

ACHIEVING TENURE

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The main purpose for tenure is to protect academic freedom. Other purposes are to recognize contributions and dedication of faculty and to build a permanent cadre of faculty. Tenure is earned by significant achievements in teaching, scholarly activity and research, and in service.

Most colleges and universities have a probationary period of up to six years and tenure is applied for by faculty at the end of the probationary period. Some faculty can have the probationary period reduced because of previous work.

Most institutions also have tenure policies and procedures that include peer review of credentials. What is described in this presentation are suggestions for faculty seeking tenure that can shape their behaviors and attitudes to enhance the probability of receiving tenure. These suggestions are additions to the faculty's basic work in teaching, research and scholarly activity and service. Accomplishments in those three areas are fundamental and crucial for achieving tenure. However, each institution and/or department evaluates these differently and there may even be differences in expectations for individual faculty depending on the conditions of their contract. These topics are not addressed in this presentation.

What are addressed are the formal and informal review processes, understanding procedures and standards and presenting your credentials. There are seven major considerations:

- * the tenure clock begins running the moment you are hired,
- * learn your institution's policies and procedures,
- * understand the role of any annual review,
- * review credentials of faculty who recently received tenure,
- * set priorities and review them annually,
- * carefully prepare credentials for review, and
- * focus your energy and resources.

The Tenure Clock

From the moment you are hired you are beginning the process for tenure review. It is most helpful to understand that your efforts and accomplishments in teaching, research and scholarly activity, and in service should be undertaken from the very beginning with the goal of achieving tenure. Some institutions and departments will consider work completed prior to this appointment, e.g. publications, while others have policies that only work completed during the probationary period can be counted. It is important to know which is in effect at your institution.

The ticking of the tenure clock makes it important that you plan to use the full probationary period even when it could be reduced because of your previous experience. It may be tempting to accept or request a reduction in time, but you are likely to need all of the time to firmly establish documented significant accomplishments in all three areas. For example, you may be assigned to teach a course that is new to you and that takes time to prepare. Or, your college may be undergoing a self-study in preparation for an accreditation visit and every faculty member must work on that which gives you less time for other activities.

It is also important that you ask for, or are given, your assignments in writing by the department chair. This is important so that you can document that you emphasized tasks deemed appropriate by your chair at that time. Chairs do not always remain in that position and someone else may be chair when you are reviewed for tenure and they may have different expectations. Having this documentation can help in that instance.

Develop a personal plan for meeting the expectations in teaching, research and scholarly activity, and in service. Many policies are vague when specifying evaluation criteria saying only that your performance must meet standards, be sufficient or appropriate, or be acceptable. This vagueness makes it very important for you to have some idea of just what these expectations are and how you can work to meet them.

During the probationary period it is helpful to have a mentor. Ideally, the mentor will be in your department or discipline, but that may not always be possible. Seek out a mentor who is familiar with the institution's formal and informal processes for review and tenure whether or not this person is in your department or discipline. You may also want to connect electronically with a mentor who can be physically located almost anywhere in the world. This person can be beneficial in providing emotional support, information, and give suggestions for options and alternatives.

Policies and Procedures

Most institutions have written policies and procedures that govern the formal processes for review and tenure consideration. These are usually found in a "Faculty Handbook or Manual"

and are given to faculty. It is important for you to know the evaluation processes, such as annual reviews and pre-tenure reviews, the timeline used by the institution, and guidelines for appeals of decisions. Ask your department chair to explain these to you and do not be shy about asking questions. You need to fully understand what you are supposed to do.

Further, you need to be alert to any changes in these policies and procedures. There seems to be constant tinkering with these and although institutions make efforts to notify faculty about changes, it is the responsibility of the faculty member to stay abreast of requirements and changes.

Annual Reviews

Some institutions have annual reviews, especially for non-tenured faculty. These reviews are used to make decisions about reappointment or non-reappointment, and merit raises. It will be important to know if your institution requires annual reviews, what information is expected to be documented, and what notification and appeal processes are available or required.

Even if it is stated in the faculty handbook, ask your department chair about the criteria and process used to evaluate you on an annual basis. You will want to know if there is peer review, external review, how reviewers are chosen and what use will be made of outcomes. It will also be helpful if the chair can supply you with an example of credentials and documentation submitted for an annual review or guidelines for preparation of credentials.

An annual review should serve as a guide to you on progress toward tenure. It provides you with some current and immediate information on your ability to meet both the stated and inferred standards expected of non-tenured faculty in the department, college and university. Any identified deficiencies should be noted in the annual review and suggestions and resources given to help you strengthen any areas that are in need of attention.

There are occasions when a faculty member may not receive a fair and objective annual review. The policy and guidelines should provide you with information on how to submit an appeal when you feel that the review was not fair.

Credentials of Faculty Receiving Tenure

can be instructive to review credentials for one or more faculty that received tenure in the previous five years, especially if there are any in your department. You could learn more about how credentials are evaluated and criteria applied by the various review committees and officials, such as the dean.

