Getting Tenure at a University

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1. Introduction.

> *The success of fools in the university world is one of God's great mysteries.*
> (John Gardner, *The Art of Fiction*, Chapter I.1.)

This pamphlet offers advice on obtaining tenure at an academic institution, in a process usually referred to as "earning" tenure. However, tenure is like the rain of God that falls on the good and the bad alike. Busy young worker bees at a university may not understand the required rituals; they can easily make mistakes that could be avoided. Often the untenured get little (or poor or contradictory) advice from their tenured colleagues. So this pamphlet offers more advice; you'll have to decide what it's worth.

First, you, the untenured faculty member, should understand that there is no substitute for quality. Your co-workers need hardly any excuse to deny you tenure, but they can often use clear reasons for granting it, and excellence in research (especially at better schools), in teaching, and to a lesser extent in service are the factors that will win tenure for faculty in cases where politics or personalities don't overwhelm the process. You must make your colleagues think that these reasons apply to you.

An apprentice magician will be eaten alive if he calls a demon with a hexagram instead of a pentagram. The process of tenure is similar, where any misstep can cause the magic to fail. In the rest of your life, you will seldom be in such a mine field of trip wires and explosive devices, all set to keep you from getting tenure.

Thus you must avoid those simple mistakes, some obvious and some less so, that will result in a negative tenure decision in borderline cases. Even a strong candidate can spoil his chances with the same mistakes. More importantly, there are strategies that will increase your chance of tenure. My first advice: You must *not* appear to be following a "strategy to increase your tenure chances." Instead you must appear innocent and guileless—a frantic worker bee.

As a young assistant professor you should picture a room filled with tenured faculty—whatever group makes the decision at your university—gathered to decide the tenure issue in your case. Usually in such an assembly nothing is too trivial to bring up. The most innocent-seeming remark or act from years ago may be mentioned as a reason to deny tenure. Years of near-infinite effort on some project may not be considered at all. The recommendations should be clear: you must avoid trivial acts or remarks that may kill you at tenure time, and you want to focus your efforts on activities that will be appreciated by the specific committee at your institution. Whenever you deal with a tenured faculty member, or with faculty likely to get tenure before you do, picture the room as if before your eyes. Imagine a colleague, one you thought to be a friend, repeating, distorting, transforming your words from long ago. Be careful about what you say; be cautious about what you do—all the while *seeming* to be open and spontaneous.

Notice the contrast between tenure and obtaining a Ph.D. degree. Despite the similarities, there are significant differences. For a Ph.D. candidate, the quality of the dissertation research is everything, mainly as perceived by a single advisor who knows the candidate well. There's no *vote* by all the faculty. Even a vote by a final examination committee is usually a formality. A candidate with a strong senior advisor can have many enemies within the department. He need not be a good teacher—he doesn't even need to take baths. For tenure, however, you need strong and wide support. A single powerful faculty member can ruin your chances. Your nemesis could be an enemy, or he might hardly know you and just be having a bad day.

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2. Principles and Perceptions.

A prince need not have all the good qualities I mentioned, but he should certainly

appear to have them. (Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Part XVIII.)

. . . I failed to grasp that the important thing in the tenure decision would not be reality but the administration's perception of reality . . . If there are honest and ethical ways for you to tilt that perception in your favor, by all means do so.
(Dana Mackenzie, *The Tenure Chase Papers*, 1. Prehistory.)

Young faculty commonly resolve to stand by their principles. They will not play any tenure games. They will not jump through any hoops. They will not bend any rules or look the other way when a senior faculty member (or one of his students or associates) does something wrong. They are going to act naturally, be themselves, work hard, and maintain a strict code of ethics. If such a person pursues excellence in research and teaching, he or she may do well and may get tenure. The strategy of having no strategy may work out fine. But a stubborn insistence on "principles" often leads to disaster. Sometimes these people pursue research in an area or of a type that is completely out of favor in the department. Sometimes they get mad at a lazy class of undergraduates and flunk most of them (or try to—the school will usually intervene). Sometimes they call attention to the deficiencies of a a senior faculty member. Sometimes they refuse to sign a crucial letter of support, or are unwilling to let a senior faculty member sign on to their grant or their article without making any contribution. In the presence of extraordinary ability, they may still survive (as a young Albert Einstein). Otherwise they bounce down to a weak school or end up with no academic appointment at all.

Young untenured faculty are often asked to skirt a fine line: between tolerating or condoning activity that is at least borderline unethical, and actually engaging in such unethical behavior. The first side of the line can get you tenure and the second can send you down the toilet.

In this pamphlet I regularly talk about "perceptions," as for example: "Your teaching must be *perceived* as good." Young faculty may find such an attitude irritating, even offensive. A good untenured faculty member will plan to have an excellent research program and to be an excellent teacher, never mind any perceptions by others. The problem is that perceptions are what count at tenure review time. Even if one argues that hard evidence may be more important, one still must deal with how the evidence is *perceived*.

Most young faculty are amateurs at this business by definition, but the master at getting tenure will appear principled to one group of faculty and will appear "flexible" to another group.

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3. The Three Biggest Mistakes.

They had not sailed a league, a league,
A league but barely three,
Until she espied his cloven foot,

And she wept right bitterly.
(Author Unknown, *The Demon Lover*.)

There are three mistakes to avoid that junior faculty often make. I will list them here and go into more detail in subsequent sections. Any one of these three mistakes can be death to a junior faculty member.

Do not get the "bad teacher" label. You must not acquire such a label. Especially bad is to get large numbers of students angry. You need to be fairly popular with students, and you must not flunk large numbers of them or do anything else that will generate complaints and bad evaluations. Faculty must not think you are too hard, too easy, or unreasonable. Best is to be demanding (that is, *seem* to be) but to coax students through their courses with decent grades.

