

## Strategies for professors who service the university to earn tenure and promotion

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### Abstract:

Tenure and promotion are great aspirations for college professors. They are indicators of success in the professions. Universities stipulate in their official documents and numerous higher education publications address what professors must achieve in order to earn tenure and promotion; which almost always cite effectiveness in teaching, research, and service. Many professors excel in the three areas of performance and earn the awards. But a rather large number of professors render tremendous service to the university and are effective in teaching, however, they are less productive in research; this can lead to a denial of tenure and promotion and termination of employment at the institution. The question becomes, could faculty who succeed at teaching and extensively service the university prevent falling into such a predicament? An extensive review of literature and association with a number of such cases suggest that the execution of specific strategies during the early years of employment could lead to success in the tenure and promotion review. With such explicit information aspiring faculty will be positioned to more effectively reach the criteria specified for tenure and promotion. A favorable outcome is viewed as beneficial to both the professor and the university.

Keywords: academic promotion, publication, research, university service, teaching effectiveness

## **INTRODUCTION**

Tenure and promotion have been part of the university culture for some time and they are likely to retain their significance as prominent accomplishments in the future (Perna, 2001). They serve as mechanisms to reward faculty who perform at a high level of proficiency and at the same time, serve as mechanisms to screen out those who are less able to carry their weight in higher education. However, the criteria and process for tenure and promotion are not perfected to a point that strong versus weak faculty can always be easily separated. Some faculty clearly deserve tenure and promotion because of their stellar record of performance; whereas some not so strong faculty perhaps earn tenure and promotion because they manipulate their performances in such a way to demonstrate minimum proficiency. On the other hand, some faculty fall miserably below the standard and do not deserve tenure and promotion; but some faculty who are denied tenure and promotion seem to have a lot to offer the university yet cannot present a credible, balanced portfolio of performance. Particular concern is with the latter group of faculty. The proposition is that the university should not lose potentially quality faculty; these faculty should be guided in earning tenure and promotion.

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this manuscript is to examine the concept of tenure and promotion and to determine if due diligence is accorded faculty who contribute tremendously in service rolls to the university and teach effectively, however they are less productive in the area of publication. A number of faculty fall in this category and have struggled to earn or have been denied tenure and promotion. For this group of faculty, the challenge is to ascertain from a critical review of the literature and personal encounters if strategies may be formulated whereby these faculty may modify their work effort early in employment and become successful in earning tenure and promotion.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

The literature and university documents offer tremendous information on the criteria and guidelines for earning tenure and promotion. Far less is recorded on specific strategies for orchestrating performance among and within the criteria to ensure success across all areas. Some faculty need knowledge of such strategies lest they “overly” excel in some areas and come up “short” in one or more areas. To put tenure and promotion in perspective, the manuscript provides the rationale for and emphasis placed on tenure and promotion, demographics on earning them, particular problems and issues associated with the awards, and general best practices as well as specific strategies for at-risk persons in earning tenure and promotion.

### **Rationale for and Emphasis Placed on Tenure and Promotion**

Tenure is an award by the university that gives professors a high degree of job stability and a tremendous amount of respectability in the academy. It was endorsed as an official policy by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) in 1940 (Shea, 2002). Earning tenure and gaining promotion through the academic ranks are considered among the most honorable achievements for college and university faculty (Perna, 2001).

The initial appointment of qualified junior faculty at the university is assistant professor. Promotion to associate professor and tenure are the normal prerequisites for keeping one's job (Stewart, Ornstein, & Drakich, 2009). The reasonable goals for most university faculty are to earn tenure and become full professor, which denote a professional reputation in one's discipline or domain (McGowan, 2010). In each case, it typically requires successful evaluation on three components: teaching, research, and service.

Originally, tenure was to provide security if and when a professor wished to practice academic freedom that may or may not be controversial. But along the way it became equivalent with job security and a guarantee of continued employment. The concept of tenure is a major part of the employment relationship between the individual faculty and the institution of higher learning (Diamantes, 2002).

