

## **Online Survey Research of Faculty Attitudes Toward Promotion and Tenure**

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### **Abstract**

This study is an extension of the preliminary study on faculty attitudes toward the processes of promotion and tenure in higher education. It began when several colleagues banded together and submitted proposals to a national conference establishing a panel to discuss promotion and tenure, which were subsequently accepted. The panel proposal consisted of: (1) a comparison and analysis of the tenure and promotion process at two institutions; (2) an analysis on mentoring a newly hired non-tenured colleague for the academic year; (3) an analysis of being mentored during the entry year at an institution; and finally; (4) an analysis of the promotion and tenure process from the perspective of a female who later became an administrator. The conference attendees posed even more questions about the promotion and tenure process and the need for additional study became apparent. Curious about college faculty perceptions, a focus group consisting of faculty was organized.

Based on literature reviews and focus group results, a questionnaire was developed. It was used to answer the following: what is the relationship between attitudes toward promotion and tenure and current faculty tenure status? And what is the relationship between attitudes toward promotion and tenure and gender of the faculty?

The survey on "Tenure and Promotion" was posted online and members of National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) and Association or the Advancement of Educational Research (AARE) were requested to participate in the survey. Ninety-nine faculty members representing different educational institutes across the country completed the questionnaire. The names of these institutions are listed in the appendix. A *chi square* analysis revealed four items were statistically significant. Discussion of the results follows. Written comments supplied by the respondents are also detailed. Conclusions include a recommendation for further research to increase the database (population) to enhance future statistical analyses.

## **Online Survey Research of Faculty Attitudes Toward Promotion and Tenure**

Most colleges and universities have formal policies and procedures for granting tenure. Nevertheless, there tends to be a great deal of subjectivity in how these are interpreted by the faculty and the administration. In other words, there is always room for bias. In many instances there are no prescriptive standards for an institution's decision-making rights in granting tenure. Thus, not only do promotion and tenure policies and procedures differ from institution to institution, but there may be a great deal of variation in how each department or unit within the institution practices and applies these policies (Baez & Centra, 1995).

Tenure evaluations, while designed to meet the specific needs of the particular institution, may still share certain aspects in common. The tenure review process must be specifically designed to answer three basic questions: What does the institution need to measure, how best might it be measured, and last, toward what ends would the measurements be used (Nolte, Legate, & Schaus, 1997)? In answering these three basic questions, different institutions have their own unique set of criteria and requirements for the evaluation process. Nolte et al. (1997) have found that when the emphasis is on teaching, the institution should use portfolios for faculty evaluation. They suggest that faculty portfolios should contain the following: instructional plan, instructional evaluation, profession-related evaluation, self-evaluation, professional development plan and division (department) chair/supervisor's evaluation.

There appears to be a reluctance on the part of the higher education community to be forthright in articulating the rules and framework for tenure and promotion. The review of the literature revealed several provocative titles such as "Fanning the Flames: Tenure and Promotion and Other Role-Playing Games" and "Tenure and Promotion Barriers: Pushing the Envelope on Salary Increments, Tenure and Promotion."

Without doubt, asking for and being granted tenure is a complex and multifaceted process, where each player plays a vital role in shaping the process. For most, if not all, being denied tenure has serious implications, both in the professional and personal arenas. Professionally, their future now stands on extremely shaky grounds. Personally, being denied tenure has negative consequences on their self-perception and self-esteem because it reflects a rejection of the physical, psychological, and emotional investment that the individual has made in his or her work. It would not be an exaggeration to say that when a faculty member is denied tenure, an entire department may experience a sense of failure, because key members of the department may have been involved in the selection and recruitment of the person.

In short, the highly sensitive and emotionally charged nature of the tenure acquisition process, no matter how well established and objective the policies and procedures may be, should not be ignored. Given this, the critical importance of objective, defensible, and justifiable criteria for tenure cannot be overemphasized. Much

has been written about this, yet those in the position to evaluate, judge, and eventually bring the process to its culmination, often lack awareness and sensitivity to its nature and implication. Granting or denying tenure is indeed a fine line to tread for the administrator, because with tenure often comes the problem of complacency and reduced motivation to create and produce; on the other hand, denying tenure can result in the threat of a lawsuit.

