

# Jamie Perez

## Materials Science and Engineering

Jamie Perez, Ph.D. in Materials Science and Engineering from MIT, joins a prestigious research university as a tenure-track assistant professor after completing post-docs at Berkeley and Northwestern. At the time of hiring, the search committee notes a one-year gap between post-docs, a time when Perez studied as a Fulbright Scholar at a European university. Support for his faculty slot is earmarked from the Dean's office for the first two years of the appointment by virtue of an underrepresented faculty hiring initiative.

Perez's start-up package was average for faculty in that unit, but there are some glitches in finding adequate lab space and equipment. While he had been verbally assured during his negotiations that he could share the lab of a senior professor, Perez is told upon arrival by the senior faculty member in his interest group that the senior faculty member's group has priority, and he has limited Perez and his students to two hours per week in that lab. The chair then sent an e-mail to Perez about a change of plans, suggesting that he share a lab with another entering assistant professor until the following year, when the senior colleague moved to a new building on campus. Although somewhat constraining to the research programs of both individuals, this logistical arrangement encouraged the two new colleagues to collaborate on a small research project with some industry funding while also continuing their individual research agendas. The chair recommended at the first annual review that Perez "pay greater attention to research funding in areas more closely linked to the unit's focus" and "try harder" to attract graduate students.

In year two, Perez established a functioning independent lab, attracting a small number of graduate students, and published a paper in a journal about teaching undergraduates and one (with two collaborators) in a significant journal. The small amount of industry funding for collaborative research continued, and Perez was again counseled by his chair during the annual review to pursue more funding. In year three, Perez coauthored papers in two important journals, and worked as the sole materials science and engineering faculty member on a multidisciplinary project with four other faculty members from different engineering and science units. The collaborative, five-year project attracted \$5 million funding from the National Science Foundation and supported one post doc and three graduate students in Perez's lab. During this period, Perez taught only relatively large undergraduate service classes, as senior professors in his interest group claimed the specialty and advanced courses in his area.

The third-year review of Perez's work resulted in a somewhat mixed evaluation. The school chair counseled Perez to "keep up the good work with teaching and service" but expressed his concern that Perez had not been able to secure more than a minimum amount of individual funding despite a very reasonable record of publication in top quality journals. The chair was also concerned that Perez had trouble retaining the more marginal graduate students assigned him (the more promising students were assigned to the most senior faculty in the same interest group). During his review meeting, Perez requested that his chair exercise leadership over the interest group so that he can teach graduate courses in his field and therefore attract more and better graduate students. The chair suggested that perhaps Perez "instead ought to consider devoting more time to individual research, especially in an area more closely related" to the unit's interests and strategic plans to supplement his collaborative work. The chair also expressed concern that Perez was not playing a leadership role in the interaction with other departments on the large NSF grant.

By the time of tenure review, it is clear that Perez did not emphasize pursuing any individual grant funding, as his chair suggested. Perez remained a popular teacher, according to evaluations of MSE majors, and a valued advisor as attested by some graduate students. He was somewhat more inclined than other faculty members in the unit to take on certain advising and other committee responsibilities. Although he attracted little individual funding, Perez was able to keep up a moderately active and fairly well-funded research program in an area not well developed in the unit because of the multi-disciplinary collaboration.

In the unit promotion and tenure committee, questions are raised regarding Perez's future funding potential as an individual researcher, as a teacher of graduate students, and the value of his area of research for the unit. As a member of the committee, how would you respond to these concerns and ensure that Perez receive a fair hearing?