Conceptually, tenure and promotion mutually benefit the faculty and the university (Shea, 2002). Thus, this mutual benefit coincides with the human capital theory which proposes that human capital is accumulated via educational attainment, on-the-job training, experience, and mobility (Becker, 1975; Gilead, 2009; Perna, 2001).

### **Demographics on Earning Tenure and Promotion**

Problems and issues have existed since the inception of tenure; even to a point of questioning its significance. One contention is that tenure is not equally granted among women who make up 41 percent of the professorate. A woman with at least one child was 24 percent less likely in the sciences and 20 percent less likely in the humanities to earn tenure than men who became fathers. However, one study in Canada reported that women earned tenure at the rate of men (Stewart, Ornstein, & Drakich, 2009). The AAUP proposed that the time for tenure for new parents be extended one year but universities were slow to implement it because of concern that the additional time may lead to greater expectancy of scholarly productivity (Shea, 2002). However, despite the problems and issues, the stature of tenure remains highly regarded (Shea, 2002).

The percentage of women and their time to promotion often lag behind that for men. For example, Canadian women are disadvantaged in promotion from associate to full professor. In Canada and the United States, promotion to the rank of associate professor has a time limit of six years and almost always involves simultaneous granting of tenure and often some pay increase (Stewart, Ornstein, & Drakich, 2009).

One study reported that Blacks were less likely than Whites and Hispanics to hold the rank of full professor, and Blacks and Hispanics were less likely than Whites to hold tenured positions. Despite years of attention to sex and racial/ethnic group differences in employment status, substantially smaller proportions of women than men, and Blacks and Hispanics than Whites, have received the rewards of promotion and tenure. Women faculty hold lower ranks than men faculty even after taking into account differences in such variables as educational attainment, experience, productivity, institutional characteristics, and academic discipline. In some instances, different criteria are applied in promotion decisions for women than for men (Perna, 2001).

The folklore of academic career advancement is highlighted with cases of unsuccessful tenure and promotion decisions. There is little systematic research on tenure and promotion. Many studies deal with just one discipline or consider only limited factors that may influence career advancement, such as research productivity. A quantitative analysis of a unique

longitudinal data set of Canadian faculty reveals the trends in promotion and tenure from 1984 to 1999. A consistent finding is that the percentage of women and their time to promotion lag behind men (Stewart, Ornstein, & Drakich, 2009).

### **Problems and Issues in Awarding Tenure and Promotion**

Problems and issues in addition to gender and race are expressed in the awarding of tenure and promotion. According to Chait (2002), tenure is the abortion issue of the academy, igniting arguments and inflaming near-religious passions and no academic reward carries the cachet that it does. To some, tenure is essential to academic freedom and a magnet to recruit and retain top-flight faculty. To others it is an impediment to professorial accountability and a constraint on institutional flexibility and finances (Chait, 2002).

Performance towards tenure, such as teaching, research, and service, are not clearly defined, openly discussed, nor are they evaluated adequately. Also of concern is that graduate schools fail to prepare students adequately to assume the role of professor (Price & Cotton, 2006).

Striking a balance between teaching effectiveness, research productivity, and service can be a considerable challenge. While assistance to faculty varies, most institutions provide only a cursory picture of the tenure process, and expectations for the professorial role are often poorly delineated (Shifflett & Patterson, 1995).

As things stand, promotion, tenure, and retention are driven by research and publication (and, increasingly, bringing in external funding). Promotion and tenure committees will give pats on the head for community service but, for the most part, this service is not considered significant when it comes to tenure. This means there is little incentive to do actual outreach and service (Woods, 2006).

For faculty seeking tenure, the mission can seem very heavily weighted toward research. The phrase “publish or perish” is widely understood both inside and outside the academy as the primary path to a successful career in higher education. Over the years, various scholars have wondered whether this intense focus on research, often to the detriment of both teaching and service, is in the best interest of junior faculty, the institution, or the students (Woods, 2006).

