

Tenure and Promotion Considerations: An Analysis of Cultural Issues

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Abstract

A purposive review of selected literature related to promotion and tenure in the university was conducted during the last year. From this literature review a constant comparative method of document data analysis was conducted. This method involves reviewing all documents, i.e. articles, handbooks, cases, field notes and interview data. The findings of our study suggest that the tenure and promotion process is impacted by differing values and literal interpretations after review of the candidates' tenure file. We recommend that sustained review include senior colleagues and use of a productivity schematic to document professional activity over the tenure time frame.

Introduction

Within the past 50 years we have witnessed in the United States a continuing and unabated dialogue as related to the awarding of tenure to college faculty. A number of issues related to the granting of tenure have been raised, both in the public forum and privately among scholars and administrators. The proponents of tenure have succinctly argued that it must be protected in order to preserve academic freedom and academic quality. Opponents have argued that tenure is an outmoded concept and lies at the root of most calls for institutional accountability and success.

While sympathetic to the arguments of both camps, we believe that there is a continued and sustained call for a re-examination of tenure as we enter the new millennium. Regardless of prior arguments, both pro and con, most scholars would agree that the intense scrutiny of tenure is related to the increasing call for accountability by state governing boards of higher education. This call for increased accountability occurs simultaneously with a demand for greater productivity of faculty in relationship to teaching and service (Arden, 1995; Cotter, 1996; Ratliff, 1996).

The national accountability climate has lead to a surge of legislative mandates and public calls to remodel tenure and increase faculty productivity. Many critics of the tenure process have argued that the freedoms and job security associated with tenure create a disincentive for faculty to maintain high levels of productivity, thus allowing unproductive scholars to "reside in the halls of academe" (Huber, 1992). These arguments are not supported after careful analysis of the history of tenure and subsequent policies and procedures to award tenure. Analysis of the

historical record indicates that tenure does not guarantee job security in the manner that many critics would argue. A careful scrutiny of contractual agreements at varied institutions within the United States would also suggest that alternatives have been developed. An example is contract and/or term appointments that continue to protect faculty interests and serve to redefine faculty work in more equitable ways (Chait, 1976; 1994).

It is not the intent of this manuscript to analyze the development and awarding of tenure to faculty that has occurred over the last 100 years. The study focused on a limited number of contemporary issues that impact the awarding of tenure and how we might address them in the near future. It is a given that continued discussion of the tenure process will have impact on the traditional roles of the professorate: teaching, research and service. These three aspects have served as a focus for the work of the scholar since the advent of land grant institutions in the late 1870's. Land grant institutions emphasized research and service to wide and varied constituents, thus broadening the faculty role from emphasis on teaching and translation of existing literature to one of application, and leading to the subsequent development of professional colleges, such as business, engineering, education and nursing.

Today the tenure system continues to receive criticism as it relates to how analysis of faculty productivity is determined. Further, the issue of how faculty work is evaluated and rewarded, both in the pre- and post- tenure years (Boyer, 1990; Boyer, 1994; Tierney, 1998) will continue to be a central issue in the coming years. It behooves administrators in higher education to develop a sound knowledge base of relevant literature and/or attempts to revise the tenure system that have been derived from research on tenure or faculty productivity.

It will not be possible to present all of the findings and/or conclusions of the extant literature to guide policy formation, but this synopsis can be used to assist in developing strategies for review and subsequent revision of tenure at each unique institution. Traditional scholarly productivity must not be excluded from tenure review, rather a *broader* focus should be ascribed to the promotion and tenure procedures that includes a more detailed analysis of teaching and service to both the professional and local state communities. It would not be wise to rely solely on faculty production as traditionally defined and measured, i.e., scholarship in the form of articles, reviews, artistic works, books, technical reports and/or published research findings from grant supported projects (Mawdsley, 1999).

By adding other relevant aspects of professional work when examining faculty production and by developing matrix procedures for evaluation, we can avoid the type of argument that occurred in the Campoverde Case (Cage, 1995) where an assistant professor was denied tenure for not publishing in traditional scholarly outlets. In her case, strong emphasis had been placed on teaching and service, and less on traditional scholarship. In Florida, Campoverde became a test case and raised serious questions about the standards for tenure. Quite often the application of tenure standards is impacted by the value set of each participating academic unit within the university culture, and perhaps rightly so. The tenure system, or other alternative systems, will be subject to criticism from the standpoint of how faculty production is affected.