Do not get senior faculty mad at you. Never mind the reason, you must not get senior faculty angry, any more than students. A university is a seething morass of jealousies, and easily-hurt feelings. If a tenured faculty member steps on your toes (figuratively or literally), *you* should apologize to *him* (or to the rare *her*). And heaven help you if you should step on tenured toes. Suppose you write a bad review of an article, not noticing that the fifth author is in your department. In such a case you hustle down to their office and eat your words.

Much more serious and difficult to cope with are the various demands that senior faculty might make on you as a newcomer. You must give into their demands as much as possible without doing yourself harm in other ways.

Do not get your research off to a slow start. It's very difficult to recover from a slow start. For example, if you get a review at the end of the third year calling your research "inadequate," you'd best concentrate on getting a job elsewhere. Even if you start running twice as fast, they will still find fault with you at tenure review time. (Typically, effort after the bad review will be discounted: "Well of course he worked harder.") Grants are much harder to get if you wait a couple of years before digging in. In some areas there is such a lag between carrying out the work and seeing it in print, that you must not waste the first few years.

Some of my experienced colleagues might disagree with the above three categories. They might say, "The main reason young faculty fail to get tenure is an inadequate research program, according to the standards of the school and field. A research star almost always gets tenure, even in the presence of many faults. Someone with a weak research program often has no chance, no matter how good a teacher they are, no matter how hard they work, no matter how much service they give, or how much they compromise their principles." All this is true, but I don't necessarily regard a weak research program as a "mistake." Young faculty are often doing as well as they can. Advice that they must get a major grant, publish in a top journal, or get a literary award is not helpful. Anybody knows they should do this if they can. You *can* tell them that they need to concentrate on research, to apply for more grants, and to send out more articles.

4. Be a Good Researcher.

> *Basic research is like shooting an arrow into the air and, where it lands, painting a target.* (Homer Adkins.)

As mentioned earlier, this is usually the most important criterion for tenure. Two aspects are crucial:

Make time for research. You must give your research a high priority. Early in my own career, I would find myself with several hours free at night while everyone else slept, and with a morning class to prepare for. I would work on my research that night and frantically make up a lecture on the trolly ride to school the next morning. I had decided not to strive for the "best possible lecture." Another strategy is to give yourself artificial deadlines, such as resolving to send a paper to a conference with a specific date for submission.

Find out local research expectations. These vary widely with field of specialization and with the school, so it is essential that you inform yourself about local attitudes and expectations. How are different kinds of publications regarded, such as scholarly articles in journals, papers presented at conferences, talks at conferences, research monographs, popular articles and books, advanced textbooks, and elementary textbooks? For example, in some research-oriented departments, even an advanced textbook counts for nothing in the research category. Similarly, how important is grant support at your school, and will you get "credit" for support from industry?

Next I give a long list of additional points to consider about your research.

Get your research started right away. The importance of a quick start was highlighted in the previous section and can hardly be overstated. Time goes by very quickly.

Produce evidence. You must have evidence of a successful research program—usually scholarly publications and grants. Even a verbal promise of one of these counts for nothing: you need at least a formal letter of acceptance or award.

Keep your work confined to a narrow field. You want to be recognized as an expert in some field, even if it is a very narrow one. Keep in mind that they will *also* criticize you for too narrow an area. Obviously it would be better to be recognized as an expert in a broad area or in several areas, but that is usually not possible for a new young researcher.

Publish scholarly work. You must have publications, the more the better, though each individual publication must be sound, or else the senior faculty can also attack you on this score. The standard now is the MPU: the "Minimum Publishable Unit," that is, the smallest portion of your research that you can get published—a method for getting as many publications as possible from a given fixed amount of research. Again, it is better to publish in a narrow area than to have scattershot publications in several areas. The problem is that with a fixed number of publications, if they are scattered there may be no one who knows you well. Beware of senior faculty trying to get included as co-authors.

In some fields of study, you will need *books* instead of individual shorter articles. The normal place to publish is in one of the academic presses, and you should be aware

that it has gotten much harder to get a book published in one of these presses. Everyone up for tenure needs to publish in such an outlet, and the presses are flooded with submissions. Best would be to have an inside line on a press, although even this no longer guarantees publication.

Obtain research grants. Often grants are essential, but do not spend too much time preparing grant applications. Of course any application must be sound and reasonable, but it is also important to get out a number of applications. (Wagner's Law of Grants: *The awarding of grants is a random variable that must be sampled often for success.*) Beware of senior faculty telling you that you get significant credit just for grant *applications*, even unsuccessful ones. Usually they are lying; you need lots of applications so that you have more chance of *success*. Only success counts; in fact, after awhile unsuccessful grants will weigh on you like a death shroud. Don't be reluctant to contact program directors and ask questions about the kind of research they are interested in. Beware of senior faculty trying to get listed as part of your grant, but *advice* from senior researchers, whether at your school or not, can be very helpful.

In writing a grant proposal, you need to be optimistic about the expected results. You can't expect those evaluating the grant to think highly of your work if you yourself don't act as if the results will be important. In fact, a "grantsmanship" researcher once told me that you have to hype the possible benefits of your work right up to the point where the evaluator laughs; if he laughs you lose, but otherwise you're doing it right.

Write grant proposals for research already completed. This is for experts only. You propose to do research that you have already done. If you get the grant, you will be able to meet all your goals because you have already done so. During the time of the grant you complete work for the next grant.

Create a moveable research program. Even though concentrating on *local* expectations, keep in mind that you may need to get a job elsewhere, and so you need research that will be welcomed at other schools also.

Watch for changing research expectations. Research standards often race ahead of young faculty. It is a big mistake to think that your research is "good enough" because of standards applied in the past or because of statements about expectations. Faculty often resolve to raise standards, or they may change their minds about the real expectations. Be especially careful of excessive praise of your research from senior faculty—at tenure review time these faculty may have higher standards than they indicated earlier, or they may have turned into enemies.

