

Tenure

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The most important way to prepare for your tenure process is to understand what your institution requires. This sounds simple but often it's not, for several reasons.

1. Tenure and Promotion (T&P) manuals change from time to time. Don't take your colleagues' word for what the most current requirements and format are; go to the printed source.
2. Make sure you understand the T&P manual and your department's expectations.
 - Is a book required? Does it have to be under contract, in production, or on the shelf?
 - How many journal articles are required, and at what tier of journal?
 - Generally, it's safe to say that an *American Historical Review* or *Journal of American History* article would look great in your portfolio, but it can be equally or more important, especially to people outside your discipline, that you have *multiple* publications from reputable journals, not *one* publication in a leading journal. Volume matters, especially outside of history -- scientists often publish multiple articles every year -- so the old advice that publishing too many articles will "scoop" your own book may no longer be good advice.
 - Is your institution focused on criteria like "impact factors" and "annual acceptance rates" for journal publications?
 - As a rule, it's probably safest to assume that tenure expectations are likely to get more rigorous rather than less so over time.
 - What sorts of outside readers of your tenure file are expected/required? Does the university care whether you have Associate versus Full Professors reading your file? Does it insist on faculty from "Research 1"/Carnegie VH (very high research activity) institutions, for example, or from liberal arts colleges?
 - How prestigious a press do you need to have as the publisher of your book? Does it have to be "the best press" in your field? How well informed are your colleagues about your field? Don't assume that your colleagues know your field; make opportunities to educate them about which are the leading presses (and journals) in your field, and why.
 - Do you need to provide evidence of progress on a *second* book project? If so, what counts as evidence? Examples might be a grant application, conference paper, journal article, or book proposal.
3. T&P manuals don't typically provide information about the publishing pipelines.
 - For example, if your book has to be on the shelf by the time the department considers your file, that probably means it has to be already in production *six months to a year* before that departmental tenure meeting.

4. Understanding the publication process of the different university presses takes time.
 - Different presses have different standards and procedures. Some will send a partial manuscript to readers; some will not. Some send a revised manuscript to a new set of readers; others return it to the set who read the first version. Some have editorial boards which meet more regularly than others.
5. Getting the balance of teaching, research, and service right is difficult.
 - Few departments will say it's all about teaching or all about research, but the exact weighting given to each can be extremely difficult to pin down.
 - Service is a big "time suck" for beginning and advanced faculty alike: most colleagues will probably tell you that you have to do some but not too much, and it takes persistent digging to figure out what that means in real terms. (Either way, after tenure you will probably find out *either* that you did more service than needed *or* that your department really did shield you and will load you up with service commitments so that the next generation of juniors can be protected. Or, sadly, both.)

General advice

- Make sure you know how the tenure clock applies to your particular situation. Are there different rules if you started your employment as an ABD? Under what circumstances can you stop your tenure clock? Does taking an external fellowship or a personal leave (such as a parental leave) automatically stop your tenure clock, or do you have a choice?
- Figure out your department's culture. Is the tenure process treated as an occult mystery or a state secret, such that you really cannot ask senior colleagues for advice? Or are you at a place where junior faculty are allowed or even encouraged to attend tenure meetings, in order to learn early what lies ahead of them? Most places will probably fall somewhere between the two extremes, but it's good to know early what sort of place you're in, so you know whether your senior colleagues expect you to act, for example, like a subordinate in a strict hierarchy or like an equal and a pal. You may choose not to play along with those expectations, but it's a good idea to be aware of them, because subtle, intangible things like "fit" and collegiality can weigh in departmental deliberations.
- Seek out accurate, current information about tenuring rates in your department, college, and university. (Your chair will probably be able to get this information for you.) Current *and* accurate information is important because the conventional wisdom can be wrong and because standards change. A senior colleague's general recollection of the tenure process may be significantly out of date. You really want to know several things: Does your department have a reputation for bringing up well-qualified candidates? Does the university basically tenure everyone who fits the explicit standards, or are they essentially looking *not* to tenure? If you are at a place where *not tenuring* people is common (even folks with a book, good teaching evaluations, decent service, collegiality, and so on), then you may need to think about alternatives at the same time as you are assembling your tenure file.

