During the interview for my first job in academe, I met with one faculty member who had recently earned tenure. He was well regarded by his colleagues, and junior enough that I was eager to hear how he liked the place. Although his remarks were positive, they included a qualifier I found disturbing: "Of course, it's getting better now that I have tenure—I no longer feel I have to spend every free moment writing." I wondered what sort of workaholism this implied, and felt confident that I would never relate to that feeling. That confidence was jeopardized a couple of months later, as I neared the end of my dissertation. I chanced upon a favorite professor from another department, and he asked how things were coming along. I mentioned how close to the end I was and how excited I felt about having landed a job at a strong school for the coming fall. Perhaps I sounded too elated for his taste, or perhaps he was really trying to be helpful, but his response certainly flattened my enthusiasm: "Just remember, the light you see at the end of the tunnel is another locomotive!" As if those two events weren't enough, a third brought the lesson home. Two months into that first job, I caught my reflection in a mirror and realized suddenly that something internal didn't match what I saw on the outside. The person at whom I was looking had earned a PhD and a faculty position. Her students called her "doctor" and turned to her for expertise. Her colleagues did the same and expressed optimism about her scholarly career. But I didn't feel much like a scholar. Burdened with new beginnings, I felt rather lost. A mountain lay awaiting my climb and I was unsure where to begin.

It's easier now to look back on these moments and sort accuracy from sensitivity, potential from accomplishment. However, the incidents themselves illustrate an important point. Although there are marker events in careers, phrases such as getting tenure create the perception that careers are composed of a set of discrete points (e.g., getting the doctorate, taking a tenure-track position, getting tenure, making full professor). In truth, a career is a continuum of professional development; marker events merely indicate phases of transition in the ongoing process of acquiring and utilizing knowledge and skills. Thus, in thinking about getting tenure, it is important to think not only about
the outcomes that should be in evidence for a positive tenure decision, but also about the process—the ongoing skill development—that leads to the outcomes desired.

The Outcomes

As a starting point in discussing outcome requirements, it is worth noting that higher education is an industry—a marketplace like many others, in which services (and those who provide them) are bought and sold at varying prices. To ask what it takes to get tenure is a bit like asking what a car costs. The answer depends heavily on the brand name and features of the car. Similarly, colleges and universities respond to local concerns and mission pressures, even as they are part of the larger industry of higher education. Thus, the first issue one must reckon with in getting tenure is that there are both local norms and national norms about what should be accomplished by the point of tenure review. National norms are concerned with professional development in the field at large—gaining visibility and respect among a wide community of scholars. Ideally, the two norms are compatible; if so, success in the local environment implies national success, providing faculty with maximum career opportunities. When the norms are in conflict, it is important that one deliberate carefully about which path to take. In this chapter I adopt the perspective of national norms, assuming that the reader can identify divergence in local perspectives and choose what is best for him or her.

Scholarly Achievement

Because tenure decisions typically incorporate evaluations from senior scholars outside the local university, national norms are important. The three outcomes most widely discussed in tenure decisions are scholarship, teaching effectiveness, and organizational citizenship. Although the emphases on each of these, as well as the specific criteria used to gauge progress, vary from school to school, national norms tend to prioritize these outcomes in the order mentioned. This is partly because the mission of most universities involves creating, as well as transmitting, knowledge. Research is the means by which knowledge is generated to fill textbooks and lectures.

However, there are other reasons research has such high priority. One is the widespread belief (which appears to have some merit) that scholarly effectiveness requires mastery of higher-order skills than those required for teaching. Another is that junior faculty have the most current, broad-based training in the field. They may be more likely to contribute fresh ideas and perspectives through research than are faculty who have advanced specific research programs but, in the process of specialization, lost contact with a broader array of topics. This “freshness” factor is a significant resource, and its greatest potential is achieved only when research is conducted and published.

