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The information provided in this booklet was adapted from *The Academy as Community: A Manual of Best Practices for Meeting the Needs of New Scholars*, with the permission of the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Best Practices: Encouraging Retention



Best Practices Series

Facilitating Promotion and Tenure

What the institution should do to assist new faculty with achieving Promotion and Tenure



Encouraging Retention

How can we best retain and encourage new scholars in the initial stages of their careers? How can we ensure that our practices respect new scholars' diverse backgrounds and circumstances? Equally important, how can we create conditions which allow new scholars to develop and advance innovation and scholarly projects?

New faculty, by virtue of their inexperience, need not only the guidance, advice and support of specific middle-ranked and senior faculty, but also a strong welcome into their new community through the collective goodwill of all their colleagues. Although academics are highly specialized, trained to study the feasibility of original and unique ideas, our individual pursuits are dependent upon the smooth and equitable functioning of the human community of which we are a part. The contributions that each of us makes to the health of the community as a whole sustain the creative environments in which we function best.

“A strong intellectual community is a product of purposeful action, the result of constant stimulation, nourishment, and conscientious maintenance”

Finney et al. (2008)
from *Creating a Positive Departmental Culture at Virginia Tech: A Compendium of Successful Strategies*

The Pre-tenure Years

Throughout the tenure-track period, junior faculty members and Chairs should meet once a term to discuss the progress towards promotion and tenure. Regular meetings and assessments should serve two main purposes:



- To help alleviate undue stress on junior faculty members,
- To clearly indicate the status of their progress so that they can adjust their workload and schedule accordingly.

The Dean should invite new faculty to lunch around the mid-point of the first term. At that time the Dean should specifically ask how their work is going.

- *The Chair and Dean should ensure that teaching and service assignments are fairly distributed among the faculty.* If possible, published guidelines should be available to new scholars which outline the methods used to distribute the workload equitably. It is important that this process is as transparent as possible so that all new scholars within a department, faculty or institution both are, and feel as though they are, being treated fairly in relation to issues of promotion and tenure.
- *Expectations relating to both the application for and receipt of external grants should be clearly indicated.* This is especially important where there is not a direct link drawn between winning external grants and receiving promotion & tenure, but where there is still an expectation for the former from the institution.
- *Internal grants should be designed to meet the needs of all creative and scholarly work being conducted at the institution, not just those areas designated as priority.* Funding groups need to be aware of the different scholarly practices and needs of faculty working in the humanities and social sciences, science and technology, fine arts, etc. Given the demands of promotion & tenure faced by faculty in all disciplines, all junior faculty need equal access to funding within the institution.
- *All pre-tenure faculty should be given a comprehensive mid-tenure review of their progress towards promotion or tenure.* This review should be conducted by both the department and the college levels, including peer reviews by colleagues, not just the chair and dean. While the preparation of the portfolio for this review is time consuming, it will form the basis for the eventual application for promotion or tenure, so the benefits of doing this work are enormous.



Thinking About Promotion & Tenure in the First Year

Consistent (*cont'd*):

- Preferably, the criteria for promotion & tenure should be presented to the appointee in both oral and written form, with no discrepancy between the process as presented in written form and any so-called “informal” understandings. If current promotion & tenure practices are not correctly reflected in the written document, then the latter should be revised as soon as possible to reflect current practice.

Specific:

- *The promotion & tenure document should be as specific as possible.* Although criteria and weighting can vary within and across departments and faculties, wherever possible new faculty members should be given as much information as is needed to clarify scholarly/creative work expectations for promotion & tenure. For example, the document might specifically indicate the number and kind of publications (e.g. books, articles, reviews, editions, notes, etc.) needed. Where applicable, new faculty members might be provided with clear guidelines relating to the number of peer-reviewed publications expected. The value of conference papers and poster presentations could be indicated as well.
- The document should also specifically indicate the various kinds of teaching experiences that are expected, the number of teaching evaluations (i.e. peer and/or student) needed, and the required elements of a teaching dossier. New faculty members should also be aware of their own responsibilities for arranging peer and student evaluations as required. New faculty should also be informed if supervision of honors and/or graduate students is allowed *or expected* before tenure.
 - *The Chair should also be as frank as possible about the judging process.* Who will judge the candidate's file? What are the institutional mechanisms which determine the selections of judges?

In the case of term faculty, rather than tenure, requirements for passing successfully through the probationary period should also be clearly documented and given to the new faculty members upon their appointment

The First Weeks



During the early days of the new appointment, Deans and Chairs play an instrumental role in informing the new appointee about contractual details, promotion and tenure criteria, equity policies, and general institutional regulations and supports available in their faculties and departments. Chairs, especially, perform the crucial, initial stage of the “mentoring” process, as they are the first people with whom the appointee has frequent contact within the department. As a result, it is important that Chairs be as open and available as possible, willing to answer any questions and address concerns especially in the early days of the appointment, and remain a touchstone throughout the tenure-track years.