You would want to note the format used by faculty who were successful in obtaining tenure. How did they organize and present their credentials? What documentation was provided?

Many of those who review your credentials will not know you as a person and will only have your credentials and documents on which to base their judgment. Learning what was successful provides you with guidelines for structuring your work and preparing your credentials.

Following are some other points that can be helpful. Note the number of different courses taught. Some disciplines will expect faculty to teach the same few set of courses while others will expect their faculty to be able to teach a wide variety of courses in the discipline. You do not want to be criticized for having too narrow a focus, nor do you want to be too broad and be constantly preparing new courses.

Count the number of journal articles published noting if they were international, national, regional, or state; if they were refereed or not and the number of authors. Did they have sole authorship on any articles or were all joint authorship? Most places will not give you a firm number of publications that are expected but a review of credentials can give you a ball park figure. You will also want to pay attention to what other kind of publications were listed, such as software developed, book reviews, or books written. Books and monographs are generally viewed as taking more time and effort than articles.

If research dollars are important at your institution, pay attention to grants submitted and awarded. There may also be disciplines that require that the grant dollars be given for basic research and not for scholarships or service activities. This distinction may become important when you are being reviewed for tenure.

It may also be important to count the number of professional presentations and note if they were international, national, regional or state; and if they were refereed. Some presentations are accepted only after peer review and this can be an important point in documenting the quality of your work. As with journal articles, it is difficult to get anyone to tell you how many professional presentations are expected, but reading someone's credentials who did receive tenure will give you a guideline.

Teaching is very important and you will want to note what processes are used to evaluate teaching. If student opinion surveys are used and there is numerical data, note what the averages are on the particular scale. For example, if there is a 5 point scale and faculty who received tenure had average ratings from 4.0 to 5.0 you will then know that you should aim for the same range. Also note if there are other methods used to evaluate teaching, such as portfolio review, exit interviews, or classroom visitation. You would want to have your credentials also reflect whatever method is used.

Review Your Priorities

Earlier you were advised to develop a plan for achieving tenure. As part of the plan you should set priorities for yourself and annually review these priorities. Your plan and priorities should guide your day to day work.

Faculty are constantly faced with new challenges and new directions. Whenever there is a change in administration, such as a new department chair or dean, there are usually changes in store for faculty. It seems that self-study for accreditation is constant as it some sort of curriculum review. It is not always possible to order or predict just what you will need to do. However, if you have priorities and continue to work on those tasks that meet your priorities you will not find that you lack needed accomplishments when you are reviewed for tenure.

For example, it may be important for you to prioritize scholarship and research. Therefore, you should spend the majority of your time and effort on these areas. In order to ensure that you emphasize that which is of most importance in these areas, ask your department chair to define the relative importance of activities in these areas. An example of relative importance would be understanding which carries the most significance; a book, monograph, article, newsletter or book review.

Preparation of Credentials

If you will get in the habit of carefully preparing your credentials for annual reviews, you will find it relatively easy to prepare them for tenure consideration. You will also be able to easily access needed documentation as you will know what will be needed for both reviews and will have it organized.

Some suggested documentation that you may not think to collect are; assignments from the chair or dean in teaching and service, teaching portfolio reviews, student evaluations, unsolicited letters from students, committee appointments, and letters of appreciation for professional services. You may also wish to include a list of teaching improvement activities, such as workshops that focus on instruction, copies of articles, full citations for presentations, books and other scholarly activities, copies of any handbooks or manuals you wrote, and a list of professional service activities. It can be helpful to reviewers if you would include a brief one or two sentence description of each service activity that highlights the professional nature of your contribution.

Have someone proof your credentials. If you know someone who understands how to prepare resumes ask for their assistance. They know how to emphasize your strong points and can make suggestions for highlighting activities that you may overlook. The format you use can also be important but do not make the mistake of thinking that image is all important.

Members of review committees are expert at detecting fluff and exaggeration and do not appreciate their use. They will check your citations, ask other faculty about the quality of your work, or even seek out experts in your discipline for their opinion. Make sure your credentials reflect your true accomplishments.

Focus Your Energies

It is easy to become overwhelmed with trying to meet expectations for tenure. Probably no one is deliberately trying to put roadblocks in your path or give you too much to do, it just happens sometimes, especially when only you know just how many you have to work on. This is why it is important to focus your energies and have a plan for how you will meet the criteria for tenure.

Your department chair can guide you in making choices about which activities will be valued over the long term. For example, if you have to make a choice between using time and resources to either write an article or make a presentation the better choice may be to write the article. It is too easy to dissipate your energies on activities that on the surface appear to meet your goals but in the long term are not as valuable as other activities.

The same holds true for committee work. Every faculty should contribute to committee work for the department, college and university. However, be guided by the department chair on which committees will benefit from your contributions and also be helpful to you. Do not let yourself be put on too many committees or on committees where your major contribution is race or gender. Make committee work count for you as well as the organization.