Finally, the junior faculty years are part of the continuum of development. Fresh research training, even coupled with participation in some research as a doctoral student, is an indicator of potential. After tenure, when we look back at where we started, most of us are amazed at how much we have learned about research and writing. The marker event of tenure coincides with a stage of development that is no longer characterized mainly as potential but as potential augmented by substantial accomplishment. Ideally, the research accomplishment reflects mastery in developing, managing, and publishing results from an independent research program. If this is not accomplished during the junior years, the prognosis is not good that the tenure candidate will later generate knowledge through research and contribute to that part of the university’s mission.

Thus, outside reviewers may be most concerned with evidence of national visibility in research. To an extent, junior academics gain visibility by presenting work at conferences; however, reviewers place greater reliance on publishing. Three general criteria are commonly used in assessing the effectiveness of scholarly research: quality, independence, and impact.

Quality

In general, research quality is gauged in terms of theoretical and methodological rigor. The quality criterion reflects the question, Is this person’s work well done? As outside reviewers...
Getting Tenure

may differ in their evaluations of an individual's work, heavy reliance is placed on whether the work has been published and where. Some journals are more "prestigious" than others because they have stronger review boards, more selective standards for publication, and wider readership and respect among leading scholars in the field. Work that is published in these journals is often considered superior to work published elsewhere, because it has survived rather rigorous peer examination. In general, six faculty members whose tenure packages show multiple publications in "top journals" will be reviewed more favorably than those whose work has not achieved this placement.

I once heard a junior scholar remark, "It's better to give them a line on the vita worth arguing about than not to have the line on the vita at all." This may be true at the margin because tenure evaluations consider the broad pattern of publications. If the majority of one's work is gauged to be of high quality, occasional lines "worth arguing about" might be acceptable. However, if used as a dominant strategy, this may produce a record whose overall quality is weak.

Many factors contribute to whether or not particular work is publishable in leading journals, and I will discuss some of the process issues later in this chapter. However, the time to consider quality is in the design phase itself. Often, junior scholars remark, "I've an idea for a study that may not make it in a top journal, but I can probably get it published somewhere." Considering that time is limited during the junior faculty years, it's worth asking whether such a study might be strengthened with more forethought. If it is developed carefully and targeted for a good journal but doesn't make it there, it can then be aimed at other outlets.

Similarly, journals have different audiences and objectives; these affect the likelihood of a study's relevance and should be considered in the design phase. Studies that have only one feasible outlet among top journals are riskier than those with several strong possibilities. A good rule of thumb is to plan research, if at all possible, so that it addresses issues of theoretical interest, sample, and/or task in ways that will make two or three strong outlets for publication possible. Then, if the manuscript fails at one, it may be revised (with weaknesses corrected) and submitted to another strong journal.

Independence

In evaluating pretenure performance, a second concern is independence in research. This criterion reflects the question, Can this person conceptualize research projects and manage all phases of them? One proxy that is used in assessing independence is the proportion of publications that are solo authored. However, because joint-authored work is quite common, reviewers also look at the order of authors. Work for which one is first author is assumed to indicate leadership, whereas secondary authorship is less clear. As with quality, independence is gauged from the dominant pattern. Records in which first or solo authorship predominates inspire more confidence than those in which leadership is rare. Similarly, joint publications with a range of people, particularly if they are students or colleagues not associated with one's employing or degree-granting institutions, inspire more confidence than records dominated by the same collaborators or by those who have some stake in one's success.

Reviewers also may consider the correlation between leadership attempts and quality of journal outlet. A fair amount of first- and solo-authored work at top journals is preferred. A few secondary-authored publications at leading journals, with most first-authored work being less prominently placed, may indicate difficulty in conducting independent research of high quality.