Make yourself known. For your tenure review you will need references related to your scholarly work. This is another reason for focusing your research narrowly. In the end you may also use these contacts to help you get another job.

Attend conferences. You must go to scholarly conferences, even if you have to pay your own way. This will help make you known, and will make more of an impression on your senior colleagues. In some fields you can get a conference proceedings paper as well as a later journal article on the same work, expanding your publication list. (You should

cleverly give the journal article a different title, with somewhat different content, although this common strategy can backfire.) Being a member of a conference committee is also helpful, and being the *chair* of such a committee is often a special bonus.

Work with students. Depending on the field, it may be desirable, or even essential, for you to work with graduate students, especially directing Ph.D. students as their advisor. There are very complicated issues here, including possible jealousy by senior faculty of your success in getting a good student to work for you. However, in some areas and particularly at good schools, you may need a batch of your own student slaves who can help you grind out research. They can also sign up for your courses and do scut work for you. Of course you must not steal a senior faculty member's student, and if one of them steals a student of yours, you complain at your peril. At some schools it can also make you look very good to carry out research with undergraduate students. In all cases the research needs to be published to make a good impression.

Avoid irregularities. Any *hint* of real problems with your research, such as unethical practices, fabricated results, or claims that are not substantiated can be deadly. You should be careful in how you spend your grant money.

> **Wrong:** "I used my grant money for extra summer salary and to support my trip to Hawaii for a conference."
> **Deadly:** "In my research I need to use video recordings, so I spent my grant money for a big-screen TV and a couch in my office. "
> **Right:** "I used the grant money to support two promising students during the summer, and we got a joint publication out of it."

Don't slow down toward the end. The perception that you are slacking off the last year can be detrimental. Also undesirable is the perception that you are frantically working just because of the coming tenure review. Best is to give the impression that you are a very hard-working, productive, successful researcher who will continue working throughout your career. Beware even the time *after* the department recommendations have been made and passed up the line. (The upper-level administrators might still ask for clarifications, further opinions, and so forth.)

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5. Be Perceived as a Good Teacher.

Provost (P) to Faculty Member (FM) regarding "uneven" teaching evaluations:

P: *The better the student, the better the evaluation.*
FM: *(Not said aloud.) Duh . . . What else is new? That's the way it always was and always will be.*
P: *That suggests that you need to reach out more skillfully to the weaker students.*

(Dana Mackenzie, *The Tenure Chase Papers*, 1. Prehistory.)

Notice the contrast of this section title with the previous one. Successful research must be quantifiable and demonstrable, and preferably unequivocal. In contrast, evaluation of teaching is nebulous, with no rigid standards.

Find out local expectations. As with research it is important (though not as essential) to learn the local expectations. This includes the normal faculty expectations of students, faculty expectations of how a course should be taught, and student expectations when they take a course. Students can be conservative and may resent a new teacher who teaches a course in a different way from what they expect.

Don't be too hard. This is the most common mistake, especially when dealing with non-majors. New faculty often overestimate the capabilities of students. For example, suppose you are at a ski/party school with a decent graduate program. You have a lazy class of undergraduates. Push them, challenge them, even withhold good grades, but you must not flunk half of them.

Don't be too easy. At weak schools and even some good ones being easy is not a bad route, especially if there are no complaints. At better schools you need to challenge students with interesting, worthwhile material. The key is this: you don't want senior faculty *thinking* you are too easy. For example, consider a course at a good school that hasn't been taught well lately—say, it's been too easy. Suppose you tighten up standards, make the course much harder, but more worthwhile and challenging. If you are careful, don't get the students mad, don't generate a flood of complaints, then this could make a very good impression. At a good school, a limited number of "too hard" complaints can actually reassure those above you that you are doing a good and conscientious job.

Make students **think** *you are fair.* The opposite is deadly. If students perceive you as unfair, they may generate serious complaints. For example, suppose a student complains about the grading of an exam, whether it was your grading or the grading of a teaching assistant. The natural reaction is to explain why he got more points than he deserved. Instead seriously consider the following strategy: listen carefully and attentively to his complaints, and then try throwing him a few points. As another example, consider that a single unreasonable student (and every school has them) can destroy an untenured faculty member. Suppose a student known to be crazy makes an unreasonable demand. Try compromising. You'll not likely be called a wimp by other faculty. (In this case they won't even know about the incident.) The alternative can be horrible: letters to the chairman and dean, petitions by students (organized by the crazy student), and so forth. The advice: stand on principle after you get tenure. Sometimes in dealing with a crazy student you need help from those above you. Even here you want to seem like someone with infinite patience.

Get good student evaluations. Other things being equal, it's always better to have good evaluations. Check out the evaluation form ahead of time. When planning the course, see if you can't help with some of the questions. For example, if the questionnaire focuses on "course organization," try to do up a syllabus before classes start. (A good idea in any event.) It will help with evaluations if you make your expectations as clear as possible,

spelling out the basis for the grade, and explaining on assignments exactly what is required. During the course you should try not to have academic surprises, which students hate. ("You all should have known that there was an exam today, since it's on the syllabus.")

Convince better students that your course is good. Senior faculty frequently check how good a teacher is by asking good students how the course went. They also listen to the complaints of good students about a teacher.

Be careful if you are teaching a senior faculty member's "pet" course. Often a senior faculty member will have taught a certain course many times. He may resent you for teaching the course at all, and he may complain if you teach it differently from his method. You should look up past teachers, and if this situation is occurring, ask the faculty member for advice about the course. (The down side: you have to follow his advice.)

Beware of team teaching. This works all right if the other team member is a friend and a junior faculty member, but otherwise there can be problems. Especially dangerous is to team teach with an old senior faculty member, say one near retirement.

