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Abstract

The tenure process can be a stressful ordeal for an assistant professor. Obtaining research funding, publishing, recruiting graduate students, serving on university and national committees, participating in student activities, and on top of all that, trying to be an effective teacher can be quite overwhelming. By their fifth year, the faculty member becomes somewhat proficient at wearing all those hats (researcher, teacher, advisor, etc), and it is now time he/she must prepare their tenure dossier. Often faculty members have little or no guidance in preparing their tenure dossier until their fifth year (or possibly for their three year review). Most faculty members at research institutions realize that research funding and publications are important, but there are many other things that should be included in their tenure dossier. These other things include the number of students advised, teacher evaluations, faculty evaluations, and service, to name a few. Tracking down all the additional information can be very time consuming. However, the time requirement can be reduced if work on the tenure dossier begins early in the faculty member's career. This paper reflects the lessons learned from three faculty members, a full professor, an associate professor, and an assistant professor. The full professor serves on the department's promotion and tenure committee. The associate professor has recently received tenure, and the assistant professor is preparing his tenure dossier for his three year review. As well as insights on preparing tenure dossiers, information on recruiting graduate students and the benefits of attending conferences and workshops is also presented.

Introduction

From the first day a new faculty member begins their academic career, he or she should begin preparing their tenure dossier. Preparing your tenure dossier can be likened to a coach preparing a game plan. This plan will allow them to define and accomplish the necessary objectives as well as portray their work in each of these areas in the best light. They should stick to the game plan and collect evidence along the way rather than waiting until the last year to collect and compile the evidence they need. This paper provides the young faculty member guidance in obtaining that evidence and compiling it into their tenure dossier.

Background

Your tenure dossier summarizes the first six years of your academic career and is divided into three sections; teaching, research, and service. Tenure dossiers can differ depending on your type of institution. Hoback and Dutta surveyed civil engineering chairs in 1999 and their findings showed that research activities are more highly valued as the number of doctoral students increase.¹ At baccalaureate universities, tenure dossiers focus on teaching and service. At research (or doctoral) universities, the emphasis is on research funding and publications.

Although some schools have official or unofficial faculty mentoring programs, it isn't uncommon that new tenure track faculty are left to their own devices and given little direction about their careers and the tenure process. The objective of this paper is to share the lessons learned from our tenure processes as well as from colleagues at other schools.

Each school can be somewhat different from other schools and have different tenure track evaluation criteria; typically, an application for tenure will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Published papers (levels of journals, order of authors names)
- Research dollars (internal and external)
- Ability to get along within the department/college/university
- Graduate students graduated (Master's and Ph.D.)
- Teaching effectiveness
- Donated equipment
- Service to university and profession
- Publicity in PR type publications
- Outside evaluations

New tenure track faculty should find someone within their department that can help them through the tenure process. Besides knowing which of the components listed above are used in the evaluation, it is very important to understand the actual weighting (not the public weighting) of each of these criteria. Faculty should also determine the submittal dates of reviews (mid-term and final) and any additional dates required by their department, college, and university. Additionally in the first year, the faculty member should determine what format the university uses for tenure applications and start a system of folders to retain documentation on each of the evaluation criteria.

As with all major endeavors, it is best to have a strategic plan to keep on track with the numerous demands that will be put on the assistant professor. Not only will it be necessary to balance research, teaching, and service; but, it is also important to balance your personal life, such as spending time with family, exercising, and just getting away from it all. A written strategic plan can also formalize the method of teaching, types of research, potential funding sources, and potential collaborations with other faculty members.

Teaching

Your teaching philosophy is the first section in the teaching division of your dossier. The teaching philosophy may not be much different than the teaching philosophy each of us wrote when we began applying for faculty positions, but it conveys a concise personal philosophy on teaching. This philosophy should be supported by course materials, which illustrate the manner in which you teach, and by anecdotal evidence, e.g. comments or letters from students and colleagues.

Your teaching folder should contain much more than just your teaching evaluations for all your classes. But, keep your teaching evaluations in a safe place, because you will need almost all the information they contain for your tenure dossier. The additional information in the evaluations include the number of students enrolled, the courses you taught each semester, and, depending on your university, how your evaluations compared to other courses offered within the department, the college, and university wide. You may also collect comments on what went well and what could be improved in your courses. Obviously, the positive comments strengthen your teaching portfolio, but evidence that you took action on areas of weakness may be even more important. Table 1 summarizes the previously mentioned information and is a sample table from a tenure dossier from the University of Arkansas.

