

Utilizing Feedback From Your Tenure and Promotion Committee

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The tenure and promotion (T & P) process may seem to be a maze of confusion: publishing requirements, performing research and writing grants, service to the university and to the community, faculty development, advising students, and last, but not least, teaching.

There seems to be two main methods of T & P evaluation procedures. In the first procedure, the tenure candidate is evaluated at the end of the third year of employment, and then again in the sixth year of employment, with the tenure decision made in the sixth year. In the second procedure the tenure candidate is evaluated annually, and the tenure decision is made in the sixth year. The appropriate procedure, and any supporting documentation, should be published either in a handbook or on the school's web page so that the tenure candidate may access it as needed.

The evaluation process usually requires the tenure candidate to produce a written document that details how the tenure candidate has complied with the appropriate T & P requirements. These requirements usually are in the categories of teaching, service and research (for research institutions) or teaching, service and writing (for teaching institutions). The categories are assigned various weights by the institution, as spelled out in the afore-mentioned T & P procedural documents. The tenure candidate's T & P committee then reviews the report and evaluates the candidates' performance, noting any exemplary performance or any weaknesses. At USI, the committee's recommendations then are forwarded to the Dean, and to the tenure candidate. The Dean may send a letter to the tenure candidate with his/her comments and recommendations. The letter from the T & P committee and any letters from the Dean are the focus of this paper.

Tenure Anyone?

Tenure is often defined as a reward for personal dedication to an institution. This dedication takes many forms:

- publishing scholarly works
- research
- grant writing
- service to the university
- service to the community
- faculty development
- advising students
- and last, but not least, teaching

The Tenure Process

There seems to be two main methods of tenure and promotion (T & P) evaluation procedures. In the first procedure, the tenure candidate is evaluated at the end of the third year of employment, and then again in the sixth year of employment, with the tenure decision made in the sixth year, while in the second procedure the tenure candidate is evaluated annually, and the tenure decision is made in the sixth year. The appropriate procedure, and any supporting documentation, should be published either in a handbook or on the school's web page so that the tenure candidate may access it as needed. At the University of Southern Indiana in the Pott School of Science and Engineering (USI Pott S & E) there are two documents titled *Faculty Evaluation Procedures for Reappointment and Tenure* and *Faculty Evaluation Criteria for Reappointment, Tenure, and Promotion* which spell out in detail the makeup of the T & P committee and the specific criteria on which the candidate shall be judged. Similar documents probably are in use in every college and university.

Given the choice of the two, the annual evaluation seems much more equitable. More feedback is provided, and more opportunity to correct deficiencies and mistakes is available. Also, annual self-evaluation seems to help one become a better teacher by focusing attention on teaching goals, results, pedagogy, and pinpointing areas for improvement. At USI Pott S & E, the candidate is evaluated annually by the T & P committee, the results are sent to the Dean and to the candidate in an official letter. The Dean then writes a letter to the Provost (or equivalent) with his recommendations, and a letter to the candidate detailing areas of satisfactory progress, areas needing attention, or noting any exemplary work.

The T & P committee consists of tenured faculty whose responsibility is to guide and advise the tenure-track candidate through the T & P process. The committee will serve as the first-line evaluators of the candidate, and will advise of any glaring discrepancies between what is being accomplished *by* the candidate vs what is desired *from* the candidate. It would be a good idea to select a T & P committee member to serve as a mentor, if possible, and if one will serve.

Teaching Portfolio

The evaluation process usually requires the tenure candidate to produce a written document that details how the tenure candidate has complied with the appropriate T & P requirements. At USI Pott S & E, the preferred document is a Teaching Portfolio [1].