Members of our college department have shared a common interest in the promotion and tenure process, both here and at other institutions. Several colleagues worked together and submitted proposals to a national conference to establish a panel to discuss promotion and tenure that was subsequently accepted. The panel proposals consisted of: (1) a comparison and analysis of the tenure and promotion process at two institutions; (2) an analysis on mentoring a newly hired non-tenured colleague for the academic year; (3) an analysis on being mentored during the entry year at an institution; and finally; (4) an analysis of the promotion and tenure process from the perspective of a female who later became an administrator. The conference attendees posed even more questions about the promotion and tenure process and need for additional study became apparent.

Curious about college faculty perceptions, a focus group was organized. Recently, the use of focus groups has grown tremendously, particularly in business and industry. They can be of enormous benefit to the educational researcher (Jarrell, 2000). Our focus group consisted of five participants. Jarrell (2000) reports that most authors recommend six to twelve participants. Colleagues who teach measurement courses recommended eight to twelve participants, however the number of participants depends on the objectives of the research (Stewart & Shamdasan, 1990).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The object of this study was to conduct a preliminary investigation of faculty attitudes toward promotion and tenure. Specifically:

1. What is the relationship between attitudes toward promotion and tenure and current faculty tenure status?
2. What is the relationship between attitudes toward promotion and tenure and gender of the faculty?

Morgan (1997) lists questionnaire development and hypotheses formulation as research efforts that lend themselves to the use of focus groups. The focus group findings, a survey of available promotion and tenure documents, and a review of periodic literature resulted in a list of ten tenure-practice items (Appendix A). This list provided the basis for the research questionnaire. The instrument was designed to be completed quickly by the participating faculty members, and to facilitate scoring. The questionnaire was used as an additional data source to elaborate focus group findings and literature review

results. Barbour & Kitzinger (1999, p. 36) warn against the focus group as the “sole method” of inquiry.

### **Method**

The self-report survey “Faculty Survey on Tenure and Promotion,” was posted online and email requests were sent to members of NCPEA and AAER to complete it. Faculty members (N= 99) representing various educational institutes across the country completed the survey.

The instrument solicited information grouping respondents in the following ways: (1) current faculty status, tenured or non-tenured (2) current faculty rank, assistant, associate or professor (3) gender of the faculty member (4) institution status, public or private and (5) the number of students enrolled in the institute. Respondents answered ten items using the following Likert-type scale: strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree and strongly agree.

The study’s data are nominal, therefore the appropriate statistical test that was employed was the *chi square* ( $\chi^2$ ). Some of the cell sizes were small and thus the Fisher’s Exact Test was employed within the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for *chi square* analysis.

The following null hypotheses are expressed in the study:

1. Responses to the ten instrument items will not differ significantly based on the current faculty tenure status.
2. Responses to the ten instrument items will not differ significantly based on gender.

### **Results**

Table 1 shows the ten questionnaire items and the related *chi square* results. Two *chi square* values achieved statistical significance at  $p < .01$  level and one at  $p < .05$  and another one at  $p < .10$  level based on the current tenure status of faculty respondents (whether they had tenure or not). Therefore, Null Hypothesis 1 was rejected for items #1, #8, #9 and #10.

## Faculty Survey on Tenure and Promotion

Survey Questions	A	U	D	Chi-Square	
				Gender	Tenure
1. Tenure procedures are clearly defined	71	7	21	0.928	0.052*
2. Tenure decisions depend upon the quantity of published research and/or creative work	77	9	13	0.686	0.462
3. Tenure decisions depend upon the quality of published research and/or creative work	63	12	24	0.401	0.684
4. Tenure decisions depend heavily on outside evaluations	29	21	49	0.565	0.725
5. Tenure decisions depend heavily on student evaluations	62	15	22	0.138	0.309
6. Tenure decisions depend heavily upon committee & service	59	9	31	0.996	0.124
7. In order to be granted tenure, it is important to work collaboratively & effectively w/ Professional Colleagues	75	7	17	0.341	0.89
8 Tenure depends on one's ability to secure grants	36	5	58	0.145	0.03**
9. The criteria used for tenure decisions are well known in my department.	61	13	25	0.86	0.001** *
10. I have found that the annual review of faculty by the dept. P&T comm. is helpful in preparing for promotion	53	19	27	0.128	0.002** *

A = Agree or Strongly Agree

U = Undecided

D = Disagree or Strongly Disagree

\* Less than .10

\*\* Less than .05

\*\*\* Less than .01

Item # 8, Tenure depends on one's ability to secure grants, ( $\chi^2 = 4.687$ ,  $p < .03$ ) indicates that non-tenured respondents felt that the ability to secure grants plays an important role in the tenure process. Whereas the tenured faculty felt that the ability to secure grants doesn't impact the promotion and tenure process.