Impact

The impact of research refers to its contribution to the knowledge base in the field. Assuming the work has been well placed, the criterion of impact reflects the questions, So what? or, What difference have these publications made? Evaluators are concerned with whether the "body of knowledge" produced during the pretenure
years is significant enough to provide the individual visibility as a scholar. One proxy for impact is quantity, because a high volume of work is likely to be more visible than very little. However, as one senior colleague mentioned, “You have to publish three articles on a topic before people associate your name with it.” Beyond name recognition, programmatic work has more impact because it goes deeper: Several publications on any topic are likely to contribute more to the field at large than the same number of publications spread out over different topics. Programmatic work also may contribute more to the individual’s own scholarly development by providing deeper immersion in relevant literature, more astute conceptualization of ideas on topic(s), and mastery of a range of research skills needed to study the topic(s) well.

Other factors worth considering that relate to impact include the significance or importance of the work. This is partly related to quality, because the most important criterion for acceptance or rejection of manuscripts at leading journals is the significance of the contribution to the field. However, some tenure reviews also favor work that contributes theoretical or methodological innovation over work that is incremental, or work that has applied relevance over work that is limited to the esoteric interests of a small group of scholars. Thus, although quantity contributes to impact, programmatic work that breaks new ground or addresses important applied concerns may increase impact even more.

Some proxies used for assessing impact are the outside reviews of the tenure package itself (including sample work), the extent to which the work is being cited by other researchers (based, e.g., on the Social Science Citation Index), work published as the lead article in a top journal, success in securing funding for the research, and spin-off among practitioners from the knowledge generated. Because it is hard to leap tall buildings in a single bound, some schools utilize longer pretenure periods (e.g., 9 years) so that they can gauge impact more accurately. Those using shorter periods (e.g., 5 years) expect proportionately less impact and appear to weight quality and leadership more heavily; still, evidence of positive impact is impressive.

Teaching Effectiveness

Most universities use student evaluations as one measure of teaching effectiveness. Increasingly, student ratings are being augmented by various peer assessments, such as classroom observation and review of course syllabi and exams.

However, flexibility in teaching also may be a factor. Faculty who teach well at only one level may not be viewed as favorably as those who can teach well in several programs. In business schools, MBA programs are highly visible, and strong performance in core classes is typically beneficial. However, because few faculty enjoy teaching, or teach equally well, at all levels, individuals may earn positive overall evaluations on teaching by being able to teach well in several electives or across three or more programs (i.e., undergraduate, master’s, doctoral, or executive master’s degree programs or public non-degree programs).

Further, teaching is subjected less to national norms than local ones in tenure decisions. Some schools use a compensatory model in which classroom excellence can offset less-than-stellar research performance. At others, these factors are noncompensatory. Also, the range of teaching effectiveness that is considered acceptable for tenure is wider at some schools than that used in evaluating scholarship. Although this may be changing, a mediocre teaching record coupled with excellence in research has often been more favorably reviewed in the past than a mediocre research record coupled with outstanding teaching.

Organizational Citizenship

This category is often referred to as service, and it encompasses service to the department or school, the university, the field, and/or the community at large. Most institutions try to protect junior faculty from heavy service obligations in order to further scholarship. Accordingly, although tenure reviews welcome evidence of wide-ranging service, they typically stress research and teaching more heavily.

Participation on committees, attendance at meetings, presence in one’s office, and a will...
ingness to supervise students are generally expected. Membership on editorial review boards and participation at national conferences help. Again, local norms may be more relevant to citizenship than national ones. This is also an area in which the two may conflict, should local expectations for service interfere significantly with achieving the level of research productivity that is valued in the field at large.

The Process

Most junior faculty arrive with some sense that the outcomes described above will be important in getting tenure. Despite good intentions, many quickly become immersed in the demands of the new job and end the first year feeling distressed at how quickly it has flown and how little research they accomplished. Those who succeed with tenure grow in two process areas: structuring time and managing progress.

Structuring Time

Perhaps the greatest single challenge in getting tenure is that of imposing structure on a demanding yet largely unstructured job. The autonomy an individual has in an academic position is at once part of its greatest joy and its greatest frustration. When I was a student, I recall one professor saying, "I wake up and am at my desk by 7:00 in the morning. On many days, the whole day stretches before me with no externally imposed structure. It's hard to decide how to best use the time and hard to stay focused so that I do what I need to do. No one really monitors that closely, and if I don't come in to the office, I can go the entire day not talking to anyone. It can be a very isolated existence."

