

“Running a Great Lab”: Notes from Session #3, “How to Survive and Get Tenure”

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6201 MSB

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1) The Workings of the Tenure Process (at the Divisional Committee Level)

- a) Which divisional committee should you go through? Decide as early as possible. You and your mentor committee should decide together. Divisional Committee affiliation matters the most at tenure time, but it also affects which division you vote in, and serve in.
- b) Majority vote enough to pass a candidate—but committee usually moves towards a consensus on a case. In biological sciences about 90% pass the divisional committee.
- c) If a member of the candidate’s department happens to be on committee, that member recuses him/herself from discussion and vote
- d) Candidate has “area of excellence” and “significant accomplishment” in another area. Areas could include: research, teaching, extension/outreach, possibly administration. Usually, “area of excellence” is research, and “significant accomplishment” in teaching.
 - i) If teaching will be your area of excellence, then seek specific advice on how to prepare your case. See *Preparing a successful teaching tenure case* document.
 - ii) If clinical work or outreach is your area, see the *Standards for Professional Practice* document.
- e) Candidate prepares the biosketch, research statement, teaching statement (and/or clinical, outreach/extension statements.) Be sure to follow the format on the Secretary of the Faculty’s website (see below!)
 - i) List all of your peer-reviewed publications in order, with #1 being the first, and on up. Then cite these numbers in your research statement, chair can cite the numbers in the chair letter, you can use these numbers in your student chart (#3.d.ii. below.)
- f) It is possible to go up for tenure early, but the bar is high. If you do go early and get turned down, can go again next year. But, this is more work for you, your department, and the divisional committee so consider carefully.
- g) The department’s decision carries enormous weight in Divisional committee deliberations. Get departmental process information from your chair as early as possible.
- h) The letter from your department chair carries enormous weight in the divisional committee decision. This letter sets your work in context of the field. The chair should explain your case and your constraints (e.g., excess clinical duties.) The letter must state the department vote. You should help make this letter great—if

- your chair doesn't know you well, make sure your mentor committee is highly involved in preparing the letter. You should not be asked to write this letter yourself. If you are, seek help from outside your department immediately.
- i) If possible, get your case to the divisional committee in the fall or winter, as their caseload is a bit lighter then.
 - j) If your case is refused at the divisional level, and your department still votes yes on you, then dean or provost can overturn the divisional decision (does not happen often.)
 - k) **MAKE SURE THE TENURE PACKET FORMAT IS FOLLOWED!** If your department does not regularly prepare tenure packets, you will have to make sure yourself that the instructions are followed. Go to:
 - Biological Sciences:
<http://www.secfac.wisc.edu/divcomm/biological/TenureGuidelines.pdf> and
<http://www.secfac.wisc.edu/divcomm/biological/DepartmentChecklist.pdf>
 - Physical Sciences:
<http://www.secfac.wisc.edu/divcomm/physical/TenureGuidelines.pdf> and
<http://www.secfac.wisc.edu/divcomm/physical/DepartmentChecklist.pdf>
 - Social Studies:
<http://www.secfac.wisc.edu/divcomm/social/TenureGuidelines.pdf> and
<http://www.secfac.wisc.edu/divcomm/social/DepartmentChecklist.pdf>
 - l) If you have a negative department vote, go immediately to the Secretary of the Faculty's office, because there are deadlines for appeal that you will need to meet.

2) **Research—area of “excellence”**

- a) No set number of papers, no set journals, no set amount of outside funding.
- b) Publish often in the highest-quality journals you can.
- c) Make sure you are “corresponding author”, especially when collaborating with others.

3) **Teaching/Clinical/Extension—area of “significant accomplishment”**

- a) Divisional committee is looking for evidence of leadership, influence.
- b) Usually teaching is the area of “significant accomplishment”, and often there is not enough teaching experience to pass this bar, especially in SMPH appointments. If you have less than a 3-credit/year teaching load, make an effort to seek out more teaching experience. Biocore has some good opportunities. Hours of teaching, size of class are both important (with size of class perhaps more important than hours).
- c) You should know your percentage of teaching, research, extension, clinical in your appointment. This is usually outlined in your offer letter. Talk to your chair, mentoring committee about these percentages, and adjust them if necessary to match your actual time spent.
 - i) If you have less than 5% teaching, and teaching will be your area of “significant accomplishment”, then this is problematic for the divisional committee—seek advice.
- d) Advising/mentor-teaching can't count for all teaching, but it is a “bonus” in the divisional committee's eyes.