Item 9, The criteria for tenure decisions are well known in my department. ( $\chi^2 = 10.142$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The non-tenured faculty members indicated more disagreement with the statement suggesting that they or the other members of their department did not have a clear understanding of the criteria. However, the tenured faculty readily agreed that the decision criteria pertaining to tenure and promotion are well known in their department.

Item 10, I have found that the annual review of faculty by the departmental P&T committee is helpful in preparing for promotion. ( $\chi^2 = 9.553$ ,  $p < .002$ ), was agreed to more by tenured faculty as compared to their non-tenured peers. Item 1, Tenure procedures are clearly defined. ( $\chi^2 = 3.773$ ,  $p < .052$ ) again found non-tenured faculty indicating that some mystery surrounds the promotion and tenure criteria whereas tenured faculty did not share this view.

There were no statistically significant differences in the questionnaire items when isolating gender, thus the study failed to reject Null Hypothesis 2. This indicates that the attitude regarding promotion and tenure did not differ based on the gender of the respondent.

The instrument, "Faculty Survey on Tenure and Promotion," included a space allowing respondents to write in additional comments. Majority of these comments reflect the disillusionment and mystery that surrounds this process. Some of them addressed other issues like the expectations of the faculty, governance of the process in various institutes and their opinions regarding what is the most important component determining tenure and promotion. Some of the comments are as follows:

- Promotion and tenure are supposed to be based on a combination of teaching, research, and service, but in fact they appear to be based solely (or at least primarily) on research that has little relation to reality.
- Definitions exist, but the P&T committee's presentations obfuscate the definitions. For example, one tenured faculty member said to group of non-tenured teachers that, "This is a club and acceptance to it is getting more difficult."
- Tenure and promotion is a political process ruled by a few who have agendas and alliances. It is rubber stamped by the provost.
- I am no longer at this institution. I left because the guidelines for tenure were arbitrary in practice, though there were printed guidelines. The primary way to get tenure in my dept. was through being a gofer and lapdog for an entrenched chair
- Tenure is a joke. It's not about job performance\_\_ (incomplete)

- Decisions are made solely by the administration in consultation with whomever they wish.
- Tenure is ALWAYS political over performance no matter where you work.
- The VPA and the president have the authority to reverse any decision whenever the candidate is their crony. Decisions are not based on the set criteria.
- Scholarship, Service and Teaching: These are the three components for promotion and tenure. Though, teaching is viewed as the most important
- I'm not convinced tenure is a good idea. I see tenured people (even with a supposed tenure review in place) doing very little and getting by with it - while professors without tenure do all of the departmental level work, and still teach a full load.
- The tenure and promotion process should not be a mystery. As we work with folks who are on tenure track, we should offer support and guidance and give them on-going feedback as to whether or not they are making appropriate progress
- Dean is heavily involved in the promotion and tenure process almost to a micromanagement point. He unduly influences the process. He makes his opinion known early in the process and has an undue influence on the committee, especially in selected cases.
- Each department has its own criteria. I was denied tenure even though I excelled in student evaluations and was average in research and service.
- Bottom line - Number of publications in refereed journals trumps everything else. Currently, the ability to secure grants is gaining ground but has not penetrated the collective consciences of the faculty yet only the administration!
- Our unit tenure/merit criteria are very specific and clear; as might be imagined, their application often is uneven.
- In bad economic times, tenure is a very important concept to preserve.
- In times of political intolerance, tenure is a very important concept to preserve.
- Promotion and Tenure decision are made based on a balance of work in the following three areas with an emphasis on the order as given: Teaching, Research, Service.
- Promotion and tenure should not be an intimidating process; our department does an excellent job of making P&T rigorous but non-threatening.

- The tenure process should be reflective of three tracks: Scholarship and Creative Works, Excellence Teaching with high student evaluations, Outstanding Intellectual Leadership beyond the College or University levels.
- The college faculty has done substantial work revising the promotion & tenure guidelines for the college. We have a committee that annually reviews the guidelines to assure all faculty of fairness.

### **Conclusion**

This study was an extension of the preliminary study to investigation of faculty attitudes toward promotion and tenure. This study addressed these two questions specifically:

1. What is the relationship between attitudes toward promotion and tenure and current faculty tenure status?
2. What is the relationship between attitudes toward promotion and tenure and gender of the faculty?

The survey on “Tenure and Promotion” was posted online and via emails members of National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) and Association of the Advancement of Educational Research (AARE) were requested to participate in the study. Ninety-nine faculty members representing different educational institutes across the country completed the questionnaire. A *chi square* analysis revealed four items based on current faculty status (whether or not they had tenure) achieved statistical significance.