Scholarship expectations for tenure and promotion to associate professor vary greatly across rank, discipline, and institution than do those for teaching or service (Price & Cotton, 2006). The requirements in each area vary by type of institution (graduate, comprehensive, or undergraduate) and even within types of institution. The time limit is usually six years to apply for tenure and associate professor. The applicant compiles and submits a dossier of accomplishments for review in the university evaluation process and will ultimately be informed of the results and recommendation (Mabrouk, 2007).

Faculty differ sharply in their notions of how scholarship should be evaluated. They agree on the importance of high-quality work, but they disagree on how to determine whether high quality has been achieved. Various models, e.g., procedural and judgmental, have been advanced for addressing this issue (Matusov & Hampel, 2008). The procedural model features a set of specific measures of the caliber of scholarship. Faculty need not decide on their own whether a candidate’s work meets the official criteria and what these criteria mean for particular cases because well-crafted policies, if applied faithfully by a committee, will do that. The faculty avoids the need to decide if the work is good enough to merit promotion. The judgment model obligates the faculty to discuss and evaluate the quality of the scholarship under review.

Each colleague must devote the time and effort to decide whether a candidate's work is excellent and then be able to explain and defend that assessment in a faculty meeting. The latter model is heralded as the most democratic and the fairest approach to tenure decisions and gives departments the best chance of arriving at a real, rather than a default, decision. Models are not mutually exclusive. Procedures, rules, and standards can work very well to evaluate recursive, well-defined, and stable cases and events. However, evaluating out-of-the-ordinary, ill-defined, and nonrecursive cases and events requires judgment (Matusov & Hampel, 2008).

There is concern about expectations for earning promotion and tenure. The perceptions are that some factors are overemphasized (student evaluation of instructor, student evaluation of the course, peer-reviewed publications, and production of an undergraduate textbook or book chapter) and that portfolio documenting personal assessment of teaching is underemphasized. These are considered gaps in the current system of evaluating teaching for the purpose of promotion and tenure. The faculty placed a higher value on criteria recognizing excellence in teaching based on intradepartmental dynamics (i.e., interactions with close-up peers and students) rather than recognition within a broader community of scholars as evidenced by authorship or success in generating funding for teaching (Whittiaux, Moore, Rastani, & Crump, 2010).

Conceptually, tenure and promotion are expected to mutually benefit the faculty and the institution of higher learning (Shea, 2002). A principal concern is that some faculty perform an inordinate service load at the university but when placed in their academic portfolio it is not very beneficial in earning tenure and promotion. These faculty think that what they do is good for their students and the university and feel that they merit tenure and promotion. It is advocated that with a meeting of the minds of the university and faculty who advance the university; these faculty can be better positioned to earn tenure and promotion.

## **BEST PRACTICES FOR EARNING TENURE AND PROMOTION**

A professor generally has tenure and is considered an expert in a certain discipline or domain (McGowan, 2010) at an institution of higher learning. The challenge is meeting the criteria to earn the awards of tenure and promotion. The review process that faculty undergo prior to tenure differs in length and rigor from one institution to the next but the elements reviewed often include teaching effectiveness, research productivity, and service (Shifflett & Patterson, 1995; Woods, 2006). Chait (2002) stated that context counts so much that no single tenure system exists.

Proposed improvements in evaluation of teaching for promotion and tenure include 1) providing tenure-track faculty with written guidelines at the time of hiring; 2) ensuring that student ratings tools are reliable and valid; 3) carefully mentoring new faculty within the departmental and institutional culture; and 4) encouraging self-reflection and documentation of attempts to address pedagogical issues in one's own teaching. Educational leaders in doctoral/research universities should promote changes to enhance teaching performance of future faculty graduating from their institutions (Whittiaux, Moore, Rastani, & Crump, 2010).