The challenge is to cope with more than a day; most universities provide 5 to 9 years of unstructured time before tenure reviews are conducted. Still, the period between conceiving a research idea and getting an article published in a leading journal can easily be 3 years, given all the steps in between. When one considers the volume and quality of research productivity required, as well as norms for teaching and service, it is no surprise that some faculty are caught short. Strategic planning and proximal goal setting can be useful methods for structuring this mass of time.

Strategic Planning

First, it is important to think strategically about time: Review the outcome requirements and clarify goals for tenure review. A classic question that most people have early on is, How much does it take? For scholarly productivity, how many publications of what type are expected? For teaching, what range of teaching ratings are expected in what kinds of courses? Few people are willing to commit on these issues, but by questioning several faculty members in the local environment, one can derive the mean expectations and gain a sense for the variance. It also helps to ask people outside one's institution about the norms in their environments (particularly schools that are considered to be "peer" institutions) and to consider the records of other individuals who have achieved tenure recently. These data will (a) provide normative comparisons between one's institution and others, (b) clarify the probable expectations of outside reviewers at different types of schools, and (c) help one to set promising strategic goals.

Because it is difficult to predict research outcomes with certainty, it helps to strategize a tenure record that will be stronger than needed for success. This leaves room for miscalculations: a study with ambiguous findings, a planned publication that gets rejected from the targeted journal, another that is detained in the review process for longer than expected. Mishaps are common, but tenure reviews, like professors, offer little grace for "last-minute" crises.

It helps to assess one's assets and liabilities early in the process and to plan how to strengthen weaknesses. Some new faculty members begin with masses of data they gathered as students. For such individuals it may be best to begin writing, not designing new work. Doctoral programs often emphasize research proposals in content courses, so it may be most natural to think of new ideas and new designs for studies. However, as a colleague of mine once remarked, "Ideas are cheap." He meant this in the sense that there is a very long way between an idea and a publication. Nearly half the time spent in getting most papers published is expended on
what is required after the data are collected. Starting new studies instead of writing up existing data may not be a wise use of time early on. Particularly when one is adjusting to the demands of a new job, design and data collection work may detract energy from writing, so that a couple of years pass with no publications. An individual who has data and focuses on writing initially will probably publish earlier and will find that his or her subsequent research is stronger and more programmatic as a result of lessons learned in the review process.

By contrast, if one has few data, one may find it helpful to identify resources that can maximize the research strategy. One resource may involve collaborating with doctoral students, who can contribute time on relatively simple tasks (data collection, guided analysis), freeing one to concentrate on more difficult aspects of the research (significant theoretical questions, complex design issues, writing). Similarly, one should pursue funding. This may provide resources that the local environment cannot, such as money for research assistants, summer support, release time from teaching, and direct research costs.

**Proximal Goal Setting**

Once one has established some overall goals, it helps to break these down in a time line, setting short-range targets, or proximal goals, for each year. However, as one colleague has noted, “It takes time to get the machinery in motion.” Part of this requires thinking about the processes involved and finding ways to measure progress long before outcomes are clear. For example, one can track progress toward each stage of a project: design, data collection, analysis, first and subsequent drafts, draft sent out to colleagues for comment, final draft submitted to journal, revision requested and completed, final acceptance.

It helps to set challenging goals, but goals must also be realistic. I learned that it was useless to think I was working on a dozen projects at once. Perhaps I had a dozen in my head, but there were far fewer that I could move forward consistently, from one stage to the next, in any given year. Once realistic goals are set, getting the machinery in motion involves synchronizing work on multiple projects. Every project has downtime (e.g., waiting for journal reviews to come back), and that time can be used for other purposes if one has planned well. It is also helpful to use conference deadlines as part of the machine; for example, annual calls for papers can be important for moving work toward a first draft, regardless of whether it is later accepted for presentation.