The purpose of this paper was twofold: to review a selected sample of literature on tenure decision-making, and present a model for productivity analysis. A descriptive picture can be

used that provides an empirical basis for examining what is meant by faculty production. The second purpose of this study was to understand how we define productivity and offer a number of alternatives to those who must make tenure decisions about individuals seeking promotion and tenure.

In short, we explored the complex association between tenure and faculty production, and analyzed the implications for different productivity measurement in the areas of teaching, scholarship and service. It is expected that the generic model developed from our review of literature and subsequent analysis of faculty comments regarding faculty tenure procedures at selected institutions will help to inform policy level discussions regarding the creation of alternative faculty evaluation and review systems.

We are indebted for the preliminary work on analysis of faculty tenure and productivity by Antony and Raveling (1998). Their work indicated significant differences in the overall productivity of tenure versus non-tenured faculty members and was helpful as we analyzed this issue.

Tenure in the Professional School of Education

It is appropriate at this point to discuss the tenure and promotion process as it impacts faculty working in a professional college of education. We are concerned about faculty work as it relates to learning, institution building, collaboration and participation in public life in a number of varied sectors. The collegial culture of the professional school is different from that of the Liberal Arts College where the faculty perspective is oriented to teaching, research and service, with the latter being of less critical importance.

In the professional school we seek to develop strategies for improving effective teaching and professional service with some emphasis on applied scholarship and research. We believe that it is important for professors in a professional school of education to develop a strand of research inquiry that will direct their work over specific periods of their career. Quite often this work should be tied to a focus in the discipline which they are most identified with and may often cross various knowledge domains. We suggest that new assistant professors begin to develop an area of specialization that integrates the knowledge of their discipline interest by bridging theory and practice; different approaches to learning and that cognitive rationality; hip of discovery and practice.

Several prevailing m; ssion of tenure and promotion in a professional school are as follows:

Myth #1: a belief held by a substantial number of professionals and/or members of the public citizenry that tenure is a lifetime job guarantee. The reality is that it is difficult to become a tenured professor and also very difficult to terminate one. The probationary period generally averages six years at graduate research institutions. For entry-level professors this is a period of employment insecurity that is unique among United States professions. Professionals denied tenure at the end of the six-year period lose their job in what is called the “up-or-out” process. It is during the probationary period that assistant professors must wrestle with developing a strong

teaching approach, participate in a variety of service activities, identify a research agenda and contribute to the knowledge base of the profession through publishing. The work of junior faculty during the probationary period is generally evaluated by senior professors and administrators to determine if they are establishing teaching, research and service productivity prior to a recommendation for tenure and promotion.

A second myth that abounds within the public domain is that “tenured faculty do not work very hard.” There is a perception among legislatures and other leading business entrepreneurs that faculty spend too much time doing meaningless research and very little time teaching. A number of surveys have clearly indicated that tenured faculty generally publish more, serve on more committees and teach more than their untenured colleagues. On average, faculty work a 52-hour week at the national level (Antony & Raveling, 1998). It is also a requirement for full-time, tenured faculty to serve on academic committees and provide senior leadership for a number of critical functions within the professional school. Serving on curriculum committees, promotion and tenure committees, and academic policy and procedure committees within colleges and universities are typical requirements.

In addition, a recent issue relating to the tenure process that is receiving considerable attention in the national literature is post-tenure review. A number of institutions such as George Mason University in Virginia and the University of Florida have initiated post-tenure review procedures for those faculty that are “tenured and senior” within the institution. Tenured faculty at most colleges and universities are evaluated periodically, for among other things, promotion, salary increases and in some cases, merit increases.

Myth #3: research is not important. As we consider the serious issues related to tenure and its future as a viable entity in the academic community, we need to address the issue of research. Within the university structure each college and/or sub-unit may have a very different mission from other entities on campus. There are also differing missions between Carnegie Doctoral I research institutions and small, selective liberal arts colleges. For example, at an institution such as Arizona State University, which has over 50 doctoral degree granting programs, it is a “mandatory” requirement that faculty devote a considerable portion of their working time to research, both funded and non-funded. However, according to several government surveys, even faculty at research universities spend considerably more time teaching than conducting research (Bieber & Blackburn, 1993; Eash, 1983).

From our perspective it is wrong to think of research as the enemy of good teaching as we continue to develop a mission statement for professional schools. In a professional school within a research university it is appropriate to place emphasis on faculty scholarly activity, albeit with a different focus, while not neglecting teaching and applied service in the training of professionals. It has been said a number of times in relevant literature, that it is important that faculty continue to demonstrate that they are “up” on the latest research and are able to communicate results of inquiry projects and findings to students in both undergraduate and graduate classes (Boyer, 1994, Ratliff, 1996).