The Teaching Portfolio is a self-evaluation of one's goals, objectives, and outcomes in terms of the specific T & P requirements that one is responsible for. Writing this document requires one to examine:

- teaching pedagogy
- goals and objectives in teaching
- personal goals
- career goals

- publishing
- research
- service

The Teaching Portfolio also provides an opportunity to document:

- accomplishments
- teaching awards
- service awards
- letters from students
- student evaluations and assessments
- research grant awards

The Teaching Portfolio provides a structured opportunity to reflect on what has been done in the past, to develop a plan for the future, and to communicate these plans to the T & P committee. The self-analysis required to write a Teaching Portfolio forces one to focus on the desired outcomes of ones' teaching, research, service, and publishing efforts. Developing a Teaching Portfolio also forces one to elucidate current motives, to determine if the current methodology being used will elicit the desired outcomes, and to correct any deficiencies. In essence, the Teaching Portfolio will highlight good teaching, as well as spotlight bad teaching.

The Teaching Portfolio also serves as a means of alerting the T & P committee, and the entire chain-of-command, of your intentions. This provides a beautiful opportunity to float test balloons to determine if your plans will be acceptable with the goals and objectives of your institution.

The Teaching Portfolio should be thin enough so that the T & P committee will *actually* read it. A lot of effort will be put into writing this document, and it will not serve you if it is not read. If there are questions that were not answered in the Teaching Portfolio, the committee could always ask for more detail. If more information is requested, document the information so that it will be included in future editions of your Teaching Portfolio [2].

The Evaluation

After the Teaching Portfolio has been written, it is examined by the T & P committee. Essentially, the Teaching Portfolio will be compared with what the committee members observe as the daily duties of an academic career are carried out, and the expectations the administration has. At USI Pott S & E, the committee drafts a response to the submission, and sends it to the Dean with a copy to the candidate. The Dean reviews the T & P committee letter, and perhaps the Teaching Portfolio, and responds with his recommendation in a letter to the Provost with a response also to the candidate. These two letters, one from the T & P committee and one from the Dean, are the two most important documents in existence. They should guide the candidate on any shortcomings in the candidate's efforts. *If* the candidate addresses these recommendations within

the next year, and documents the changes in the Teaching Portfolio, there should be no grounds for not receiving tenure. To reiterate, if the candidate writes a Teaching Portfolio and delineates all career plans (research, publishing, service, teaching), and receives no indications that anything is amiss, all is well. If, however, something is noted in the letters from the T & P committee or the Dean, *and* these problems are addressed in the next year and documented in the next edition of the Teaching Portfolio, what reasons could be used to reject the candidate's application for tenure? The candidate could easily argue that *every problem that has been brought to my attention has been addressed, so how could tenure not be granted?*

If the T & P candidate has been writing Teaching Portfolios during the probationary period, the application for tenure *should* be relatively easy. The various revisions of the portfolio should make it easy to track changes in attitudes toward teaching, research, service, and publishing during the probationary period. At USI Pott S & E, the tenure candidate is not present at the decision-making meeting, and is represented by another faculty member. Therefore, all appropriate documentation for the T & P committees' consideration must be available in the candidate's absence. Coupled with any teaching or professional organization awards, the Teaching Portfolio should provide most of the required information.

In Conclusion

The Teaching Portfolio is a nice document to address the needs of the tenure candidate. It allows for the candidate to document the results of past efforts and to disclose his intentions for the future. The self-analysis required to write the Teaching Portfolio can itself cause the candidate to become better equipped for tenure. But it also allows the T & P committee, and the Dean, to evaluate the candidate against established goals. The letters from the committee and the Dean shall explain any deficiencies or discrepancies, and should guide the candidate to an appropriate course of action. By addressing these deficiencies or discrepancies, the tenure candidate should have no areas of concern in receiving tenure.

Bibliographic Information

[1] Seldin, Peter. 1997. *The Teaching Portfolio: A Practical Guide to Improved Performance and Promotion/Tenure Decisions*, 2d. ed., Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing

[2] Several sites with Teaching Portfolio preparation content, including some examples:

<http://www.usi.edu/ctle/portfolios.asp>

<http://www.cte.iastate.edu/portfolio/>

http://www.brown.edu/Administration/Sheridan_Center/

Biographical Information

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