Formal versus informal criteria. Many schools have specific written criteria for evaluating teaching, often using teaching evaluations. Senior faculty at these same schools often use their own anecdotal evidence in deciding about teaching. Thus it isn't enough just to do well on the formal criteria.

Give good homework sets and good exams, all in writing. This is another way to get some visibility. Senior faculty may occasionally see your handouts or hear about them.

Be on time, meet all your classes, don't let class out early, be available to students. This is all obvious, but some young faculty don't realize how terrible it is for their reputation to miss a class without notifying the students. (These students will go to the department office, asking where the teacher is.)

At research schools, don't appear to emphasize teaching too much. At many research-oriented schools, the perception that you're neglecting research in favor of teaching makes you look like someone who will not develop into a research superstar. This is more common than young faculty might believe. Senior faculty want to see their new colleagues doing a good job in teaching *without* spending too much time on it. They want the new young faculty members to spend most of their time on research.

Get help with your teaching. If your school emphasizes teaching or if your teaching is perceived as a problem, you should seek formal help, ideally from a friendly senior faculty member acting as a teaching mentor. There are two goals here: to improve your teaching, and to give the impression that you are concerned about your teaching and have improved it. Even in the absence of improvement, the second goal can still help your case. You should also read the excellent account by Dana Mackenzie of his tenure problems related to teaching (see the references at the end).

Non-native English speakers whom students seem to have trouble understanding should make significant and visible efforts at improvements, perhaps using professional speech tutors.

6. Give Reliable, High-quality Service.

> *[Most administrators] claim that their decisions are still based on three components – teaching, research and publishing, and service, although research is now a key factor at many institutions that previously focused almost entirely on teaching and service.*
> (Robin Wilson, "A Higher Bar for Earning Tenure," 2001)

Keep in mind that many schools *say* that service counts a great deal toward tenure. Rarely is this true. Only when the service you render is important and when you are difficult to replace will service count for much. Service might help with tenure a little, but it will not make up for other faults.

At some schools, the "service" category includes professional service, such as service as a committee chair at a conference. This work is more properly considered research, and schools that call it service are often using evaluation trickery to give more emphasis to research. You should find out whether your school uses such accounting.

Quality and reliability is more important than quantity. Accepting a committee assignment and not doing what you are asked can be deadly. You want a reputation as someone who does a good job on the work requested, who finishes up on time, and who doesn't complain.

Get visibility. As in any field, you must be *seen* doing work. A committee assignment without much to do may not help.

Turn down some assignments. It is far better to turn down an assignment than to do a poor job. Of course, even when turning down you want to be careful:

> **Wrong:** "I don't want to do that committee work. It sounds useless anyway."
> **Deadly:** "That committee interferes with my Wednesday afternoon hard rock band practice."
> **Right:** "I'm really over-committed with work right now, especially with xxxx course and yyyy service."

Turn down unreasonable requests. Suppose there is a series of demanding and unreasonable requests for service, say, the chairman wants you to do library work for him. Try to do the work if it's not too demanding. But in the end you also need time to do your research and teach your classes. Work like this may not count much towards tenure. Instead of saying, "Hell, no, I won't do your shit work for you," try indicating how very busy you are already with research, teaching and service. The later section on politics talks about this issue more.

Be gun-ho. Give extra lectures, for example to campus student organizations. Sponsor a student organization.

7. Make No Enemies.

> *But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away.* (The Bible, Matthew 13:25.)

Of course the focus is on senior faculty and their perceptions. Even if the head secretary hates you, she (or he!) won't be voting during your tenure review. However, the head secretary might convince other faculty that you should not be kept on, and in any event she can cause you grief and make you look bad, as well as make you look good.

Make no senior faculty enemies. This was mentioned earlier. As an example, it is always dangerous to joke with a senior professor. Of course you can (and must) laugh at *their* jokes. You absolutely must not make such a person the butt of your jokes.

Do **not** *balance enemies with supporters.* Sometimes you are forced to take sides. This is a perilous course that you should try to avoid. If you can't avoid it, at least make sure you gain a powerful supporter along with an enemy. The fallacy with having some enemies and some supporters is that you end up with a split vote in your tenure review. At many schools a split vote is death. In other areas or at other levels of academia, you can afford a balance of enemies and supporters, but not at tenure review time. The moral: get supporters if you can, but try not to make real enemies. (I discuss this further in the next section.)

Once a senior faculty member told me about a tenure case at his Ivy League school. The department's vote was two-thirds in favor of tenure, so I was shocked when my friend said, "So of course he was dead, he had no chance." The people above the department level were going to focus on the one-third who felt the candidate was not qualified.

Get a mentor it you can. Often junior faculty are practically "adopted" by a senior faculty member. Such mentoring can be very helpful indeed. The mentor may be altruistic: he may enjoy helping a young person. He may feel it is important professionally. He may want to help create the kind of faculty needed by the department. Beware of a spurned mentor turning into an enemy.

Get along well with secretaries and other support staff. These people can help you look good or bad. Bring them flowers, donuts, and presents at holidays. Take them out to lunch. Do not make unreasonable demands of them. For example, do not give a secretary an exam to type at the last minute. (You can do this, but only if you apologize and afterwards thank her or even give her a present.)

Do nothing weird. Perhaps you can't help it, but *try* not to. For example, suppose the campus police give you an undeserved parking ticket. Your inclination is to fight all the way to the president of the university, if necessary. You absolutely must not bother upper-level people with (to them) trivial matters. Protest to the police if you like, but then just pay the ticket. You must not do crazy things, though almost by definition a truly crazy young faculty member will not be able to recognize these things. Examples that come to mind: keeping a dog in your office; playing loud music at work; growing phosphorescent mold in your darkened office.