If faculty in professional schools of education are to have an impact on the learning community of American public schools, then we must continue to support differential modes of

inquiry as a basis for school improvement. Research on innovations, new teaching strategies, learner applications and how students learn through new technology would be an example of areas where we need continued applied and/or theoretical research.

Myth #4 is related to the issue of “academic freedom.” which sounds very much like the freedom to do or say whatever a professor wants, no matter how incorrect or inconsequential. In reality academic freedom is important to society. It is through institutions, such as professional schools of education, that students and scholars are able to challenge conventional wisdom in any field. For example, the issue of censorship in schools continually raises its “ugly head” in the form of a number of active sub-groups within the culture of the United States who would like to censor what students read and under what conditions. If we do not educate students to deal with problematic ideas and issues, such as racism, sexism, and/or differing political ideologies, how will we maintain an open society where students and university faculty can address critical issues that require sensitive treatment?

A final myth is related to the persistent notion that chairs, deans, and other higher education administrators want to deny tenure wherever they can. Tenure has costs and benefits associated with it for both the faculty and administration. A faculty member denied tenure suffers from professional, emotional and financial consequences. The administration loses a six-year investment in the professional development of a faculty member. Denial of tenure to a faculty member must be based on meticulous documentation that spans the six-year probationary process. If the documentation and reasons are not considered to be adequate, the institution may face the threat of litigation, interference from the judicial system and the prospect of negative re-employment, 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 and subjectivity. 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, & Kalispell, 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) 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.

Method

This study focused on the issues related to the awarding of tenure and associated issues in the decision process. A purposive sampling of selected literature sources from higher education data banks for the period 1995 to 1999 was randomly obtained through electronic research procedures. The authors analyzed 18 articles, 7 “letters to the editor” and 5 faculty handbooks. The articles were from the following sources: *Journal of Higher Education*, *Academe*, *Review of Higher Education*, *Journal of Personnel Evaluation*, and selected reports (see reference list). A number of research presentations from national conferences and the ERIC data base completed our data pool.

Each evidence piece was interpreted through documentary analysis and a constant comparative approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1990; Merriam, 1998). First, we coded the data into as many categories as possible, each to represent a different concern about tenure. Second, a comparison was made with the overall data and the properties of the categories. Finally, we refined the categories into positions regarding the granting of tenure. Accompanying our data acquisition plan was the securing of several case studies on tenure issues as viewed by assistant professors (N=3) in tenure track positions at a medium size state university. The research team met monthly to discuss the data and generate interpretations of the information. We sought to extract the meanings of varied scholars who had written in the literature base. Through an inductive/deductive process, we were able to see inferences in the database. The following discussion portrays national concerns regarding issues related to tenure, followed by findings of this study.

Discussion

Clearly, the ability to demonstrate increased professional competence as one proceeds from assistant to full professor is a mandate that is often not clear. It needs further description with precision if we are to assist entry-level faculty in the future. Without the acceptance gained from colleagues, students and the institutional markers of tenure and promotion, faculty would be hard put to develop confidence in their work. Without clearly delineated standards for promotion, the junior faculty would probably not receive tenure and might find difficulty in retaining a high confidence level. As one non-tenured assistant professor colleague summarized her feelings while waiting for the tenure decision at the university, “I don't know if I feel different in terms of my place in the profession. I feel, having had a book out and reviewed, so that, when I went to a conference in April, people I never met could say, ‘Oh, I read your book.’ You know, that made me feel like I sort of came of age to a certain extent” (Finnegan, 1998). Her statements demonstrate the level of anxiety that one might feel while progressing through the promotion transitions. According to our thinking, the above assistant professor would appear to be increasing her self-confidence as she moves from one professorial rank to the next.

In evaluation for promotion and tenure, there are both matters of fact and unobtrusive factors that are often difficult to assess. The role of faculty in American higher education varies by complexity, size of faculty, organizational structure, context variables, and teaching versus research commitment. Also, there are other variables that professionals use in arriving at performance judgment. In evaluation for promotion and tenure, there are both matters of fact and unobtrusive factors that are often difficult to assess. For instance, the college mission must be considered. The goals and objectives of a School of Education faculty are typically related to

varied assignments that require a commitment to teaching, service, and administrative type duties.

In arriving at a fair assessment of performance, it appears that the following variables may need to be given full weight by the promotion and tenure committees. The two primary areas that seem to require extraordinary commitments of faculty in schools of education are the areas of teaching and service. Analysis of professorial promotion materials over the past 15 years have indicated extraordinary commitment to teaching, and service within schools of education. An unevenness Insert Figure 2 Here been noted.