Finally, it is useful to set a process goal to keep a fixed number of manuscripts under review at all times. As papers progress in the review process, this means that other work has to be readied to fill the pipeline when something is accepted. This helps ensure a continual flow of publications.

The methods described above may seem mechanical, but they can help impose structure on the unstructured mass of time available to the pretenure academic. Further, the evidence on goal setting is compelling—goals direct attention and increase effort. They may enhance discipline when it is lacking from externally imposed deadlines.

**Managing Progress**

**Control**

Once goals are set, it helps to exercise high control over daily, weekly, and monthly schedules, to see that they are met. An operational definition of control in this case involves how much one allows one’s schedule to be interrupted by nonessential requests and expectations. Those who take their plans seriously and understand the importance of continual progress will find that they must say no, politely, to a range of requests. Certainly there are times to yield, but, at tenure review, one is accountable for how well one has used one’s time. And although I’m loath to admit it, during the last few years before tenure, I did feel as if I had to spend every free moment writing!

Above, in discussing the structuring of time, I used research productivity as an example; similar planning must be done for teaching and service activities. With these factored in, control of time is even more important. Teaching and service not only consume time, they break the week up into blocks that make finding time for research progress even harder. Further, they carry a sense of urgency that can derail scholarly activity. For example, one must prepare for classes before they meet, so this work feels very
important. However, research progress, although appearing to have more flexibility, actually may have less. Because it is difficult to sense how time is running out on research, one may spend more time on “urgent” activities than one would otherwise. Part of an academic’s development during pretenure years is learning to balance what’s urgent with all of what’s important. Typically, one has to make time for research. An important indicator to watch is whether one is making regular progress on research goals or whether week after week is being consumed by other demands so that research activity is neglected.

Persistence

During my first year as a faculty member, a senior colleague advised me that persistence is nine-tenths of success. Although others might debate the proportion, there is no doubt that persistence is important. Few people achieve tenure without experiencing failure along the way: courses they worked at diligently that received lower ratings than they felt they deserved, manuscripts they felt would move the field that were rejected by leading journals, brilliant revisions to papers that received yet more requests for substantial revision.

The difference between success and failure is often in how one interprets and handles rejection. I once watched as a colleague was presented with an award for outstanding scholarship throughout his career. During his acceptance speech, he described how much acclaim he had received for his most renowned article: an award and heavy citation by other scholars. He went on to tell how this article was published by the seventh journal to which it was submitted—but only after he had received six prior rejections and had revised it substantially before each subsequent submission. That’s persistence. Rejection comes to most of us, and it is hard for everyone. It helps to take it in stride, persist in improving the work, and try, try again.

The Price and Rewards

The foregoing review of what it takes to get tenure may make the required outcomes and process seem daunting, but it is doable, as many success cases show. Still, it is worth reviewing what the struggle for tenure takes (and perhaps costs) on a personal level and the benefits that come with success. Each person’s experiences will be unique, but some common themes are described below.

Time and Emotional Challenges

The norms for tenure at major research institutions require significant productivity and offer little grace time for catching up if one falls behind. In turn, the price one pays for tenure is typically several years of one’s life spent working—to the exclusion of almost everything else. As imbalanced as this seems, it parallels the process of development in several other professional fields (e.g., making partner in a law firm, completing internship and residency to become a practicing doctor). In other words, the junior years of professional development are often taxing; those who intend to succeed find they must make a multyear intensive investment beyond graduate school training. Whether this is worth it is always a personal decision. There are significant rewards for the effort (described later) and some emotional adjustments along the way.