- i) Mentoring undergraduate students in your lab is looked at especially favorably.
- ii) Create a table to keep track of all students coming through your lab. Note whether student is a postdoc, graduate student, undergrad. Note the dates the student worked in the lab. Keep track of publications co-authored with student. Keep track of what happened to student after they left your lab (which degree program did they complete, where did they go next)—their successes count for you!
- iii) Students publishing with you is a plus, indicates good mentoring.
- e) DOCUMENT your teaching!
 - i) Keep track of numbers (how many times, how many students, how many credits.)
 - ii) Evaluate all classroom teaching. Most departments have a standard form. Give students ample time to fill it out (don't just give it to them as they are walking out the door at the end of class). Consider the timing--don't do teaching evaluations on the day they get an exam back.
 - iii) Get peer teaching evaluations. Ask a respected department member to watch you, give written feedback. Do this multiple times so that the senior faculty member can see progress.
 - iv) If you develop a new course, include the materials in your tenure packet—syllabus, screen shots of online courses.
- f) Taking on Ph.D. students is good, but be careful. Do a couple new students a year so that they don't all defend their dissertations at once. Also remember that you will be asked to write recommendation letters for the candidates, so the work does not end at graduation.
- g) Outreach can be a plus for your case, even if it's not part of your formal appointment. Seek opportunities to publicize your work; this counts as outreach. It also connects you to more people and more opportunities. If requests for interviews and speaking engagements get too numerous, then rely on UW Communications to help you manage the requests.
- h) If you have done any outreach, then prepare an outreach statement even if outreach is not part of your formal appointment. (Same for teaching. If you have done teaching but teaching is not part of your formal appointment, then it is still to your benefit to prepare a teaching statement.)

4) Service

- a) Never a major area of evaluation, but must be present. Do just enough.
- b) Make your service work for you. Choose something you care about, and then use that service as an excuse to get out of other service requests.
- c) If your department makes requests of you, help you as much as you can to show your collegiality.
- d) Keep careful track of all service. Faculty annual reports can help with this. Get in the habit of writing down all names, dates of committee assignments, lectures given (guest lectures, invited lectures), papers reviewed, etc.

5) Outside letters of support

- a) Very important to your case. Should have at least six letters and no more than 10 letters.
 - b) Process of getting outside letters is out of the candidate's control, but is done differently in different departments. Candidate cannot ask someone to write a letter directly, but *may* be allowed to suggest a letter-writer to their mentor committee (or, the mentor committee might not allow this.) You should have the opportunity to exclude people you know may not write a favorable letter for whatever reason.
 - c) Letters must be "arms-length." Letter-writers cannot be co-authors, co-PIs on a grant. They must have no stake in your success. It's okay if you have served on a grant panel with a letter-writer, and/or met a writer at a national meeting. Do not ask a particular individual if they will write a letter for you.
 - i) Letter writers usually will note in their letter introduction what their relationship is with you.
 - d) Letters from outside U.S. can add to the prestige of your case, but keep in mind the cultural differences in letter-writing. For example, Europeans tend to use more temperate language.
- 6) TIPS (from "what not to do")**
- a) Don't let loose ends from your dissertation and/or postdoc linger on for too long. It's okay to publish from these projects in the first year or two, but then you should move on to your own work as soon as possible. It's okay if there is a dip in productivity in year 2-3 as you transition to your own projects—that's expected. The independence is what's important.
 - b) Get other (senior) people to read your first few grant proposals. Request help from senior faculty and use it—they will never be so generous with their time again.
 - c) Create mentors for yourself. Build collaborative relationships with others, get advice from senior colleagues. Bring in outside scholars for seminar series in order to begin collaborative relationships. (These scholars can be letter writers later!)
 - d) Don't get sucked into too many collaborations, though. Protect yourself. New faculty often get sucked into these collaborations because they have a new piece of coveted equipment, or have new knowledge of use to senior faculty.
 - e) Keep your research focused. Don't do too many little projects. Be brutal in keeping yourself on track.
 - f) Consult your mentor committee and others on where to publish your research. Aim high. Call editors if it is taking too long to review your manuscripts.
 - g) Be proactive in gaining invitations to give talks at other places. Swap invitations with colleagues from graduate school or postdoc positions.
 - h) Spend your startup—get things going quickly. Don't save it, you can't take it with you if you don't get tenure.
 - i) Take on graduate students, but do so judiciously. Get rid of students who are not working out as soon as you realize that it's not working; don't let a bad situation fester. Not good for you or for the student.
 - j) Take a tenure clock extension if you need it. Birth/adoption of a child, elder care responsibilities, equipment or lab space delays are all reasons for extending.

These extensions are not viewed negatively by the divisional committees—your work is viewed as a 6-year portfolio regardless of the actual time expired. Also, taking the extension does not obligate you to wait if you feel ready in the original 6 years.

- k) If you get an invitation to speak and you don't have the funds to attend, go to the Graduate School. They have funds if you are an invited speaker—once per year.

7) Additional comments

- a) Read the sample cases available for review in the Secretary of the Faculty's office (133 Bascom Hall). Get to know Lori Hayward.
 - i) Read the cases once at the beginning of your time as assistant professor so you know what to aim for. Then read again just before preparing your documents so you know the format to follow.