Table 1. Summary of Teaching Evaluations.

Number	Title	Enrollment	Semester	Ratings ¹		
				Ind.	Engr.	Univ.
CVEG 2113	Structural Materials	21	Fa 2002	4.8	93	89
CVEG 2113	Structural Materials	17	Sp 2003	-	-	-
CVEG 2113	Structural Materials	19	Fa 2003	4.6	81	67
CVEG 563	Prestressed Concrete	5	Fa 2003	4.8	93	85
CVEG 2113	Structural Materials	18	Sp 2004	4.3	65	49
CVEG 4303	Reinforced Concrete	35	Sp 2004	4.6	85	70
CVEG 563	Prestressed Concrete	1	Su 2004	-	-	-
CVEG 2113	Structural Materials	16	Fa 2004	4.8	86	79
CVEG 4303	Reinforced Concrete	16	Fa 2004	4.3	63	55
CVEG 493VH	Structural Honors	1	Fa 2004	-	-	-
CVEG 563	Prestressed Concrete	1	Fa 2004	-	-	-
CVEG 563	Concrete Materials	5	Fa 2004	4.9	93	90
CVEG 4303	Reinforced Concrete	8	Sp 2005	4.7	84	71
CVEG 563	Prestressed Concrete	12	Sp 2005	4.6	73	60

¹ Ratings are given as the median “score”, followed by the percentile levels for “College of Engineering – all courses” and “University – all courses”.

To strengthen your tenure dossier, the faculty member should show efforts that they have made to improve their teaching methods. Attending teaching workshops is one way to demonstrate an interest in improving teaching. The workshops can range from the American Society of Civil Engineering’s ExCEED teaching workshop (<http://www.asce.org/exceed>) and the National Effective Teaching Institute (NETI) to technical specialty workshops sponsored by professional groups. For example, the Portland Cement Association sponsors teaching workshops for faculty members who teach concrete related courses.

If the faculty member is not able to attend education workshops or conferences, most universities have teaching and support centers for faculty members. The support centers can offer a wide range of assistance from in-class evaluation of your teaching methods to informal presentations on teaching. For example, the University of Arkansas has “New Faculty Lunches” each month where teaching related topics are discussed. At a

minimum, attendance at these activities should be documented. Documentation may include a short description of what was taken away from a workshop and how that material was incorporated into your teaching methods. Ideally a marriage of activities to improve teaching and course evaluations would show that the learning process is improved.

Another way to demonstrate your commitment to teaching is through participation in ASEE, either by attending conferences or publishing papers in the ASEE's *Journal of Engineering Education* or ASEE conference proceedings. Depending on the conference location, attendance at national conferences can be expensive. However, ASEE Section Meetings typically have a lower registration cost and are normally within driving distance from a faculty member's university. Not only do ASEE Section Meetings provide a great opportunity to publish educational papers, they offer an excellent networking opportunity for faculty members to find out what like minded individuals are doing at different institutions. These networking opportunities also offer the potential for collaboration in educational or research projects.

At research universities, another division within your teaching section is the number of graduate students you have graduated. This section includes the name of your student and his/her thesis/dissertation title. At many research universities, graduating a doctoral student before your sixth year is very important for tenure. At non-research intensive universities, the number of undergraduate students that you advise is very important in your tenure dossier. The final thing to put in your "Teaching" file is any notes, emails, or notes of encouragement you received from a student.

The faculty member should make the most out of his/her classes. If you are at a research university, undergraduate courses are a great recruiting ground for future graduate students. In these courses, exceptional students can be identified early in their academic studies.

Research

At most research universities, the official appointment for a faculty member is 50 percent teaching and 50 percent research. The teaching load is either 3 or 4 courses per year. Theoretically, research activities account for only 50 percent of the faculty's member time, but in reality, research oriented activities can consume much more of your time. The research side of academia can be divided into two major sections, research income and publications.