Most of us enter the junior faculty years with a sense of achievement based in having earned a doctorate and much enthusiasm about being a faculty member. These feelings often give way to dismay as time flies by and so much remains to be done. As one person put it, “Fear of failure is a great motivator!” It is one thing to consider tenure in the abstract; it is quite another when the process and result become very personal. Anxiety tends to increase each year as the moment of truth approaches and continues until the final result arrives. Some degree of anxiety affects almost everyone, regardless of how strong his or her tenure package looks. It is amplified by stories of others who seemed exceptionally qualified but who were denied tenure somewhere for unclear reasons. The potential loss of a job is simply hard to ignore, and it is difficult to have absolute confidence in a favorable outcome when one’s own turn comes for review.

On the other hand, preparing and submitting a tenure package forces one to reflect intensively on what one has achieved. Assuming one has produced well, pretenure anxiety is counterbalanced by a sense of deserving (and expecting) a favorable outcome. Yet this mixture
of feelings—both anxiety and self-respect—is what may make the moment of finally getting tenure feel surprisingly anticlimactic. As described by one of my predecessors, "getting" tenure felt like not getting hit over the head. The real rewards are typically realized less at the moment tenure is awarded than more gradually over the next few years. As a marker event, tenure denotes a stage of transformation whose meaning is clarified by hindsight. The changes occur in substantive professional skill and post-tenure self-image and direction.

Substantive Skill Gains by Tenure

Along the path to tenure, if one structures one's time and manages one's progress well, one masters a significant amount of content knowledge and skill in research and teaching. Indeed, many academics feel they learned as much during their junior faculty years as they did during their doctoral programs. This is perhaps the most important transformation that tenure marks.

To a great extent, the process of conducting research becomes the classroom after graduation. The peer review process for manuscripts forces us to read literature we have overlooked, integrate ideas with concepts from domains we had not considered, clarify our thinking where it is fuzzy, improve our skill at quantitative analyses, understand contributions and limitations of our work that we had not anticipated, and articulate ideas in writing with greater precision. While we improve in all of these with experience, the review process forges an intimacy between scholar and work. This intimacy typically adds value not only to our papers themselves, but to our own knowledge. In turn, we often find synergy between the knowledge developed through research and our classroom teaching.

So, despite the structural and motivational challenges involved in getting tenure, the process yields strong professional rewards. The work itself is much easier by the time one achieves tenure; one has mastered the challenges and one's confidence is higher. But there is even stronger gratification in watching a research program unfold and take wing, in watching teaching effectiveness grow, and in finding one-self amid a national community that offers exciting new avenues for contribution.

Personal Gains From Tenure

Apart from adjustments in title and income, tenure brings three other rewards. The first is that tenure occasions internal validation and adjustment in self-image. It begins with a sense of genuine pride that emerges as one pulls one's package together for review. Many of us realize during this time that we have learned a tremendous amount since graduation, that we have indeed accomplished a lot, and that we are not so junior anymore. Also, publications often gain increasing visibility within 2-3 years after they appear in print. Thus one's pretenure scholarly contributions continue to gain recognition in the field after tenure. As more calls and letters come in over time, one recognizes more clearly the value to the field of the body of knowledge one has created by the point of tenure. This not only increases the pride felt in one's own contribution, but helps clarify the reasons behind national norms for scholarly productivity that apply to tenure reviews.

Second, tenure permits more freedom in activity: flexibility to attempt riskier projects, to explore new topics, or to seek more balance between work and personal life. Time pressures rarely ease after tenure, but stronger skills enable one to work more efficiently; thus the freedom to explore and manage time more to one's liking is perhaps the greatest reward of earning tenure.

Finally, getting tenure brings more respect from colleagues—external validation. On a local level, this may be apparent with senior colleagues outside one's own department, or as one gradually assumes a larger role in institutional governance. On a national level, it is often manifest in opportunities for wider service to the field. Similarly, there are psychic rewards in knowing that those in positions of decision power, both internally and externally, feel that one has learned to manage one's time well, has built strong skills, and has contributed significantly in research, teaching, and service—enough to be trusted with this academic freedom indefinitely.
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