- Think about contingency plans, especially if you are at a predominantly not-tenuring university. Are there fellowships you can apply for simultaneously, to give yourself a cushion should your university deny you both tenure and short-term employment? Keep an eye on the job market if there is any reason to think your case is dubious, especially in the year *before* you come up for tenure. While being denied tenure is not "the kiss of death," it's almost certainly easier to get a new job before being denied than afterward.
- Document everything: all service, all public speaking engagements, all publications, including book reviews, etc., should potentially be in your vita or somewhere else in your file. Keep favorable comments from students, because your university might solicit letters from former students for teaching awards, and teaching awards look great in a tenure file. Try to get information about the selectivity of the venues in which you publish. (Measures like "impact factors" are getting important even in the humanities.)
- Think carefully about writing anything that is not peer-reviewed. With the partial exception of book reviews, time spent on non-peer-reviewed publications will almost certainly be time mis-spent.
- Print out the tenure calendar in advance, and work to it. The specific dates will change from year to year, but generally, you will be able to figure out that if your department typically meets in the early fall, then the file must be ready to send out to outside readers by, say, late May. If your department requires a book between covers, then work backwards with your editor to figure out when, according to the press's conventional timeline, you would need to reach particular stages in the process. (Most editors are used to the tenure-timeline concerns of junior faculty, and they should be able to give you at least some guidance about how long it will take to get readers' reports and editorial approval, for example, and how long the production process usually takes. Key information to get is when the press plans to publish your book: the spring list or the fall list, for example.)
- Take a look at the successful tenure applications of other people in your department and in other departments at your university.
- Document carefully anything that seems seriously inappropriate in the way a colleague treats you. It probably doesn't help to assume the worst, but *if* you find yourself feeling harrassed or discriminated against—sexually or otherwise in a way that significantly interferes with your ability to work, for example—you need to know your options and whom you can trust, and you need to be able to support your suspicions. Flinging accusations will rarely make you friends, but for all the strides academics have made in the last thirty-plus years, there are still countless people in the profession who could tell you horror stories of one kind or another. Don't be paranoid, but do be watchful.
- Pay attention to "fiddly" details. Does the tenure manual say to use a particular kind of binder, or a particular kind of paper? Are you required to use a certain type of dividers? A certain font and point?

- Give yourself the time you need to carry out all the detail work: formatting, printing, collating, etc. It's much less stressful if you're not doing it at the last minute.
- Seek out and attend workshops or informational sessions about your university's tenure and promotion process.
- Talk with your chair about any questions you have, especially about your annual evaluations and your third-year review. Don't sign off on an evaluation or review until you're sure what the comments really mean.
- Find out your department's track record in shepherding candidates through the tenure process. How active is your department in assisting junior faculty through the process? How experienced are the chair and the members of the personnel/T&P committee?
- Remember that the process of getting tenure starts on Day 1 of your contract. In your early semesters, much of your time will probably be consumed with teaching, especially if you have little or no prior experience. Consequently, it's important to protect your summers for research.
- Seek internal and external funding to help you complete your research and finance summers of writing. Funding also looks good in your tenure file. (Even *unsuccessful* applications may count as evidence of your active research agenda.)
- If there is a third-year review process or equivalent, take it seriously, and make sure you understand whatever document or letter is produced as a result. These documents can be used to argue, "well, we told her that she needed to do X, Y, and Z to get tenure, and she didn't do them," so you need to make sure you are on the same page with the evaluating committee or individual.
- Find something that relieves stress—or find a way to harness your stress productively. Don't let the tenure process drive you nuts.

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