It is posited that the tenure-and-promotion system needs radical reform. A proposal is modification of the method used by a large number of external funding agencies, such as the National Science Foundation, to evaluate research-grant proposals. The seven steps are 1) have the evaluation committee established outside the university, 2) submit college's tenure and promotion guidelines to the committee, 3) submit a statement of philosophy for tenure and

promotion to the committee of evaluation, 4) candidate would submit application materials to chair of department's tenure-and-promotion committee to forward to chair of committee of evaluation, 5) committee of evaluation completes its evaluation, 6) president disseminates the dossier to the candidate, etc. of committee's recommendation, and 7) president would arrive at a recommendation. The author suggests that this system would be well received by everyone involved in the tenure-and-promotion process (Lewis, 2010).

Changes to Yale University's tenure process include a strengthened commitment to junior faculty members in the arts and sciences to better compete for talent with its peer institutions. The report also calls for mentoring junior faculty and providing opportunities for them to show and be rewarded for excellence (Millman, 2007).

Most of those dominating the political, economic, and social systems of the university buy into a traditional, Eurocentric view of achievement within the academy, which supports scientific and technological achievements above all else (Woods, 2006). Alternative views, such as Afrocentricity, are ignored or marginalized by academic power structures (Woods, 2006). Universities need to reach out to K-12 schools that service minority populations with greater consistency.

Chait (2002) posited that few institutions will initiate significant changes in tenure criteria without either powerful external pressures or persistent demands from new or disgruntled faculty. To improve the climate in higher education for women and faculty of color, universities should make a commitment to provide an academically rich, multicultural learning experience; emphasize learning in an academic environment that is inclusive, student-centered, and aware of the world it is part of; recruit and retain diverse high-quality faculty, staff, and students; and create a new slogan: "Service or Perish" (Woods, 2006). Chait, in *The questions of tenure*, suggested seven revisions to tenure policy: The candidate's dossier, as well as the portfolio of peers, should be open to inspection by the candidate; promotion and tenure committees should reflect a commitment to diversity; scholarship of discovery and conventional research should not outweigh the scholarship of teaching and service; collaborative research should be valued as much as independent research; interdisciplinary research should be prized as much as disciplinary research; probationary periods should either be eliminated or tailored to the candidate's circumstances and discipline, and adaptable to family responsibilities; and tenure-track faculty should be provided clear expectations, unambiguous standards, and consistent counsel (Woods, 2006).

Junior and minority faculty members need to be assured that service efforts will be valued by the university and counted significantly in the promotion and tenure process. Such recognition will provide greater incentive for all faculty to take the academy's service requirement seriously (Woods, 2006).

Students want an education and an experience from their undergraduate years. Scholarship is a faculty concern, not theirs (McGowan, 2010). Professors claim that only free inquiry, rigorously evaluated by expert peers, can actually produce new knowledge. The world and the university need more than just scholars who make "original" scholarly contributions. Editing journals, creating and overseeing curricular reforms, creating programs that bring the university's expertise to wider audiences, working with external groups to address issues like dropout rates and environmental concerns, and serving as departmental chairs or directors of programs are among the many activities a university needs some of its professors to take on. When it comes to evaluation, either for promotion to full professor or for post-tenure review, the

university would go to the community identified by the professor as the beneficiary of her contribution (McGowan, 2010).

Some say the answer to the service dilemma is simply to do more to reward good service; even put more emphasis on service in faculty job descriptions (Fogg, 2003). Other ideas are: extend the tenure clock for professors who take on exceptional service loads; improve the climate in academe for female scientists and engineers; give female scientists a semester off from teaching and service to have more time for research; and universities should give awards, perhaps even money, for faulty service. In the absence of such changes, professors will continue to struggle to figure out how much service is enough (Fogg, 2003).

Table 1 (APPENDIX) captures some best practices for earning tenure and promotion as gathered from the review of literature and exploration of the university-serving faculty concept. The practices are listed according to teaching, research, service, “service over-load,” and other/general.

