

How Not To Get Tenure: A Worst-Case Scenario

(These "suggestions" are culled from combined strategic mistakes observed on diverse cases over the years. This is a fictional composite, and fortunately bears no resemblance to any one case)

1. During your first 2-3 years at UW, publish every bit of data & loose end from your PhD and post-doctoral research before starting any independent project of your own. Be sure to make your former advisor the corresponding author on every paper.
2. Continue to work on exactly the same problem you studied as a grad student or postdoc. Keep including your advisor as an author on anything you publish.
3. Write your research grant proposals at the last minute – you work best under pressure, right? Don't ever show proposal drafts to your colleagues, it would just be embarrassing for both of you. Don't bother the grant agency program managers either, they're busy.
4. Don't pester the active senior researchers in your area with questions or requests for advice about your work; they're busy too. Don't annoy them with invitations to come speak in Madison. Keep a low profile at national meetings.
5. Get involved in many small collaborations. They might distract you from your own research, but hey, you'll be middle author on lots of pubs.
6. Start plenty of research projects and give each one a little attention. Who knows, one might pay off someday.
7. Submit your research for publication in lower-end journals where you won't be rejected. Divide any important results into several small papers to maximize your pub numbers.
8. Wait patiently and politely for colleagues to call & invite you to give seminars or symposium talks. If they want to hear from you, they'll let you know.
9. Don't spend any of your start-up funds – save them for a rainy day.
10. Wait several years before taking on any grad students. They demand a lot of time.
11. Try to avoid doing any teaching. If you do end up in the classroom, put in the minimum effort. Maybe your postdoc can give your lectures for you?
12. Don't ever let a colleague observe your teaching or discuss teaching or mentoring problems with senior colleagues. It's none of their business.
13. If you're asked to serve on campus and university committees, agree to sit on all the small ones that don't do anything and won't be much work. Only show up for half the meetings and never offer to do anything. If you're invited to be on a big important committee, refuse. After all, you're pre-tenure.
14. Check your email early & often and respond in reverse order of importance: get all the little stuff out of the way so you can clear the decks for your real work.
15. If you have a kid or two during your pre-tenure years, just work on through without taking parental leave. Your partner can probably cover the childcare for you.
16. Don't worry about documenting your work for your tenure case; keeping track of that stuff is the responsibility of your department chair, or your mentor, or the head secretary, or somebody.
17. Spend more time worrying about tenure than about your research. First things first!