

Conquering the hurdles of the tenure and promotion process for Junior Faculty Members

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Abstract

The process of tenure and promotion can be a harrowing experience for faculty in higher education. A tenured faculty member is one whose job, with a few exceptions, is secured for life. These exceptions typically include the closure of the department, (although a good faith effort may be made to place them in a related department within the university), gross negligence, and sexual harassment. Tenure was designed to protect faculty from the volatile behavior and attitudes of administrators. The process generally occurs in the sixth year of employment and for many can be stressful. A candidate for tenure and promotion is evaluated in the areas of teaching, scholarship and service. This manuscript addresses tactics, strategies and approaches that were utilized by the author to overcome the tenure and promotion process.

I. Introduction

Tenure was designed to protect faculty from the volatile behaviors and attitudes of administrators. For many, the tenure and promotion process is a toilsome one that is very stressful for the candidate. The process generally occurs in the sixth year of employment and the candidate is evaluated on teaching, scholarship, and service. There are many strategies and approaches that can be used to lessen the stress and alleviate some of the frustration involved in the tenure and promotion process. The plan presented by the writer in this manuscript was utilized and proved to be successful for being promoted to associate professor and being awarded tenure.

II. Scholarship

Before the completion of the dissertation, explore potential publishers. Use segments of the document for articles, presentation at conferences, poster sessions, and the like. This will prevent the dissertation from becoming a dated, unpublished book on your shelf. Start early with publishing efforts because of extended publication turn around times. Since, the research is already complete, most of the work for the publication is already done. It is wise to have publication commitments for papers during graduate school so that editorial completions can be done your first year as a faculty member. Writing manuscripts to be submitted for publications in peer reviewed journals are also critical. The process of getting manuscripts published in journals usually takes longer than getting manuscripts published in conference proceedings. However, both options are great for junior faculty.

There is an effort at many institutions of higher education to promote interdisciplinary research. Interdisciplinary research involves the collaboration of faculty who are employed in different departments or disciplines, for the purpose of introducing participants to

interdisciplinary learning; showing them how to integrate technical subject matter with mathematics, science, and communication skills into a modular engineering technology curriculum and then implementing it. As an example, Johnson recently worked with a faculty member from the history department at East Tennessee State University. The focus of the project was to link engineering faculty with faculty from core subject areas such as history, math and English.

Shortly after employment, the writer enlisted his former graduate advisor in a joint venture to write a paper, and possibly a chapter in a book. The former advisor welcomed the opportunity, and the efforts were successful. As his former advisee, Johnson posed no threat to the quality of work that the advisor is accustomed to producing. He was a tenured, associate professor; therefore, his primary goal was to have an opportunity to work with the writer as a colleague, rather than a student. Since the former advisor was already established in the field, it was to the writers' advantage to sign on as a co-author.

Too often as new faculty members, we immediately set our sights on publishing a book. This awesome task requires a great deal of commitment, time, and hard labor. Junior faculty members usually cannot make this commitment because of job requirements that include advising, committee assignments, mentoring, preparing to teach new classes, attending meetings, and the unseen agenda of getting acclimated into the community. Depending on the breath and depth of the book, and the editing process, writing and publishing a book may take years to complete. If possible, publish portions of your work along the way, the process of publishing a book may not seem insurmountable.

III. Teaching

Teaching effectiveness is an extremely important concept when determining tenure and promotion. Presented below are helpful hints that were very successful for the writer and may encourage your effectiveness. Literature illustrates a variety of ways to document teaching effectiveness. It is extremely important that we do not take this for granted. From my experience, I have discovered several methods to document my effectiveness as a teacher. They include the following: peer observers/evaluators, evaluate data from professional teaching activities, awards and recognition, professional development, involvement in instructional development, document your classroom instructions, student outcomes, student testimonies, attend effective teaching workshops and utilizing constructive criticism.