8. Politics in a Department.

University politics are vicious precisely because the stakes are so small.
(Henry Kissinger, February 28, 2003.)

Departments of a school are part of the larger political entity, and participate in all the political maneuvers that constantly occur in academia. Senior faculty and administrators (who are usually also faculty) fight about money (salaries, budgets, equipment, and perks), about space (offices, research laboratories, studios, and classrooms), about promotions (to Associate Professor for tenure, but also to (full) Professor), about administrative positions, and much more. The biggest battles are about *power:* who is in charge, who decides. Just like priests in a Catholic church, or doctors in a hospital, the faculty jealously retain control and treat everyone else with contempt, although not always openly.

Even though the issues in academia are trivial compared with life and death matters in medicine or the military, the fighting is vicious (as in Kissinger's quote above), pervasive, and unrelenting. Those outside a university picture a bucolic calm, and in fact all the infighting is usually invisible to the students. By rights the fights ought not to involve untenured faculty either. But sometimes junior faculty are dragged into the fray.

So a senior faculty member comes to a junior and says, "Either you are with me or you are against me." He wants his junior colleague to support his efforts to gain power, to be on his side. When a sufficiently senior professor makes this statement, it becomes a classic "offer you can't refuse" to the junior faculty member. This is the most difficult situation that a hapless non-tenured assistant professor can find himself in, and there are no good strategies to follow. What can you do in the middle of a fight to the academic death, where each side only cares about whom you are supporting, and where each side will vote against your tenure if you support their enemies?

Avoid the fight by refusing to choose sides. With this strategy you decline to get involved in the fighting, but you don't even think of using a word like "refuse." The danger is that you end up having both sides against you for tenure. Instead you need to make excuses about how busy you are and how you can't really get involved in this issue. If a senior faculty member shows up at your office with a letter for you to sign, this strategy can be tricky at best. For example, I might say that I have a deadline for an article submission in three days and that I just can't think about anything else right now.

Act naive, unsophisticated, and even confused about the issues. They will expect that you won't appreciate what is going on (and you probably won't understand the details of these battles), so a naive approach might work, where you say you can't get involved because you don't understand what they want, or because you promised your mother not to sign any letters, or some other lame excuse. Thus this is pretty much the same as the previous strategy.

Pick a powerful senior faculty member who is asking for your support and become his slave. I mean this figuratively, of course. You become the lackey, the gofer of this

faculty member, his mouthpiece, his alter ego. This is terribly dangerous, but he will be at the vote for your tenure, and he may be able to threaten anybody who votes against you. Thus your slave master has to have real power already. You must give him total support until you get tenure; if spurned, he will do anything to keep you from getting tenure.

A young faculty member can fall into such a relationship while hardly realizing what is happening. He starts with admiration for a senior professor, taking the senior's side in disputes. From here, the young person gets trapped by circumstances until no one thinks of him as independent of his senior colleague.

A simpler form of such "offers that can't be refused" is the request by a senior faculty member to be included as a co-author of a paper, or included as co-researcher in a grant proposal. If the senior person has a name coming before yours in alphabetic order, and if he is willing to be second author, then the harm with a paper is less than it might be. In any case you diminish the value of the article or grant toward your tenure attempt, since you don't get full credit. Having a senior researcher's name on your article or grant proposal can increase your chance of acceptance, but at tenure time they will cite this very fact to partly discount the value of your research effort. So here again the junior researcher is pretty well screwed any way he proceeds, and he will often feel he has to include the senior's name. I have no good advice for this situation, except to appear naive and confused as above.

Finally, there are more drastic measures to protect yourself in the extreme situations described above:

Keep a notebook. This will be mentioned in the next section, but here you *really* must keep a notebook, detailing everything that happens, including especially names and quotes of what was said to you. It must be a bound notebook, handwritten in ink, kept secret, with dated entries. You can use the notebook in a court of law, or threaten to use it. Keep and date all other documents also.

Wear a wire. The idea is to record everything they say. First check up on the laws about secret recordings in your state, but this is usually legal. You must be careful that they don't realize you are recording the conversations. You might think they wouldn't expect such an extreme measure, but in fact they will often be suspicious of a hidden recorder. Thus it is death to give any indication that you are recording, such as making an adjustment inside a coat jacket, or asking them to speak more clearly. You should record phone conversations also, again only if it is legal in your state. (Some states allow it and some do not.)

Consult a lawyer. You might shy away from this step because of the expense, but it could be money well spent. Later you can use your lawyer to threaten them (which can backfire), and eventually to sue them.

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9. Play the Game.

Your actions must seem natural and executed with ease. All the toil and practice that

> *go into them, and also all the clever tricks, must be concealed. When you act, act effortlessly, as if you could do much more. Avoid the temptation of revealing how hard you work.* (Robert Greene, *The 48 Laws of Power*, Chapter 30.)

As before I recommend that you play the tenure game and play it well, but you must not appear to be doing this. Most of the items below can be carried out covertly or with innocent appearance.

Make a good first impression. Attend orientation sessions. Introduce yourself.

Be someone other faculty want as a colleague. Think about this carefully in your dealings with other faculty. You want to be a friendly, helpful, and above all *useful* faculty member. (See also "Be a key person" in the next section on being a winner.)

Get another offer. You should arrange it so that the offer appears unsolicited. Such offers can make you look much more desirable. ("We're going to lose him.") It's best not to make threats or to bluff ("I'm leaving if I don't get what I want") as they may call your bluff.

Take any complaints seriously. From students, faculty, staff or wherever, if you hear about a complaint, always take it seriously and follow up on it.

Keep in mind the different levels of a school, with different criteria for tenure. At a good school it can be very hard to satisfy the expectations at all levels. Even a weak school may have one level that emphasizes research and another that wants good teaching and service.