A significant portion of a faculty member's job can be spent on locating funding for his/her research program. The search for research funding is sometimes combined with little or no training in writing research proposals. However, there are books available to assist faculty members in writing proposals.²

Most universities require the faculty to include the funding source, years, and the principal and co-principal investigators in their dossier. Typically, promotion and tenure

committees want to see a faculty member who has developed his/her own area of expertise and who has the potential for continued success. A diversity of funding will make your tenure dossier very appealing. Some schools place special emphasis on federal dollars, particularly from nationally competitive funding sources. Writing proposals to competitive sources shows that the faculty member is trying to diversify his/her funding sources. Unfunded proposals can indirectly be successful too. Reviewer comments, when applied to the unsuccessful proposal, could help make your future proposals successful.

“Publish or perish” is often heard by faculty members throughout their career. The tenure dossier should include a citation of every publication that the faculty member has published since starting the tenure track process. Tracking down the correct references for the articles can be time consuming. To make this process easier, as soon as an article is submitted to a journal or conference, record the article title and journal/conference title in your tenure dossier. Once the article is published, update your dossier.

When writing articles for publication, faculty members should devote most of their time to refereed journal articles. In a faculty members trek toward tenure, refereed journal articles could be the most important item in your tenure dossier. The quality of the journal may also be important at some universities, so early in your career; you should determine what journals your department considers upper tier peer-reviewed journals and which they consider lower tiered journals.

However, one should not forget about conference publications, specifically refereed conference publications. Conferences allow you to network with your colleagues, develop potential partnerships for research, and develop a list of potential outside reviewers of your tenure application. Also, conference proceedings can be a first step toward a journal article. Many times, a conference publication may include preliminary data and a limited literature review, which can later lead to a journal article once the research is completed.

Another aspect in the research section of your dossier is presentations. Presentations can be time consuming and may not directly contribute much towards tenure. But indirectly, the presentations give you opportunities to present your work and meet more colleagues. Conferences provide opportunities to meet potential external reviewers for your dossier (to be discussed later). Even at the local and state level, these presentations are beneficial. Local and state presentations allow you to make contacts with the professionals who live in your areas. These professionals may assist you in your research endeavors (funding, equipment use, etc).

Service

The final box to check in your tenure dossier is service. There are various levels of service. There is university service, which can be at the department level, college level, and the university level. Volunteer for departmental, college and university committees, but choose your committees wisely. Senior faculty typically recommends that assistant

professors minimize their committee work.³ Very few, if any, faculty members received tenure based on their service. Choose committees that require a limited amount of your time no matter how interested you may be in a particular committee or the mission of the committee.

Prior to the start of one of the authors' academic careers, they were told that there were two things a young faculty member should not do; the first, to be the faculty advisor for a student organization and the second, teach the senior design course. As a new faculty, you are sometimes the faculty member who is closest in age to the students. Many times, students will want the young faculty member to be the faculty advisor for their respective clubs or organizations. Be aware, being a student group advisor can be very time consuming and contribute little to tenure.

There is also service to your profession. This can be done at the local, state, and national level. Committee membership may not directly result in your promotion and tenure, but the contacts you make during committee meetings may. These committees provide you with great opportunities for networking. The contacts you make may one day be your external reviewers for your dossier or future collaborators on a research project. In national organizations, committee membership takes time, so attend conferences early in your academic career and begin forming those professional relationships early.

External Reviews

Universities typically require external review of your tenure dossier and the faculty member must provide a list of potential external reviewers to your department head. The external reviewers evaluate your tenure dossier and in turn write a recommendation letter to your department head either supporting or not supporting your nomination for tenure. Obviously, you should choose your potential external reviewers wisely as they should be full professors or department heads at similar or higher ranked universities, they should be familiar with your work (research, teaching, and service), and of course they should feel comfortable writing a strong letter of recommendation supporting your application for tenure. The potential reviewers should not be directly related to any of your work (e.g., your Master's or Ph.D. advisor or other collaborator).

Summary

As a new tenure track faculty member starts their career, they should determine the criteria that will be used to evaluate their tenure application. These criteria include the categories (e.g., research dollars, journal papers, teaching, service) that are deemed important by the promotion and tenure committees, fellow faculty members, and department head and dean. The faculty member should also determine how these criteria will be evaluated (e.g., external dollars, number of papers as primary author, student evaluations) and how you are supposed to document these values. Additionally, the faculty member should determine the expected format of the application and all related deadlines for submittal of the application. Lastly, the faculty member should start their career with a strategic plan on how they will accomplish the goals required by the

institution and their personal lives and set up a system to document those accomplishments.

Bibliography

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