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Demystifying the Tenure Process

A Panel Presentation

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This article is a summary of a panel presentation given at ACL conference 2004.

ABSTRACT: The tenure process holds a lot at stake for the candidate. In an effort to demystify it, the panel will discuss questions about tenure review, the process of tenure review and how to prepare for it, a supervisor's perspective of a candidate up for tenure review along with examples of tenure portfolios.

Four individuals served as panelists for this presentation. Lindsay Van Sicklen (Periodicals Librarian) from Ouachita Baptist University (OBU) set the stage by introducing questions that many have as they approach preparing for tenure. She also shared different ways in which OBU paved the way for their candidates. Tami Robinson (Coordinator of Instructional Services) from Whitworth College and Rea Redd (Library Systems Administrator) from Waynesburg College, who had both recently been granted tenure at their respective institutions, addressed preparing for tenure review. Barbara Nelson (Chair of the Acquisitions Department) from Auburn University discussed supervising and mentoring untenured librarians.

Questions about Tenure Review

- What could the institution provide to better prepare applicant? OBU provides the following.
 - Orientation meetings for new faculty during their initial year of employment.
 - Tenure preparation workshop as needed.
 - Letter to applicant that states specific requirements for the portfolio.
 - Seldin, Peter (1997). *The Teaching Portfolio: A Practical Guide to Improved Performance and Promotion/Tenure Decision*. Bolton, MA: Anker is on reserve in OBU's Library.
- How does one determine what's important and what isn't?

- What suggestions do you have regarding picking your references?

Thoughts Regarding the Tenure Process

- It is both for you and your institution. Let it be an adventure and time of discovery rather than merely "jumping through organizational hoops."
- Let your portfolio represent more than simply the items relating to your profession. Include anecdotal and personal items as well.

Preparing for Tenure Review

Both of our panelists had numerous helpful suggestions but the bottom line is to remember that each institution's requirements differ. Tami learned this the hard way when though she'd earned tenure at a large university; found that she had some adaptations to make to fit Whitworth's criteria. Her former place of employment wanted an executive summary whereas Whitworth wanted to see everything. How can one determine exactly what is important?

- Know your resources – New faculty orientation, faculty handbook, tenure preparation meetings, and pre-tenure review.
- Network – Ask the Library Director and/or your supervisor for guidance, recent tenure committee members, faculty who have recently been granted tenure, consider finding a mentor.
- Document everything: Job performance, professional participation, civic/volunteer participation, faith related activities and scholarship. Save in file by year ... you can always discard later.
- Bibliographic Instruction (BI): Selectively list classes for senior professors to visit. The more advanced are more interesting. Don't try to equate BI with other classes. Instead

focus on pedagogical style and how what is done in BI contributes to the whole.

- Choosing your references: Don't necessarily pick those who you've done something for. Instead select people who like you and will speak well of you.
- Portfolio Mechanics: Know your institution's requirements and limits, use narrative rather than a bulleted list.

Supervising and Mentoring Untenured Librarians

Supervisor's role –

- Be sure all of the rules and procedures are in writing and are up to date. Make sure it is clear which rules apply ... the rules when they were hired or the rules at the time he/she is eligible. Be alert to changes that can take place with new administrators.
- Keep to time schedules.
- Early vitae preparation in the correct format.
- Warn candidate re: spending time on unproductive things i.e. Auburn University is moving away from service expectations until after tenure.
- Pre-qualifying If the institution has any pre-tenure review(s), be honest as early as possible if it seems that the candidate may not be a match for the institution. Best yet – really screen candidates for employment. Better to be short-handed for a longer period than to create problems for yourself later.
- How Much Mentoring? It varies with the individual. Some benefit by a formal mentoring relationship whereas an informal one works better for others. Librarians and faculty outside the formal chain of command might be valuable resources in areas such as research and writing. You can't force a structured mentoring program on someone who is not interested. It can actually do more harm than good.
- Finding a mentor outside of the supervisor's role is really up to the one applying for tenure. Consider recently tenured colleagues

and/or those who have served on the tenure committee in the past. Choose someone with whom you have a good rapport and feel comfortable.

Things to keep in mind –

- Assess each person individually in terms of strengths, weaknesses and in libraries i.e. writing, service and collegiality.
- Be sure to do a written report of each mentoring conversation. The person being evaluated needs a copy and an opportunity for written rebuttal if there are problems.
- If there are communication problems involving a third person both a mediator and witness might be helpful.

In conclusion, those in attendance found our discussion to be very beneficial. All of the attendees were on tenure track. Our panelists came from a variety of institutions and so some items that might be true at a school as large as Auburn University might not be as important elsewhere. †

SUGGESTED READING

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