## **SPECIFIC STRATEGIES FOR FACULTY WHO SERVICE THE UNIVERSITY**

In any challenging situation, the objective should be to establish policies and procedures to make matters more friendly and accomplishable. Promotion and tenure are difficult to earn, especially for faculty who are bent on high service activities and limited research productivity (identified here as at-risk faculty); however, they always have important long-term consequences for both the candidate and the institution. Preparing for them is one of the most difficult and challenging experiences a person can have. Suggestions for managing the tenure process include (1) make a substantive research contribution; (2) learn the craft of publishing in academe; (3) work with and benefit from one’s colleagues; and (4) keep all materials updated, all of the time (Diamantes, 2002).

Professors’ growing service obligations make advancement tougher for many of them, particularly women and minority-group members (Fogg, 2003). Women and minorities have a greater burden because institutions want diversity on committees. They do a disproportionate amount on service work and service does not get enough credit in academe. This may be because service is harder to quantify than teaching and research. If a person teaches too well or does too much service, he or she may be seen as neglecting their research. Faculty have to show they can do some service but teaching and research are really what they should work on. Their goal is to get tenure. Universities want people to be reasonable teachers, but if they are spending an inordinate amount of time on teaching are short-shifting research, then they are really hurting themselves. The number of committees is increasing, as universities become more conscious of potential lawsuits involving sexual and racial discrimination. Yet, university service is rarely talked about and goes largely unrewarded. Research and teaching are key. What people do beyond that doesn’t count for much in promotion and tenure decisions (Fogg, 2003).

Strategic professional service (e.g., collegial collaboration, conference involvement, and grant-review panels) can advance one’s career. But when it comes to university assignments and committees, many supportive and cooperative faculty may be asked to do more than their fair share of the service load. Though service activities may make the faculty member feel good about themselves, service often does not contribute directly to the case for tenure and promotion (Mabrouk, 2007). Professors’ growing service obligations make advancement tougher for many of them, particularly women and minority-group members (Fogg, 2003).

Some vignettes are presented to show real faculty's concerns and efforts in earning tenure and promotion. A vignette on an African-American female faculty member indicated need for the skill to be a master juggler of multitasks ranging from domestic and child-rearing to professional responsibilities (Woods, 2006). A typical day for a junior faculty member may include requests from the department chair, demands from senior faculty, the need to serve on college and university committees, pleas for time from desperate students, opportunities for faculty development, and in-service training on the latest technologies. Everything takes time: writing, preparing for class, completing human subjects' documents, applying for grants, faculty meetings, and taking that minute with students. Some faculty jealously guard every minute and work on their research and publication to the level of selfishness. Other faculty make choices with an eye toward achieving tenure while, at the same time, not drifting away from their values as a mother and African-American community member (Woods, 2006).

Another vignette showed a situation where on Wednesdays there were no classes; they were writing days for assistant professors. The particular faculty was to finish her book before coming up for tenure the next fall. On this Wednesday the precious hours sped by as she performed a list of inescapable duties considered service to the university: helping a graduate student revise an article; listening to a lecture given by a visiting job candidate; committee meetings; and in the evening, entertaining the job candidate. The only writing she did was finishing letters of recommendation for some of the 15 students she advises. As the only Black female professor in the social sciences, the faculty is in high demand; minority students need mentors, and committees want diverse memberships. Multiple service commitments take time away from her research and teaching. But when it comes time for decisions on tenure or promotion, it is not the number of students you advise, but the number of publications on your CV. Women seem more approachable than men and have a harder time saying no, they have to do more to prove themselves and they take on too many service commitments (Fogg, 2003). This faculty is a member of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, Committee on Pluralism, gives presentations to university groups, chairs the undergraduate-curriculum committee, teaches in a weeklong summer workshop, and is on the advisory board of a resource group for Black students. She finds it hard to turn down requests for help. She gets a sense of being really needed (Fogg, 2003).

