

Tenure file prep ideas

In the years between 2007 and 2010, I facilitated several sets of 5-week seminars for those going up for tenure. Ithaca College is a comprehensive institution with 4 professional schools and a liberal arts school. That means a tenure file, generated at the department level, is reviewed by bodies and individuals from a wide variety of disciplines.

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Here are some of my notes:

1. From Day 1, collect tangible evidence: your institution's expectations for the file, dividers, categories (make your own starter kit!)
2. Teaching: Do your best; document it well
 - a. **Collect** from each class each semester: your teaching materials including syllabi, handouts, explanations, possibly samples of rubrics and great and awful student work. Also student comments and any of the random extras like sweet emails.
 - b. **Reflect** at the end of a semester: what went well, what you plan to change and why. Review and comment on student feedback. Note any unusual circumstances (brand new course, bad time, fantastic group dynamics.) Just be calm and descriptive: this is data for future analysis, not a persuasive argument.
 - c. **Select** at the time of a formal review: You have collected a great deal of evidence. Examine the evidence as you would data in your discipline.
 - d. **Reflect** overall: What story does the data tell? Generally steady progress in most areas? Serious challenges and improvement? A real rough time or activity? Be authentic. Support your analysis with evidence, as you do in your scholarship.
3. Scholarship: What does it mean in your discipline and institution? There are VAST differences across disciplines and institutions.
 - a. The multiple types for institutions using the Boyer model: scholarship of discovery, application, teaching, creative endeavor
 - b. Or the assumption that all scholarship is research
 - c. Supporting your scholarship:
 - d. Guidelines; outside letters
4. Service: I prefer to call it citizenship or engagement. It IS a valid criterion even if expectations are modest.
 - a. This could be your workplace the rest of your career. Do you want that? If not, examine your options. If so, engage in citizenship as it makes sense.
 - b. Collegiality is important: not to be buddies but to do your share of the shared work.
 - c. Isolation is hazardous both personally and professionally; collaboration can be very productive, working groups can be excellent support, and

engagement in professional organizations can help maintain your momentum.

5. Weighing the factors.
 - a. Teaching and research: At your institution, which is a necessary condition, the bottom line? At a teaching-oriented institution, evidence of excellent teaching is the primary criterion. Evidence of scholarly productivity and a strong scholarly trajectory is also required, but no one with demonstrably poor teaching will earn tenure.
 - b.
6. View the process as the scholar you are.
 - a. Avoid believing the outliers are typical. The file that would earn tenure anywhere in the universe is not the norm. The file that was fiercely challenged at every step is not the norm.
 - b. Remember that the purpose of the tenure review is for different bodies, representing different perspectives on the institution, to evaluate whether your file provides sufficient evidence to support permanent membership in your faculty. You do not have to be the best. You have to meet the criteria.

The anxiety about scholarship at Ithaca College has increased recently, and in my view that is due to several factors:

- We are an employer of choice now and our faculty members come wanting to be teacher/scholars.
- The job market is tight and anxiety rises.
- Some of our new faculty members are coming from situations in which they built scholarly trajectories before even coming here. Some are in two-career families and need to remain employable in a wider variety of institutions. They are NOT typical and their files do NOT represent what is required.
- Former Provost Peter Bardaglio spoke of “turning up the heat” in his third year mantra. First year was “lower the walls,” and second was “hard wire the campus”. People took that to mean that the expectations had dramatically changed. He said that he meant a culture change in many parts of institutional life, particularly for students, and was not expecting a dramatically higher level of faculty scholarly productivity. He said it was the candidate’s responsibility to create the narrative demonstrating that his/her scholarship represented a good tenure file. His actions confirm this, in my view.
- I believe the FILES need to be stronger now and that expectations have indeed increased in the past 25 years but not necessarily in the past five.

The all-college tenure and promotion committee represents perspectives from across campus and should be the most varying and mixed voice, in my view. The committee does NOT have the final recommendation and there are multiple examples of positive outcomes following a negative recommendation from the committee.

Linda McMillan, Provost at Susquehanna University and a leader in ANAC, the Associated New American Colleges, spoke at an ANAC Summer Institute about four elements of our identity as faculty members at comprehensive institutions.

- Our identity as members of our disciplines
- Our identity as teachers
- Our identity as institutional citizens
- Our identity as professionals in higher education

My assumptions and the college's.

- We are a comprehensive college: primarily undergraduate, graduate programs are professional degrees rather than research doctorates.
- Teaching is our primary mission.
- Scholarship takes very many forms and often from our own perspective the work of others is virtually unknown. Our faculty has adopted definitions of scholarship based on the model introduced by Ernest Boyer of the Carnegie Foundation in his book *Scholarship Reconsidered*. He is also the one who identified our kind of institution as the "great American hybrid" with features of both liberal arts colleges and land grant research universities

My main pieces of advice:

- Remain engaged in your scholarly work and community
- Trajectory is important: you want to demonstrate that you are and will remain active and that your work makes and will continue to make an impact.
- Isolation is hazardous both personally and professionally; collaboration can be very productive, working groups can be excellent support, and engagement in professional organizations can help maintain your momentum.
- Research by Robert Boice and others shows that writing every day, even for 15-30 minutes, works extraordinarily well

For your file, recall that your final audience is people committed to the college who may know nothing about your area of scholarship.

- Be instructive: describe the context and meaning of your work.
- Set annual goals and reflect on them in writing; creating evidence of your trajectory.
- Use outside sources such as Diamond or statements from your professional organization to support the value of the kind of work you do.
- Assess whether you ought to guide your department to ways to put your scholarship in context: don't assume they are familiar with the resources you have.
- If you come across concise descriptions of the kind of scholarship you do, save in your pretend file.

Building a list of outside reviewers

- Use your pretend tenure file to note names of people who you have reason to think understand your work

- Check your own lit reviews for names
- Review institutions that are similar to us and see if someone there does work at all like yours
- Stay in touch with your school's expectations as to whether the outside reviewers have to be unknown to you, etc

Resources:

Boice, Robert. (2000). *Advice for new faculty members: Nihil Nimus*. Needham Heights MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Diamond, Robert M., 2004, "Preparing for Promotion, Tenure, and Annual Review: A Faculty Guide, Second Edition," Jossey-Bass.