Deans & Chairs:

- *The new faculty member should be formally introduced to all members of the Faculty and Department (including graduate students).* Formal introductions could occur in the first Department and Faculty meetings of the semester. Chairs should also make every effort to introduce new faculty members to all members in the department with whom they will have significant contact: e.g. key department administrators, colleagues with common interests, areas of study, cultural backgrounds, and domestic situations, etc. Chairs should introduce new faculty to departmental support staff and provide information about the specific support each staff member can and will provide for faculty.
- *Deans or Chairs should provide new faculty members with information indicating where they can obtain advice and information relating to grants, technical services, classroom support, pedagogical training, and library resources.* New scholars need to know “whom to ask” for help relating to the set up of their offices, teaching and research. We suggest providing a small pamphlet of directing new faculty members to key webpages which list the services available to them both within the department, and externally, in areas such as the Faculty or University Research Office, Technical, and Computing Services, and the Library.
- *The Chair or Dean should have a meeting with all first year faculty to introduce them to the requirements of the college for their annual reports.* Discussions of the planning page, the weighting of the evaluative components, and the way in which the new faculty member's annual report (which typically will cover only the first semester of work) will be evaluated. They should discuss the implications of this for a merit raise the next year, and for the reappointment of the new faculty member for the following year.

The First Weeks

Deans & Chairs (cont'd)

- **F**aculties and Departments should introduce their new hires to both the larger university body and the general public through media, such as campus websites; faculty alumni, and student newspapers or magazines; and local municipal newspapers.
- **I**f start-up money was negotiated, the new person should be given a fund number specific to their allocation and instructions for accessing the money. This money should be available as soon as the faculty member begins the first semester so that their scholarship agendas will not be impeded. If there is significant delay in accessing the start-up funds and if the original offer letter specified specific requirements for promotion & tenure based on activity dependent upon the money, those tenure expectations should be renegotiated.
- **N**ew assistant professors should be assigned teaching loads and schedules that are consistent with scholarly expectations if at all possible. Ideally this should be at least one course reduction per semester for at least the first year. It is also undesirable to have new faculty teaching 3-4 new preparations per semester.
- **N**ew faculty should not be given departmental work for which they are unprepared – like writing annual assessment reports or five year reviews for the program. Likewise, new faculty should not be assigned to teach the least desirable or least popular courses.

Given the level of commitment to their profession, and to their academic careers, and also given the contribution they make to our intellectual communities, new term faculty members need to be welcomed into the academy with the same enthusiasm and support given new tenure-track faculty.

Presidents and / or Vice-Presidents

- **T**he President and/or Vice-President of Academic Affairs should host a reception welcoming all new faculty to the university. A gathering which includes new faculty from all departments within the university induces community-building across disciplines and can reduce the alienation experienced by a new faculty member who is the only new hire within his or her particular department.
- **T**he President and/or Vice-President might also wish to broaden the guest list of the above welcoming reception to include special guests from the public, such as members of community organizations who would have an interest in the work of the new scholars in attendance. A new international scholar, for instance, may also enjoy connecting with members of local international community organizations, such as the International Students Association.

Thinking About Promotion & Tenure in the First Year

Criteria for promotion and tenure should be Transparent, Consistent and Specific.

Anecdotal evidence reveals that new faculty members find the promotion and tenure process enormously stressful, partially because they often receive conflicting, and politically charged information about the process from a variety of sources.

Transparent:

- **N**ew faculty members should clearly understand how evaluation of both teaching and scholarship will occur. Evaluation of teaching should ideally include multiple perspectives, as one perspective in the absence of others might well provide an incomplete picture of the teacher's knowledge and skills.
- **N**ew faculty members should know what kinds of committee work are expected to earn promotion & tenure, so that they do not end up taking on more responsibility than is necessary, inadvertently endangering their ability to attain their scholarship goals in a timely fashion. This is of particular concern in small departments. Due to the limited number of faculty, new scholars can find themselves serving as Chair of the department during their pre-tenure years, resulting in either a delay in the promotion process or extreme stress as the faculty member struggles to find time to pursue their scholarly activities. We recommend that no person be given such administrative responsibility before tenure. Deans and Chairs should also ensure that heavy service duties do not fall unduly upon new female or minority appointees who, because of their smaller numbers may be asked to serve on numerous committees.
- **N**ew faculty members should be given clear indication of the weight placed on each criterion needed for promotion & tenure. If scholarship is most valued and committee work least valued, for example, this should be transparent to new faculty members. Conversely, if teaching is more valued than scholarship, this too should be clear.

Consistent:

- **W**e recommend that the Chair quell the tenure rumor mill by becoming the central, reliable source of information about tenure within the department. New faculty members need to feel confident that they are being evaluated through a standardized and equitable process. Moreover, new faculty members should feel able to speak to the Chair about any incidences of intimidation or harassment they may experience during the pre-tenure period.