

Preparation for Tenure and Promotion- Quality and Quantity

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Introduction

Today, it is a challenge to secure tenure status in academic institutions. Some faculty are not granted tenure because they failed to prepare their materials properly, or they did not understand the evaluation criteria. The process of organizing materials for tenure is very tedious and takes a lot of time. Some faculty are not adequately informed by their supervisor regarding the evaluation criteria, the complexity of the process, documentation required, or the consequences of the process. Very often, the individual responsible assumes the faculty member knows how the process works. Hence this paper will provide a general overview of the tenure process and provide general guidelines for individuals who are preparing their materials for a tenure decision.

Tenure

Today, more than ever, tenure is under attack! It is clear the corporate mentality is forcing itself into academia. The idea that the students are “clients” or “customers” is prevalent in some academic circles. Jim Perley, in his editorial, stated that “Tenure protects faculty from unjust dismissal. However, faculty still can be terminated for incompetence, but not for personal or political reasons. Moreover, the notion of economic security through tenure makes the profession more attractive to qualified individuals.”¹ In addition, tenure is commonly defined as “the right of a regular faculty member to hold his/her position with pay, until the age of retirement. Only for adequate cause and under stipulated procedures may the faculty member be dismissed, demoted, prematurely retired, or placed on indefinite leave without pay from that position.”²

Tenure and Promotion at Eastern Michigan University

The tenure process at Eastern Michigan University will be used as an example. The process used is very typical with the understanding that some universities use different processes and/or criteria.

According to Eastern Michigan University AAUP handbook document, tenure is described as follow:

The primary purpose of academic tenure originally and presently is the preservation of academic freedom. That freedom, protected by sufficient degree of economic security to make the profession attractive to men and women of ability, is essential if the professor and thereby the University is to fulfill the function of being that agency in a society devoted to the search for and exposition of truth. At Eastern Michigan University academic tenure is awarded to a faculty member only after he/she has proven himself/ herself to be a worthy member of the University community.³

At the Eastern Michigan University the year that a probationary faculty member can be granted tenure is:

<u>Initial Appointment Rank</u>	<u>Evaluation of Tenure</u>
Professor	Third Probationary Year
Associate Professor	Fourth Probationary Year
Assistant Professor	Fifth Probationary Year
Instructor	Sixth Probationary Year

At EMU, a probationary tenure faculty is evaluated in: (1) Teaching; (2) Scholarly and/or Creative Activity; and (3) Service Activity. A faculty will be ranked Exceptional, Distinctly Above Average, Average, and Below Average in each of these categories. Some universities do not weigh the three categories the same. The importance of each category is dependent upon the mission, past history, and culture of the institution. For example, Eastern Michigan University was established as a teacher's college; therefore, traditionally teaching has had the greatest weight in the evaluation process. Most institutions place a greater emphasis on scholarly and/or creative activities.

At EMU, the Department's Personnel Committee, the Head of the Department, the Dean of College, and the Provost each evaluate each faculty member. The final recommendation made by the Provost is forwarded to the President of the University for his/her approval. For tenure the President's decision must be approved by the Board of Regents.

At some universities each faculty meets the same criteria regardless of the area of study. At other institutions, tenure criteria are related to the field of study. At EMU, "Each department conducts faculty evaluations using procedures, techniques, and criteria specified in its Departmental Evaluation Document developed and/or subsequently modified in accordance with the Faculty input system and AAUP contract."⁴

According to the EMU-AAUP handbook there are three kinds of evaluations of faculty performance: (1) interim evaluations of probationary faculty; (2) full evaluations of probationary and faculty for reappointment, tenure, and/or promotion; and (3) professional evaluations of tenured faculty members. Thus, each year every probationary and tenured faculty member shall complete and submit an Annual Activity Report to his/her department head. The EMU-AAUP handbook states that "The information contained in the Annual Activity Report shall provide the basic data for interim evaluations and professional performance evaluations of tenured faculty members"³.

According to the Department Evaluation Document (DED) of the Industrial Technology Department the evaluation criteria in Instructional Effectiveness, Scholarly and/or Creative Activity, and Service areas are as follow.

Instructional Effectiveness:

In the area of instructional effectiveness, the Industrial Technology Department's DED states that "The required and most important criterion is instructional effectiveness. The teaching

faculty shall give evidence of ability and commitment to lead students of varying capabilities into a growing understanding of the subject matter, tools, and materials, of their disciplines. The faculty member shall demonstrate his/her continuing concern for instructional effectiveness through methods of presentation and evaluation of students. In support of teaching effectiveness, a faculty member must maintain a high level of knowledge and expertise in his/her discipline or area of specialization. Evaluation techniques for all faculty members include, but are not limited to self-evaluation, classroom visitations, and student evaluations of teaching, department head evaluation, peer evaluations, and assessment of academic advising of students.”

Scholarly and/or Creative Activity:

“A faculty member shall give documented evidence of his/her contributions to his/her discipline or area of specialization within the discipline or in an interdisciplinary specification by scholarly investigation (e.g.,research) and/or creative activity, and of its publication or other dissemination in one of the following ways:

1. in the classroom, or
2. among practitioners in his/her discipline, or
3. among a wider community.