Peer observers. Have a faculty member come observe and evaluate your classroom instructions, and write a summary of their evaluations. Request that your peer observer evaluate you on the following areas: knowledge, organization, instructional materials, task assignments, instructional methods, enthusiasm, clarity, student participation, and comprehension. Ask your peer evaluator to be candid and provide as many critical responses as possible. If you get a poor evaluation, discuss potential ways to improve, making sure that your efforts are documented. At a later date, request that same faculty member to return and reevaluate you on the same criteria. Have them document any noticeable changes.

Awards and recognition. Often, we engage in facilitating workshops and/or assist in other “teaching-like” activities. From these activities, there may be awards and recognition for instruction or “effective teaching”. Use this documentation as evidence of effective teaching.

Professional development. Anytime you participate in a developmental activity, especially if it focuses on teaching, save the documentation. At some institutions, there is a teaching and learning center that focuses on faculty development. Many workshops, seminars, and round table discussions are available to help faculty become better teachers in the classroom. The authors participate not because of poor student evaluations, but because of the valuable information that was gained from the seminars.

Documenting your classroom instructions. Develop detailed syllabus that includes such items as test dates, assignment deadlines, expectations, reading assignments, attendance policy, office hours, e-mail address, telephone number, contact people for disability services, etc. Too often student evaluations of instructions are not based on instructions alone, but on other variables, that indirectly affect the learning. For example, a student may have questions that need to be addressed during your office hours. If you are unavailable, the students' perception of your teaching effectiveness will be adversely affected.

It is extremely important to save samples of student work (original copies), exams, projects, and other types of assignments as clear indications of the things that go on in your classroom. I recommend that you repeat this for each course you teach.

ACCM (A critical constructive moment). The ACCM is an instrument that was developed to solicit an open-ended approach to gain opinions from the students. The authors ask the students to provide their honest appraisal of the good things and the things that need improvement in the course. It was communicated to the students that their assessments should emphasize what they learned and the learning process. It is made clear to the students that this is non-threatening and will not affect their grade in any way. The primary purpose of this assessment is to continuously update and improve the course. Compile and summarize this data, use it to make improvements, and store it for future use. This does not have to be done at the end of the semester. It can prove to be very valuable during the course of a semester.

Student Outcomes. When students accomplish a unique task, or are recognized for something that was a result of a course that you taught them, document it. Often, students get published as a result of your class. This is a clear indicator of your teaching effectiveness. Student performance on assignments tests, projects, and even employer opinions of one of your students are all good indicators of teaching effectiveness.

Testimonies. When students verbally express how wonderful you were as an instructor or how well you explained a very difficult concept, taught a lesson, or even used a dynamic example in the classroom, ask the student to not only say that but write it in letter form. This information works well as evidence of teaching effectiveness. I will also caution the reader that it's possible that candidate-gathered testimonials are not valued at some institutions.

IV. Service

In addition to teaching, service is a major part of your expected duties as a faculty member. Double duty is a term that the writers use to refer to faculty who allow themselves to take on more committee assignments than they can possibly manage. At one point in the Johnson life, it was strongly believed that hard labor yielded success. Since becoming a faculty

member, the author's new philosophy is smart labor yields success. This philosophy reflects the authors new found belief that just because you work hard, you are not guaranteed to achieve your career goals. Too often, the burden of being committed to so many committees and trying to keep up with regular duties can be extremely frustrating.

Committee assignments can become a burden if they are taken out of perspective, and one does not anticipate the amount of work and time involved. As a new faculty member, there is a strong possibility that one may be encouraged to serve on committees undesirable to colleagues, because of the tedious work and time commitments. Often, these assignments take you away from activities that you may prefer, such as writing and curriculum development.

Not having the experience regarding the function of committees on campus, new faculty often mistakenly feel that this service is a form of being welcomed into the university and initially feeling privileged to serve on them. The reality of the situation eventually surfaces when you feel overwhelmed, and realize that senior faculty are not serving in the same capacity. Nevertheless, service activities are an extremely important aspect of the tenure and promotion process. One must carefully evaluate their career goals and choose the paths that will lead them there.