Keep records. Starting with your appointment letter keep every scrap of paper. In a special notebook write down and date every promise or other statement. Try to quote as accurately as possible. Prepare the notebook as if you were someday going to trial over the tenure issue. (Hey, you might!) Don't let anyone at your school know of the existence of this notebook. (Not *anyone*, not even a mentor.) The drastic step of recording conversations is too dangerous except for emergencies, because it may be fatal if they find out you are recording.

Do not openly solicit a pledge of support for tenure. You absolutely cannot trust any pledge of support, though of course you must graciously *accept* such a pledge and thank for future support. A careful, experienced faculty member knows better than to offer blank-check or 1000% support.

Learn the tenure rules. Get a copy of the rules and process leading to tenure at your school and study it carefully. People may know you got a copy of the rules, but don't let anyone know you are particularly concerned about the rules. (Not *anyone*.)

Beware of changing rules or a rising standard. This was mentioned earlier.

Fit in politically. Try to find out what's important at your school and what's not. Should you be Politically Correct or anti-PC?

No major change of your field. Do not tell faculty that you're making a major change in your field of research, especially not shortly before a tenure review. They will wonder if you can succeed in the new field. If you're important as an expert in the old field, they

may be dismayed by the change. The most you can do is tell them you're *adding* a field, and even this is risky.

Try to influence your references. Often you can help influence the specific outside experts who write letters in your support. Even if you choose your references yourself, this can be very, very tricky. A single really bad letter can kill you, but it is often essential to get a number of letters from top people in the field. Keep in mind that unless an expert really hates you, he or she will usually either write an o.k. letter or none at all. Bite the bullet and give them as possible references a *long* list of people in your field who seem friendly to you.

Don't try for tenure when there's no hope. It's often obvious to others that tenure is completely out of the question, usually because of inadequate research. Candidates may stick it out, hoping for a miracle. The problem is that you may waste huge amounts of time trying to make everyone happy, doing endless service and scut work, instead of working on your research and looking for another job. It's far better to look for a job *before* you get denied tenure, preferably a year or more before.

At the other end of the spectrum, a bright young researcher at a top school (such as Princeton, say) might not know that these schools seldom tenure their assistant professors. Depending on many factors, the tenure rate can be less than 10 percent. Sometimes an untenured young faculty member at such a school may be doing very well indeed, with people in his field referring to him as a "rising star" or as "one of the top young people in the area," with "tremendous potential," etc. This person may not realize that the school wants to hire in a tenured position a person who already *is* at the top of the field, who is not just "rising" or has "potential" but is known internationally as a leader in the area.

Other candidates for tenure can influence your outcome. There's not much you can do about it, but you should be aware that it will hurt your chances if there are other better-qualified faculty up for tenure with you. It may help your chances if there are worse-qualified faculty in the pool. Sometimes you have a chance to try for tenure a year early, and these factors should be taken into account. As another example, a faculty member whom no one wants to tenure (for whatever reason, but usually that they hate the member), with a research record equivalent to yours, can torpedo *your* chances.

Prepare your tenure folder carefully. All along you must document what you do. But, depending on the environment, you must not seem to be putting all manner of garbage into your file. One solution is to label everything accurately. Thus you can cite your talks to high schools under "Community Service," but not under "Professional Activities." Materials that are too flashy can backfire: better to look a little modest. Best is to be sure you have things to highlight in your resume.

Appeal and fight negative decisions. A negative recommendation by the department should be appealed as a matter of course. Sometimes you hear nothing until the final decision. Now you can forget about the "Mr. Nice Guy" stuff and stop worrying about perceptions. Track everything they did very carefully. Try to find out what went on at various committee hearings. If they broke any of their own rules, you have ground for negotiations

or even a lawsuit. Remember that administrators hate lawsuits. Keep in mind that they must treat everyone equal. If candidates for tenure were treated in any way differently from one another, you may have grounds for a lawsuit. (For example, if they made a special point of asking for extra references for you.) A final note about lawsuits. The suit may only get you a cash settlement and not tenure or a job. Having filed a suit, you may find it more difficult to get a job elsewhere. In the end you may need to accept the negative decision so that you can get adequate references for another job.

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10. Be a Winner.

> *The ACADEMIC LADDER: Get help with the climb.*
> *Dissertation Coaching Help, Academic Career and Tenure Coaching.*
> *Write Your Dissertation - Get Tenure - Reach Your Academic Career Goals With Less Stress and Worry.*
> *Meet the Academic Ladder Team!*
> (Small part of an online advertisement.)

It's important to be confident, to act like a winner, not to moan around about how hard things are.

Don't show excessive concern about tenure. Here's the proper attitude: the school needs *you*. If you don't get tenure, you'll just go somewhere else. Above all don't act desperate.

Try to be a key person. A key person does things around the department that others can't do or would have trouble doing, such as teaching key (= important) courses or rendering key service. You want people wondering what they will do if you leave.

Talk yourself up, act like a winner. Here's the idea. Suppose you spend the whole weekend (or the whole summer) fixing something up (like a laboratory) or figuring something out (like a piece of software). Don't whine about how hard it was. Instead let people know what you did, but act like it was no big deal. You're a winner, you're good, you can do that stuff easily.

Wrong: "Please let me teach these two worthless service courses this semester so I can have time to work on research, since everything's going to hell with my research anyway."
Right: "Give me that hard key course for majors this semester. It will help with my research and I really like the challenge that these good students provide. My research is going well." (Implicitly: "I'm a winner.")
Rationale: They'll discount research success if you teach junk courses. And the whole attitude sounds wrong.

Don't be too modest, don't be too honest. This is similar to the previous item. You can't afford to be honest or modest.

