

FACULTY TENURE

Summary:

Faculty tenure serves at least a two-fold purpose at a college or university. First, it is intended to guarantee the academic freedom of those faculty members who receive it. It protects tenured faculty from feeling compelled to teach or conduct research in intellectually dishonest ways in order to preserve their jobs. The fullest benefits of education and research will only be realized when ideas can be freely exchanged and debated in honest and open dialogue. Second, tenure helps institutions by providing a significant employee benefit that allows them to attract and retain talented scholars.

Tenure is not granted easily or thoughtlessly. Tenure track faculty members are intensively reviewed, both formally and informally, for six or seven years before tenure is granted. Tenure is granted only after it is earned via acceptable teaching, research, and service. Senior faculty and administrators must agree that the candidate is likely to remain a productive scholar and teacher for life. In large part due to the significant commitment made to a tenured faculty member, some universities and colleges are reducing their tenure track positions, relying more and more on adjunct and contract positions.

Issues:

There are several important issues surrounding faculty tenure, most of which focus on its value (or lack thereof) and importance (or lack thereof) in a modern academic setting. Just a few of those issues are:

- Post-tenure review, which provides an opportunity to provide feedback to and review the performance of tenured faculty members, is often a controversial practice. It provides the institution an avenue of recourse against the rare faculty member that abuses the system (the most usual case being a faculty member who becomes unproductive after receiving tenure), but many tenured faculty members feel this type of review impedes the very academic freedom that tenure is designed to protect.
- Tenure for administrators is another example of the tension that often exists between a university's governance and its faculty. The traditional path to university administration has involved a faculty member rising through the ranks, achieving tenure, and becoming an administrator, either at one institution or through a series of moves among institutions. This traditional path is becoming less and less common as individuals hired from outside academia are more often placed in administrative roles. This raises the question of whether a nontenured administrator can effectively manage an institution consisting primarily of tenured faculty members.
- As part of the Regional Stewardship Program in Kentucky, comprehensive universities are required to modify their promotion and tenure systems to support engagement activities. Currently, most promotion and tenure policies focus on traditional teaching, research, and service to the institution. Public engagement, or regional stewardship, is different in that it cuts across teaching, research, and service and involves a partnership between the university and an external constituency. The partnership involves a mutual definition of a regional need/opportunity, planning to address the need/opportunity, and accountability.

Questions for Boards to Consider:

- Does the board review personnel policies and practices regularly? Is the tenure and promotion process systematized, well-documented, and transparent to prospective faculty? Have routine, independent audits been incorporated into the tenure and promotion system?
- How can the board best assess the academic workforce with regard to the balance of full-time tenured, tenure track, nontenure track, part-time, and adjunct faculty?



- How can the board systematically consider information about student learning, academic quality, and the productivity of particular programs as these issues relate to the faculty? How can the board keep abreast of the academic quality while retaining appropriate distance and avoiding the temptation to micromanage specific educational programs?
- How can the board most effectively affirm its commitment to basic principles of academic freedom? How can it best ensure that such principles guide the institution's relationships with faculty?
- What is the role of regional stewardship in your institution's tenure and promotion system?

Resources:

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