V. Scholarly Activities

Too often, junior faculty have very little knowledge as to what it takes to get published and what types and the amount of publications are necessary to be awarded tenure and promotion. Of course this varies from institution to institution. However, Johnson discovered that a variety of publication worked best as is evident by being promoted and being granted tenure. It is suggested that a junior faculty member set goals to get published by writing and presenting papers at conference such as the American Society for Engineering Educators and the CIEC, which are peer reviewed. The turn around for this type of publication is less than one year. Therefore, if your university or college requires several publications, there is plenty of time to work on others.

VI. Reporting your efforts

Preparing your dossier is not an easy task even if you begin long before the time you apply for tenure and promotion. However, organization can make the task more manageable. You should start preparing the moment you accept a tenure track position. There are three areas that one must be prepared to defend. They include teaching, research (scholarly activities), and service. It is important to obtain binders to store your work. The authors recommend that you purchased three large 3-ring notebooks, and labeled each with the appropriate titles. Anytime Johnson received a letter of appreciation from a student, or a thank you note from a faculty member for a service activity, it was place it in the notebook entitled "service". Do not be too concerned at this point, as to whether or not this information is appropriate for your dossier. Anytime you participate in a task related to your profession, have someone write you an acknowledgment letter. For example, one of the subjects that the author teaches is architecture design. The author also serves as co-chair of the Building Committee at a local church. Because this is related to the profession, it was used as a service activity.

VI. Understanding your Evaluation

The evaluation of a dossier is a very complex process. In addition to being complex, the criteria used for evaluation may vary from department, college and/or university. At East Tennessee State University, in the Department of Technology, faculty agrees on the interpretation of the rules and regulations. In addition to evaluating the dossier, the department's role is to advise the applicant of suggested changes and/or modifications that should be made. It is difficult to come to consensus on issues such as what is or what is not research. Therefore, it is extremely important to write very descriptive narratives describing one's activities. Once the dossier has been evaluated at the department level, it is then forwarded to the next level. It is extremely important that the document is self-explanatory. It needs to clearly document with explanations the applicant's efforts. The applicant can no longer verbally justify nor add written documents to the dossier. At the college level, there is a new committee evaluating the dossier. Once the dossier leaves this committee, it is forwarded to the university committee, the university president, and finally the Tennessee Board of Regents. This process takes about a year before a final decision is made. Your institution may have a totally different criterion for determining tenure and promotion. A survey was conducted to identify of creative endeavor criteria for promotion and tenure of engineering technology faculty¹. To assist faculty in preparing for tenure and promotion and assist peers and administrators in evaluating a faculty members efforts, a model was developed in pursuing appropriate scholarly activities in applied topics.

At the East Tennessee State University, the faculty annual plan, faculty annual report, and faculty annual evaluation (Fap/Far/Fae) is a three-part phase that is used to evaluate tenure track faculty. It is also a good tool to use for tracking faculty process toward tenure and promotion. At the beginning of the academic school year, a faculty member details in report form what he or she expects to accomplish for the academic school year, including research, teaching, and service (FAP). At the end of the academic school year, the faculty member completes a report indicating what he or she has accomplished during the academic school year, which includes research, teaching and service (FAR). Scholarly activities that faculty are involved with during the summer should also be included in the report. The department chairperson and the dean of the college evaluate (compares your FAP to your FAR) the progress and provide verbal and written feedback (FAE). This allows a faculty member to monitor the progress and respond to the recommendations given by the chairperson and the dean. If an individual have consistently received better than average ratings, and no major weaknesses have been detected, this should provide you some assurance of being granted tenure and/or promotion. However, if your ratings have been consistently above average and no major weakness has been detected, and one is denied tenure and/or promotion, the Fap/Far/Fae documentation may clearly indicate that your being denied tenure and/or promotion is a result of some other unforeseen variable.

The denial of tenure and /or promotion has changed the lives of many college and university faculty who thought they were on the right track to attaining job security. Because of unclear guidelines and the subjectivity involved in the process, it behooves all individuals in tenure track positions to monitor the process closely.

Bibliography

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