Show no weakness. The final one of three related items. You should not admit to physical or mental weakness of any kind—particularly not to a weakness that might make it hard to interact with you. Here is an example:

Wrong: Using a sentence that starts with "I don't know . . . " or with "I can't do . . . " or with "I don't feel well enough to . . . "
Deadly: "I think I'm losing my eyesight [or hearing, or ability to walk, etc.]" "I have [a dread disease] that will incapacitate me in a few years."
Right: "I feel great; I'm so full of energy." Keep your diseases to yourself until after you get tenure.

Don't brag too much. Let people know your accomplishments and how much of a winner you are more as an afterthought, more as if by accident, not by bragging.

Wrong: You get a nice article published. Stick a copy in every department member's mail box.
Right: You must manage to let them know in some other way. One idea: Just tell a few key people how happy you are that your research is finally getting the recognition it deserves. (But not too heavy a touch here.)
Rationale: You must not promote yourself too openly.

Make sure people **see** *you working. Make sure they* **know** *what you're doing.* Again not too openly.

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11. Dirty Tricks.

> *To keep even their best friends from getting tenure, letter writers should emphasize debatable points, slip in cryptic statements about competency, and wax eloquent on personality characteristics and community service activities.*
> (Alleen Nilsen and Sandra Luehrsen, October, 1990.)

They can play dirty with anyone, and it's difficult to do anything about it. Sometimes lies are told in the tenure review committee. Sometimes rumors are spread. As a standard ploy, someone at a tenure committee meeting may quote something you supposedly said or did, perhaps years ago. (He said, "I don't know much about xxxx." "I don't care about yyyy.") How is your mentor to know whether this is true or not, and even if not true, what could he say to refute such a quote? Right in the face of unequivocal evidence to the contrary,

an enemy may claim that you taught poorly, published junk, got undeserved grants (or even cheated and lied to get your grants)—all completely unsubstantiated claims. It's very difficult to counter these tactics. Here are a few things you might try.

Be in a position to know what's going on. You need a mentor in the tenure review committee meetings who knows you well. With luck your mentor can counter an unjust or untrue accusation right on the spot.

Forcefully counter any accusations. Of course you need to refute any untrue statements if you have the chance.

Even here, continue to sound like a winner. Again, don't sound desperate. You can act mad, but just because the accusations are so absurd (or whatever). Try not to sound defensive. For example, you might end up denying accusations to faculty who did not hear them, or who had lent them no credence at all.

If you find out about dirty tricks, try to use them to strengthen your case. You might get some sympathy support, you can use them to ask for a rehearing, and they can help you with a lawsuit.

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12. Aftermath of a Negative Decision.

> *All happy tenure cases may be alike . . . , but each failed case fails after its own fashion.* (Dennis Baron, "When Tenure Fails," 2003)

> - *If you fight a tenure decision, expect it to cost you a great deal of time and emotional energy.*
> - *Do not venture into the fray alone. You need an older, wiser, and better-connected advocate.*
>
> (Dana Mackenzie, *The Tenure Chase Papers*, 4. Double Jeopardy.)

Many candidates for tenure are amazingly optimistic about their tenure chances. They may fail to realize how serious the decision is for a school—guaranteed employment for the rest of a career. Typical young faculty feel they have worked hard and deserve tenure.

Most young faculty members receive a clear explanation of tenure expectations, which usually include requiring a program of research leading to publication and requiring excellence in teaching. Some of these faculty do not come close to meeting the criteria, yet they may be genuinely shocked at a negative tenure decision. (Faculty sometimes try for tenure at a research-oriented school with no publications at all, and then are dismayed and depressed when turned down.)

The reaction if tenure is denied can be similar to the grief at the loss of a loved one, often with the four phases of that grief (in some order): anger, denial, depression, and resignation (or whatever). There are strong feelings of rejection on the part of the faculty member not receiving tenure. It can be similar to a divorce. The faculty member may well have trouble sleeping and may develop inappropriate behavior. The same thoughts will

keep running around in his (or her) head: "I worked so hard for so long. I gave such good service in xxxx and yyyy areas. My research is quite well thought of. My students like me. The committee was completely unfair. I'm better than the last two people who got tenure. I'm even better than most of the committee members. They're treating this like an exclusive private club. How will I tell my friends? How will I get another job?"

I am including this section partly to prepare you (the untenured reader) in case of a denial of tenure. If you expect the feelings mentioned here, the situation may not be as devastating. Here are additional actions to consider.

Talk with mentors, friends, and experts. You want emotional support as well as advice.

Decide whether to appeal. An appeal is not likely to succeed, and the process can be drawn out and exhausting—physically, financially, and emotionally. (See the case of Dana Mackenzie listed in the references.) As mentioned earlier in Section 9, check everything that happened during your tenure case as well as you can, and talk with others before you decide.

Look for another job. Look right away, even if you appeal. You should carefully fulfill the obligations of your position, but no one will expect you to work on departmental and university matters as you did before. Expect other schools to know that you didn't get tenure (from the timing or the grapevine), so you should steel yourself not to be defensive. People realize how hard it is to get tenure now, and how capricious the system can be, so the denial is not all negative. Nevertheless, you should expect that your new status ("denied tenure") will hurt your chances with new jobs.

Use other faculty. Try to stay on good terms with several faculty so that you can still get letters from them.

Avoid the negative. No negative feelings; they're just self-destructive. Absolutely don't write negative letters around. As mentioned above, if asked, you should admit that you were denied tenure, but you shouldn't be defensive or negative about it.

Still act like a winner. (*They* screwed up—*their* loss.) Why act like a winner, when you are hurting and don't feel like one? It will make you feel better. It may help you get another job.

Threaten to sue, and then perhaps actually sue. You can threaten even during your appeal, although usually you need to exhaust the appeal before suing. This was discussed at the end of Section 9.

Finally, read the next section, to see that some people feel frustrated and unfulfilled in their tenured position.

