The Tenure Challenge

J Strother Moore
University of Texas at Austin

Susanne Hambrusch
Purdue University

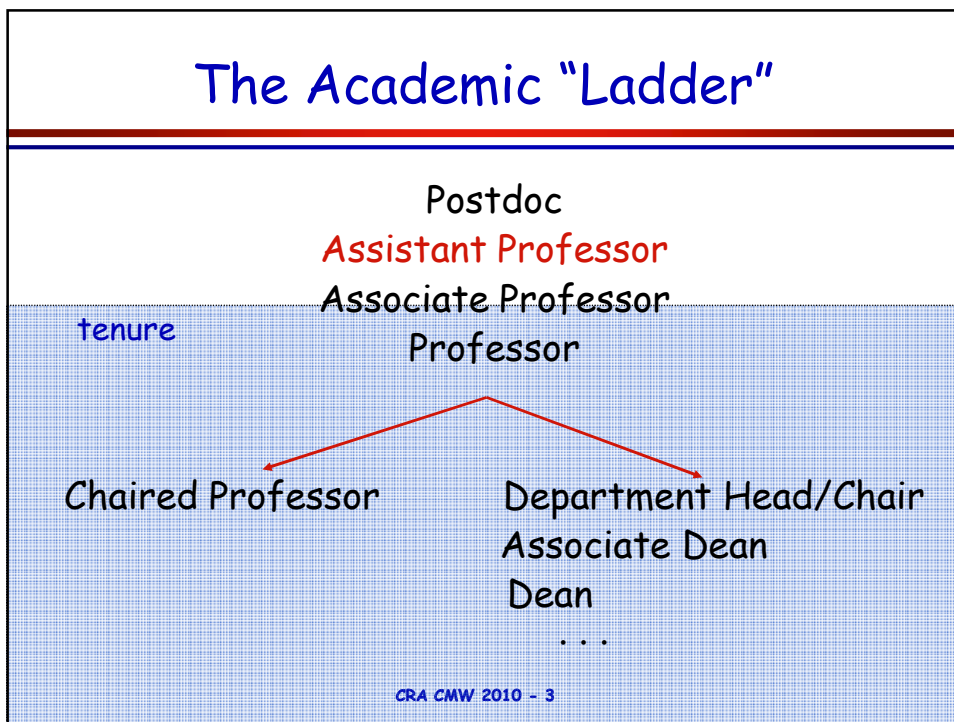(and many speakers from years past)

February 22, 2010

Tenure

"a status granted after a trial period to a teacher protecting him from summary dismissal" Webster's

- Tenure is a long term commitment by the institution and is not taken lightly
    - » A "club" with lifetime membership
    - » tenure & promotion happen generally at the same time
- ~70% of CS/CE "regular" faculty at PhD granting institutions are tenured (as reported by CRA)
    - » ~60% of all female and ~72% of male faculty are tenured

The Academic "Ladder"

Postdoc
Assistant Professor
Associate Professor
Professor

tenure

Chaired Professor   Department Head/Chair
Associate Dean
Dean
. . .

CRA CMW 2010 - 3

Example of a Research Faculty Career

(Postdoc)
hired as
Research Assistant Professor
promotion to
Research Associate Professor
promotion to
Research Professor

CRA CMW 2010 - 4

Tenure Process (1)

Usually a six year "clock"

- typical example...
  - » Yearly written evaluations by Dept. Personnel Committee and Dept. Head
    - – Head meets with faculty member
  - » Mid-tenure review by Dept. Personnel Committee and Dept. Head
    - – Can include Dean and School Personnel Committee
    - – Some institutions do an internal evaluation
    - – Some do an external evaluation and request ~3-6 external letters

Tenure Process (2)

Usually a six year "clock"

- » Sixth year promotion and tenure review
  - – **Process generally starts end of fifth year**
  - – ~8-20 external letters
  - – In some institutions, the candidate can provide a list of names (not all will be selected)
  - – Candidate's involvement and expectation of involvement in preparation of the documents varies

Primary Criteria: what matters?

- Evidence of scholarly distinction, accomplishment and impact in your field
  - » coherent body of important work
  - » significant theme showing growth as a scholar
  - » sufficient productivity to show promise for sustained productivity
  - » respect by acknowledged experts
- Different fields and different universities have different cultures
  - » how do publication patterns affect expectations?
  - » how is collaboration assessed?
  - » how is interdisciplinary work assessed and viewed?
  - » how is impact measured?

