability to both listen to students and to try to give both constructive and and thought-provoking critique to even far-fetched ideas is impressive. He has always been good at showing student that there are two sides to any coin—and he has always been willing to listen to farfetched ideas as to investigate both their merits and their faults—and subsequently explain both in a fair and balanced way. As such, he has never tried to push his own ideas directly; rather he showed how convincing others is not about being missionary, but rather it is about providing viable arguments that hold water.

He has always had an open office and an open mind for students. He, however, would also follow up, so that you would be challenged to substantiate ideas rather than just flaming—as such he is an excellent advocate for respect for well-grounded ideas rather than die-hard doctrines.

His classes were always a pleasure to attend due to his basic attitude that it is the pros and cons of an idea that counts rather than whether or not the idea was uttered by the teacher. Classes often ended with a flurry of discussion as students left the classroom.

At the weekly meetings of the Eden project, I admired Andrew's ability to provide constructive criticism regardless of the level of the student: even first-year students got good advice even when presenting naive ideas. Andrew seems to abide by the saying that in education, there are no stupid questions, only stupid answers.

Personally, Andrew has meant much to me on three fronts:

First, Andrew was instrumental in improving my language skills to a level suitable for someone interested in an academic career. My mother is American and at the start of my graduate

studies at the University of Washington, I had lived a total of about five years in the US. This meant that although my spoken English was fluent and basically accent-free, my written English was not quite up to graduate level at a top ten US Computer Science Department. Andrew immediately recognized this and sent me to a retired English professor who helped me bring my written English to a level where I had no problem writing a Ph.D. dissertation in English. Even today, after seventeen years as a professor at a top Danish Computer Science department, I still benefit from being given a wide and solid base of knowledge about writing scientific documents in English (and I now always give my own Ph.D. students a copy of Strunk and White's book).

Second, Andrew acted as a co-advisor for my Ph.D. and was immensely helpful in weeding out both the improper use of the English language and the not-so-good arguments presented. He did a great job in pushing not only me to do good dissertation work, but also many other working on the Eden and Emerald projects. For some students, his critique at first might seem harsh, but on second thought they would always realized that it was fair and correct—and that they should not shoot the messenger—especially not when he would gladly elaborate and provide fair and reasoned arguments for his critique. As such, his mentoring was of great help in improving the scientific quality of my Ph.D. dissertation. I am grateful that his mentorship continued even after he left the University of Washington—he continued to be a valuable co-advisor for the following two years until I finished—despite the fact that he no longer was officially on my committee. (Now, decades later, I actually had almost forgotten that he wasn't—despite this, he provided a substantial amount of useful comments on the final versions of my dissertation.)

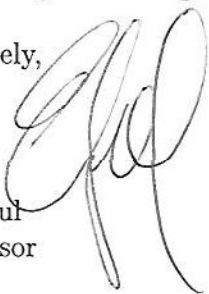
Third, Andrew taught me to believe in my own ideas—and to question them. And that my ideas could be just as valuable as any professor's. He also inspires students to present and discuss ideas in class, rather than sleeping through a million Powerpoint slides. As such, he has served as a role model for my own teaching and supervision of Ph.D. students.

Finally, I'll put my money where my mouth is: I'd hire Andrew at our department without hesitation.

Should you need any further information or verification, please contact me at eric@diku.dk or directly at the department.

Sincerely,

Eric Jul
Professor

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Eric Jul', written over the printed name.