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13. Aftermath of a Positive Decision.

> *. . . many academics . . . still feel that their promotion was alienating, that they were ill prepared for what would happen. And many still gripe about one or another perceived*

> *slight, injustice, or insult when people who had been their colleagues and friends for six years got together to judge them in secret.*
> (Dennis Baron, "Life After Tenure," 2003)

You've made it. You spent half your life trying to get tenure, and now you've got it. Do you think it's going to make you happy? Maybe not. Here are some negative consequences of your new status.

You are one of them. Throughout this pamphlet we've talked about *them* and what *they* might do to you. Well now *you* are one of *them*.

More administrative work. You will be forced into a lot more committee and administrative work, including even scut work, unless you can offload it onto some poor untenured person. (You can't offload tenure review committee work.)

Suck-ups. You have to put up with boot-licking (also known as frog kissing, brown nosing, or worse) from untenured colleagues.

Obsolescence. As time passes, as standards rise, as you get out of date, you must put up with negative whispers: "He's no good; he'd never get tenure now; ..."

Fighting for resources. You have to fight for meager salary raises and other resources.

Trapped in tenure. You can't move to another locality or another job. The only reasonable job change would be to another tenured position, and these are quite hard to obtain. As time goes by and as you get caught up in more administrative work it just gets harder. There are two main ways to get out, both difficult: get a research appointment based on truly outstanding research, or get an administrative appointment such as department head or dean. For the second method, you need administrative experience at your current school, and that tends to weaken your research and close out the first method. One common strategy (or outcome, if you like): get a *tenured* appointment mainly to do administrative work. Then resign (the administrative position) on some pretext (or, if you like, for good reasons) and fall back to regular faculty status.

* * *

I would like to list some advice for the newly tenured, in the spirit of the rest of this pamphlet.

Don't just vote "yes" on all tenure decisions. A tenure decision is a very big responsibility, for the school and even for you personally. In many respects the easiest way is just to vote "yes." For example, pushing a weak candidate for tenure may provoke distrust by upper administrators. Too many "yes" votes may make it hard to get your best candidates through. Ideally, you should pass positive recommendations up the line only for outstanding candidates. In case the committee favors the candidate, it is essential that someone make sure the tenure file is as good and strong as possible.

Avoid administrative work, unless you want to head in that direction. Certainly one career path leads to a university presidency, and you start on that path with administrative duties.

Keep a research program going. This is very important. Even if you want to be an administrator, it's still an excellent idea. For a non-administrative career, it's essential. Beware of all the pressures to slack off with your research.

* * *

From here on, the advice takes two forms. First, *in case you mainly want to help your untenured colleagues,* remember that you were just in this situation. Give them a break. Specific recommendations mirror much of the rest of this pamphlet:

Leave them alone. Give them time to work on their research.

Be a mentor. But don't be pushy. (They may not want you as a mentor, but feel that they can't turn down your "help.")

No promises. Don't promise to support a young candidate, since it is bad form, and you may not be able to keep the promise.

No unfair advantage. Don't take advantage of them, either professionally or socially.

Be fair. Be fair and careful in evaluating them for tenure. Look past any of their strategies or quirks. Evaluate them on their research achievement and potential, on their teaching, and on their service.

* * *

On the other hand, *in case you mainly want to help yourself and your own career, at the expense of the untenured,* what you should do are in many ways the mirror reversal of this pamphlet's recommendations. You should look out for yourself. Sometimes, what is good for the untenured may also be good for you, but in other cases you hope your untenured colleague is not reading this pamphlet.

Of course I don't really mean for you to do these things, but it may help to realize what motivates some of your tenured colleagues.

Plan ahead when hiring. Already when hiring new untenured faculty, you don't want independence and a strong personality, but the opposite, assuming the basic research skills are the same. You especially don't want to hire a faculty member who will become a rival of yours (a rival for whatever resources you are seeking).

Decide if the individual will get tenure. In order to decide how to and whether to exploit an untenured colleague, you need to evaluate his or her chances of getting tenure. If these chances are high, then you need a subtle form of exploitation that will leave this person as your supporter, since the faculty member may be around for a long time. Otherwise, your main limitations are the chances of a law suit.

Get extra publications and grants. It's easy. Just get your poor untenured sap to let you sign on to their article or grant proposal. For someone good who may get tenure, you need to do this carefully, perhaps emphasizing that you are trying to help them.

Do special favors to those who might get tenure. The idea is to make them a supporter of your career and your power struggles. One favor is to help them get tenure, and

ideally they should think that you were the main reason they got tenure. In doing favors, a beginner attaches conditions and strings to the favor, whereas the expert does the favor unconditionally, intending later to ask for their support.

Conclusions.

> *What's happening is that the [tenure] process has become much more formal and demanding and terrifying. The pressure is not just coming from faculty, but from administrators who are trying to raise the status of the entire institution on the backs of a new generation of young people.*
> (Kenneth T. Jackson, Professor of History, Columbia University, 2001)

If you have read this far, you may well think that the discussion and recommendations were amusing but not relevant to you personally as an actual untenured faculty member. You may teach at a small and unpretentious school that surely would not make such a big deal out of tenure. You may feel that your colleagues are all friendly and easygoing—unlikely to cause you trouble at tenure review time. You might be right, but you're more likely setting yourself up for a shock and for disappointment. I have seen and heard of so many cases similar to the ones presented here that if I were your mother I'd be worried for you.

So OK—go ahead and be a good faculty member: pursue excellence in research and teaching. Don't be a phoney, and don't go around constantly kissing up to your tenured colleagues, while kicking those below you. Above all don't spend too much time on the issues discussed in this pamphlet.

But I recommend that you follow the standard wartime advice: "Keep your head down." In other words, stay alert to these issues. They usually come up one way or another during your pursuit of tenure.

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