Scholarly productivity is typically used within higher education as a primary indicator of faculty vitality. However, in a professional school it appears in the new millennium that we must give greater consideration to field-based activity as it relates to working in partner professional development schools. We can no longer emulate the arts and science model of scholarly productivity when meeting the needs of professional faculty. They must devote considerable energy and time to clinical training of professionals in teaching, administration, technology and other domains within a school of education.

It is clear from previous research results that faculty, especially those at institutions whose primary focus is research, engage in many activities that would not fall under the definition of traditional scholarship. Therefore, faculty productivity in the professional school must be analyzed using multiple and more inclusive indicators, rather than simple reliance on articles or books published in traditional forms.

The policy implication of developing a more fluid model of evaluation that directs attention to field based activity is critical. Particularly when state legislatures required that the Board of Regents work with state universities to develop standards for faculty workloads that determined an acceptable range of time allocated to undergraduate teaching. The standards submitted by the Ohio regents advisory committee on faculty workload policy in February, 1994, designated the appropriate proportion of time faculty should allocate to teaching based on department mission (Ohio Board of Regents, 1994).

It is this type of reasoned interference that may be of concern as we analyze the model for faculty workload and productivity. While well intentioned to improve the quality of the undergraduate educational experience through redirecting greater faculty attention to undergraduate teaching, the policy implications and how it could influence faculty member's attitudes about teaching were not clearly studied prior to the mandate.

The direct and indirect impact of the Ohio faculty workload policy on faculty teaching behaviors was never fully defined or analyzed as a result of the above mandate. It is noteworthy that it expresses legislative concern about workload policy and what faculty do with their time and identifies what they value versus the reality of traditional promotion and tenure guidelines. The value to teach is not wrong - but to add more teaching without subtracting need for scholarship or service at the present level of expectation seems to be contrary to reasonable practice.

Several years ago, at Texas A&M University (College Station campus) the College of Education used a process to assess journal publication of faculty by dividing publications into a three-tier system. For example, *The American Journal of Education* was classified along with about 25 other journals in tier 1. Therefore articles published in tier 1 would only earn one point based on the classification system used by the promotion and tenure committee. A faculty member publishing within one of the journals in the tier 3 category could earn three points. Several of the journals cited in tier 3 are *The Journal of Law and Education* and *The Elementary School Journal*. It was the intent of this system to determine overall quality of a faculty member's scholarly productivity as determined by assignment to either tier 1, 2, or 3.

While the above is one illustration of an attempt to both quantify and qualify faculty productivity over time, it is lacking in serious attention to other elements of the professorial role. It is important that non-tenured faculty be evaluated annually while tenured faculty would be evaluated in a manner prescribed within the institutional faculty handbook.

We are sympathetic to post-tenure evaluation of senior professors on at least a three-year timetable, if an annual process cannot be agreed upon. In institutions that are organized for collective negotiations, discussions would have to occur with union leadership to determine and agree upon a fair and equitable process for reviewing tenured faculty. It is the intent of our model to provide an in depth evaluation for the non-tenured faculty member on an annual basis that would provide them a clear sense of direction for developing professional competence and achieve tenure.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were generated from analysis of the data:

- Professional schools must develop a continuous evaluation process with attendant feedback.
- Professional development and assessment of faculty performance is a complex issue and this model is one approach.
- Collaborative goal setting between faculty and the Dean's Office is a shared responsibility.
- The Dean and his/her administrative staff must be a support vehicle for encouragement, financial support, and leadership for the faculty they serve.

We believe a strong vehicle for assisting faculty in developing individual performance agreements is use of individual goal-setting procedures in relation to a performance plan for the year. The process of individual goal setting seems acceptable to faculty for several reasons. First, individuals were being asked to establish professional goals for themselves. Second, a feeling of trust between administration and faculty should develop as a result of mutual goal setting. Third, the individual performance agreement will be perceived as a positive vehicle for faculty to develop professional goals with the assistance of the college administration.

We suggest that faculty performance goals and objectives be highlighted within the three traditional areas: teaching, research and professional/public service as well as other significant

areas of contribution. By developing an individual performance plan within these parameters, the faculty member has a sense of career direction and a plan that is agreed to by the department chair and/or the Dean. Our prior work with faculty utilizing this type of model has indicated strong support and increasing productivity over time. In addition, the model provides a framework for individual and group study of the effects performance contracting has upon faculty development. It provides increased understanding of faculty behavior and motivation.

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 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 an ugly lawsuit.

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