It is intended that the faculty member shall utilize his/her expertise to address problems in his/her discipline or areas of specialization through scholarly and/or creative activity, which clearly contributes to the discipline.”⁴

Although there are guidelines in this area that explain what constitutes “scholarly and creative” activities, there are no guidelines related to the quantity or quality of activities.

Service Activity:

“The faculty member must satisfy one of the criteria below:

1. The faculty member shall give evidence of identifying new needs in the department and assisting colleagues in departmental activities.
2. The faculty member shall give evidence of interest and activity that extend beyond the department into areas such as university and college-wide committees, student activities, and professionally related community affairs.”⁴

Even though the Department Evaluation Document provides the criteria for tenure, promotion and retention, it is the responsibility of the Head of the Department or the Human Resource Department to inform new faculty about the criteria and procedures in the DED. However, in many instances the head/chair of the department ignores this crucial step in the orientation of new faculty.

Types of Evaluation:

Interim evaluations are very essential in the tenure and promotion process. One cannot take these evaluations lightly. In interim evaluations, faculty members report all the activities that he/she has completed in one academic year. Faculty are informed orally of their progress by the Head of the Department.

In the full evaluation faculty must complete a cumulative activity report and also provide a narrative in each area. It is important for a faculty member to write narrative statements in support of his/her Annual Report documents in each area that he/she is being evaluated. The narrative statement should explain in clear and explicit terms how and why his/her activities do satisfy the standards of performance in the Department Evaluation Document (DED).

Key to Success

It is in my judgment, that in order to be successful in being awarded tenure or promotion, a faculty must succeed in completing the following steps:

1. Understand the Department Evaluation Document (DED).

A new faculty must quickly become familiar with the past trends and the culture within the department and college. The DED is a collection of criteria that is up for subjective interpretation. The wording of the document is designed to embrace a number of different conditions and possibilities. Furthermore, the DED typically does not specify the number nor the quality of papers one must publish to receive a satisfactory rank.. Therefore, past practice within a department can provide insight of what is accepted and what is not. The DED may not state how many committees one should serve on to be acceptable as satisfactory nor identify the criteria to evaluate the quality of one's service activities as adequate or satisfactory. Again, one can get a good idea by looking at the past departmental practices. It is the responsibility of a probationary faculty to understand the criteria and seek help for the clarifications.

Different institutions have different policies and techniques for the orientation of the new faculty. Some institutions handle this through the Human Resource Department or Faculty Development Department, and others through the Head/Chair of the academic departments. Other institutions have established a mentoring program. Regardless of what system is used, a faculty member must understand the evaluation process and criteria. The orientation for earning tenure should be initiated the first day of employment.

2. Set goals and objectives.

After answering the question "what are the expectations?", one must set their goals and objectives to earn tenure. For example, if in the area of scholarship, the past practice has been that in order to receive a "distinctly above average" rating one must have four publications in a refereed journal or two research grants, and two research papers; then one must plan and set a time-line to achieve this goal before the tenure year evaluation.

3. Keeping and Organizing Your Records

The record keeping are very essential tasks. The record should be organized by activity and document the quality and the results of activity. From day one, a faculty member should create a separate folder in each area you are going to be evaluated on such as teaching, scholarship, and service. Every time an activity is completed, make a copy of it and insert in a related folder, also take time to record how the activity was completed, how other people evaluated the activity and the results of the activity. Record keeping and organization is a key to success, and must start from day one. Do not procrastinate.

4. Documentation.

Most of us are modest about what we do. In our every day work, we do a number of activities that one may take for granted. Any interaction with students, colleagues, professional associations, etc. that describe your performance should be recorded and documented. These activities document your contribution to students, your department, and your profession. Keep a record of all these activities.

In committee work one must show evidence of being an active participant. If you are the chair of a committee, you must have evidence to demonstrate your leadership ability. Hence, it is a good practice to solicit letters of support from the members of the committee.

In the teaching, peer evaluation is important and should be conducted every year. Ask your colleagues to observe your classroom teaching and provide you with oral and written reports. You can also ask your department head/chair to evaluate your teaching. In some cases, such as contractual arrangements, the head or chair may not be able to evaluate you officially. You can always ask him/her for an unofficial visit. These types of evaluations help you to assess and improve your teaching. It will project to others that you are conscientious about your job. Student evaluations are also important. In addition to the end of the term evaluation (which is usually mandatory), conduct your own midterm and final evaluations from each class. These evaluations can be used to improve your teaching, and the positive feedback can be used to document your teaching quality.

In the area of scholarly activity, seek the advice of a productive senior faculty member. Also share your ideas with your colleagues. Collaborate in some projects with other faculties. These help you to understand the culture and the past practice of your department.

5. Get Help

Get help from your mentor or a colleague who has gone through this process recently. Seek their help in the organization of your documentation. Attend workshops that generally are organized by the Human Resource Department, Faculty Development Office, or AAUP. Do not wait to the last minute to seek help. Start early!

Conclusion

Tenure and promotion are very important to faculty. To become tenured and promoted, one must execute a plan of action. One must know the expectations of the institution, college, and department for tenure and promotion. This is achieved by understanding the DED and the past practice and culture of your department.

References

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