Third, there is a vignette of an African-American female on tenure track attempting to juggle the many challenges of university life with personal, professional, and community responsibilities. She has two children and an extended family, helped develop the departmental program, and feels a special obligation to reach out to other people of color and the communities where they live (Woods, 2006). She feels that there is not enough time in the day to complete all that she is required to do. She has developed a strategy for navigating her way through the university and the tenure process; commit one day each week to research and writing. She also offers techniques: have someone in your department assess the viability of your position and mentor you; choose your committees judiciously; say "no" without offending others; refocus/reprioritize, looking at exactly what it is you want to accomplish; enter your office and close the door, establish an atmosphere of sacred time that cannot be interrupted; assert yourself when too much departmental work is assigned to you; focus on a small but significant outreach activity; and become involved in active student mentoring on campus (Woods, 2006). In her ideal world, research interests and the requirements for tenure would coincide with her joys (teaching, outreach, community service) (Woods, 2006).



Table 2 (APPENDIX) captures specific strategies for at-risk faculty in earning tenure and promotion as gathered from the review of literature and exploration of the university serving faculty concept. The problems are listed according to teaching, research, service, “service overload,” and other/general.

## SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Tenure does not assure lifetime employment, but it serves as assurance that faculty will receive due process in higher education (Diamantes, 2002). Principal criteria for tenure and promotion are effective teaching, research, and service. Women and minorities are often disadvantaged in earning tenure and promotion, while being cooperative, supportive faculty who give more than their fair share in service to enhance the institution.

There is concern about expectations for earning promotion and tenure. The perceptions are that some factors are overemphasized, for example, student evaluation of instructor, and that the portfolio documenting personal assessment of teaching is underemphasized (Whittiaux, Moore, Rastani, & Crump, 2010). Faculty differ sharply in their notions of how scholarship should be evaluated. They agree on the importance of high-quality work, but they disagree on how to determine whether high quality has been achieved. Various models, e.g., procedural and judgmental, have been advanced for addressing this issue (Matusov & Hampel, 2008).

There is reasonable evidence to suggest that women and minority faculty do more than a fair share of committee work and other service acts for the university. These faculty experience difficulty in obtaining tenure and promotion as reflected in the literature and selected vignettes. However, there are things in consideration to make university-serving faculty more positioned for earning tenure and promotion, but they seem yet to be realized.

Problems and challenges do not automatically resolve themselves; they need to be addressed forthrightly. Some recommendations for ensuring that professors who service the university earn tenure and promotion are: more tenure-clock flexibility; more credit for service; faculty to refocus/realign duties, strategize - wear many hats but manage time; make teaching and service data bases for research; govern amount of service activity; and display a disposition of a winner for motivation and respect.

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**APPENDIX**

Table 1  
Best Practices for Earning Tenure and Promotion

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Teaching:	-Assessment of teaching is underemphasized (Whittiaux et al., 2010)
Research:	-“Publish or perish” intense research focus, favored over teaching and service (Woods, 2006). -Primary force in tenure, promotion, and retention (Woods, 2006) -Peer-reviewed publications overemphasized (Whittiaux et al., 2010)
Service:	-Often does not directly contribute for tenure and promotion (Mabrouk, 2007) -For most part, not considered significant for tenure (Woods, 2006)
(Service Over-Load):	-Supportive and cooperative faculty are asked to do more than fair share of service (Mabrouk, 2007) -Growing service obligations tougher, particularly for women and minorities (Fogg, 2003)
Other/ General:	-Smaller proportion of women and minorities receive tenure and promotion; different criteria applied to women (Perna, 2001) -Graduate schools fail to prepare students for role of professor (Price & Cotton, 2006) -Women disadvantaged in promotion from associate to full professor (Stewart, Ornstein, & Drakich, 2009) -Little systematic research on tenure and promotion (Stewart et al., 2009)

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Table 2  
Strategies for At-risk Faculty in Earning Tenure and Promotion

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University initiatives	-Establishing a writing/research day – no classes (Fogg, 2003)
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Faculty initiatives	-Develop an ability to multitask, to meet various demands (Woods, 2006) -Manage time well and keep eye toward earning tenure and promotion (Woods, 2006)

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