Tenured and non-tenured respondents differed in their perception of the relative importance of securing grants to the promotion and tenure process. Those with tenure thought that acquiring grants was of little importance in contrary to the non-tenured faculty’s opinion. The non-tenured faculty endorsed the tenure and promotion decisions criteria as unclear and unknown to many. Whereas, the tenured faculty felt that these decision criteria was well known to all. Tenured faculty agreed more than the non-tenured regarding the helpfulness of the P&T committee in preparing for promotion. Also it was found that the criteria regarding tenure and promotion were viewed as unclear and mysterious by most of the non-tenured faculty than the tenured faculty. The study found that the attitude regarding promotion and tenure did not differ based on the gender of the respondent.

The written comments pointed out a general disillusionment regarding the tenure and promotion process. The comments also indicate a perception on the part of some non-tenured faculty that the process is unfair and criteria are ever changing. The study

indicates a need for clear criteria and the establishment of fair processes in the universities to address the tenure and promotion concerns of the faculty members.

More research is needed to establish a database of sufficient numbers to examine these questions in a more statistically valid and reliable manner.

### References

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APPENDIX A  
*Faculty Survey on Tenure and Promotion*

The purpose of this survey is to solicit faculty perceptions and beliefs regarding tenure and promotion at Wright State University. In order to insure the confidentiality of your responses no personally identifying information is needed or requested. In an attempt to gather the most useful information you are encouraged to respond honestly and frankly.

- Current faculty tenure status:                      Tenured     Untenured
- Current faculty rank:                                  Assistant Professor     Associate Professor     Professor
- Gender:    Male     Female
- Institution    Public                       Private
- Enrollment                      < 3000 students                       3000 – 15000 Students                       >15000 Students

Please read each of the following statements and indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each by checking the appropriate column.

SD =Strongly Disagree    D=Disagree    U=Uncertain    A=Agree    SA=Strongly Agree

		SD	D	U	A	SA
1	Tenure procedures are clearly defined					
2	Tenure decisions depend upon the <b>quantity</b> of published research and/or creative work					
3	Tenure decisions depend upon the <b>quality</b> of published research and or creative work					
4	Tenure decisions depend heavily on outside evaluations					
5	Tenure decision depend heavily on student evaluations					
6	Tenure decisions depend heavily upon committee and service					
7	In order to be granted tenure, it is important to work collaboratively and effectively with professional colleagues					
8	Tenure depends upon one's ability to secure grants					
9	The criteria used for tenure decisions are well known in my department					
10	I have found that the annual review of faculty by the departmental P&T Committee is helpful in preparing for promotion					

Use the space provided to make any additional comments you wish to make.

APPENDIX B  
Represented Institutions

Arkansas State University  
Ball State University  
Butler University  
California State University, San Bernardino  
California State University, Bakersfield  
Cleveland State University  
East Carolina University  
Eastern IL University  
Fordham University  
Friends University  
Frostburg State University  
Grand Valley State University  
Henderson State University  
Idaho State University, Pocatello, ID  
Illinois State University  
Florida University  
Jacksonville State University  
Loyola University Chicago  
Lynn University  
Marshall University  
Mc Neese State University  
Middle Tennessee State University  
Minnesota State University, Mankato  
Morehead State University  
Northern Kentucky University  
Northwest Missouri State University  
Oakland University  
Penn State University  
Portland State University  
Purdue University  
Saginaw Valley State University  
Sam Houston State University.  
Southeast Missouri State University.  
Southern Illinois University  
Southern Illinois University at Carbondale  
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville  
Southwest Baptist University  
Southwest Missouri State University  
St John's University  
Stephen F. Austin State U.  
Stephen F. Austin State University  
Texas A& M International University  
The George Washington University  
The University of Southern Mississippi

The University of Texas at Arlington  
Towson University  
U of Toledo  
U. of L.A. at Monroe  
UC Davis  
University of Arkansas  
University of Central Florida  
University of Colorado at Denver  
University of Dayton  
University of GA  
University of Houston – Victoria  
University of Kentucky  
University of La Verne  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
University of Nevada, Reno  
University of North Dakota  
University of South Dakota  
University of South Florida, St. Petersburg  
University of St. Thomas.  
University of Vermont  
UT Brownsville  
Valdosta State University  
Villanova University  
Virginia Tech  
Western Carolina University  
Western Illinois University  
Western Kentucky University  
William Paterson University  
Wright state University