Tenure "Rules"

- Find out local expectations: the rules and culture at your institution
  - » read the published tenure guidelines
- Figure out which academic level is the "real" filter
- Don't forget the "external expectations"
- Beware: expectations may change and you might get different advice from different people
  - » Best advice comes from deptartment chair and senior faculty who serve(d) on tenure/promotion committee(s)

No Substitute for Quality

- Basic factors
  - » excellence in research
  - » excellence in teaching
  - » excellence in service

  } *importance depends on institution*

- How can you do it all?
  - » Concentrate on what's important in your local context
  - » Whatever that is, don't be a bad teacher
  - » Perform limited, but reliable service (service to the university and service to profession)

  ... *perceptions count*

Local Expectations

- Research
  - » How many and what kind of papers are expected?
  - » How much grant support is expected?
  - » How is support from industry viewed?
  - » How is [interdisciplinary] collaboration viewed?
  - » Is your research area viewed favorably?

- Teaching
  - » What do faculty expect of students?
  - » What do students expect from faculty?
  - » What do colleagues expect from your course?

- Service
  - » How much service is really required?
  - » Is the emphasis on professional or departmental service?

Research

- Articulate your research goals/plan -
    - » update it regularly
- Establish (some) research independence
    - » from your PhD advisor and also from colleagues
    - » if coauthors can not be external evaluators, be careful with wide-ranging collaboration
- Keep your field narrow enough to focus, but not so narrow as to be inconsequential
- Produce evidence of impact

Publications

- Quality before quantity in publications
- Journal publications
    - » Understand the importance of publishing in referred journals
    - » Understand journal rankings in your field and related fields that you publish in
    - » Track special issues for faster turnaround
- Conferences and workshops
    - » Be visible and well-respected
    - » Understand conference/workshop rankings
    - » Keep track of acceptance rates
- Read reviews, revise and resubmit those rejected papers worth salvaging

Research Advising

- Recruit good graduate students
  (that fit your goals)
  - » Balance PhD and MS students
    - – Try to graduate at least one PhD by year six
    - – Don't take on too many terminal MS students
  - » Offer grad level reading courses
    (as overload, if necessary)
  - » Use start-up RA and equipment monies wisely
  - » Learn when and how to say "no"
    - – A bad student is worse than no student
    - – See them "in action" first (in class, trial project)

Funding (1)

- Target funding opportunities
  - » Visit funding agency sites
    - – Join an experienced faculty
    - – Get on funding opportunities mail lists
  - » NSF/ONR/ARL CAREER competitions
    - – borrow sample proposals from successful colleagues
  - » Agree to serve on NSF review panels
  - » Other career development award possibilities
    (industry, university)

Funding (2)

- Ask successful colleagues to review your proposal outline and then to read your proposal
  - » Listen to their feedback
  - » You may get contradicting feedback
- If at first you don't succeed, try, try again
  - » Call up the program officer after a proposal was rejected

Fundamental basis for academic success is IMPACT

- Much of computer science is experimental
- Impact can be evaluated in many ways
  - » journal publication
  - » conference publication
  - » Citations
  - » Grant support
  - » artifact creation
  - » technology transition
  - » effect on standards
  - » even hits on the web

  document importance

... your colleagues and the P&T committee must be convinced of impact

Service

- Find out what/how much service really counts
  - » to the department, to the school/college, to the University, to the profession, to you
- Learn when/how/why to say no
- Quality and reliability are more important than quantity
- Do what's visible and will bring respect
  - » from your research community
  - » from your campus and department "elders"

Service Portfolio (1)

- Ask for beneficial service
  - » colloquia chair (in 4th, 5th year)
  - » graduate admissions
  - » link your service to your research
  - » do things you enjoy
- Become known for being a good reviewer
  - » quality reviews, done on time

Service Portfolio (2)

- Become active in professional societies and conference activities
  - » speak-up at program committee meetings, defend your position but don't be obstinate
  - » First get involved with workshops, move up to major conferences
- Be careful with your time
  - » Be selective

Teaching (1)

- Articulate your teaching goals/plan
  - » write it down
  - » update it regularly
- Learn when/how/why to say *no*
- Negotiate for release from teaching
  - » As part of start-up package, for developing new courses and labs
- Don't mess up in a big way

Teaching (2)

- Shoot for good perceptions – positive evaluations
  - » Be available, but be careful of your time
    - – be on time and don't end early
    - – keep regular office hours
  - » Don't be too hard or too easy
    - – good learning is not necessarily *hard* learning
  - » Communicate with students
    - – explain your expectations and set reasonable boundaries for their expectations.
  - » Don't do evaluations right after an exam

Teaching Portfolio (1)

- Teach a blend of courses
  - » small/large, required/elected, undergrad/grad, seminars
- Don't teach too many different courses
  - » Teaching a new course has a high start-up cost
  - » Invest your time in developing a good set of notes
  - » Teaching a course repeatedly makes you a better teacher
- Teach graduate courses in your area
  - » graduate courses may promote your research
- Don't do too much curriculum development

Teaching Portfolio (2)

- Find help
  - » Take advantage of campus programs on teaching
  - » Ask colleagues for help – share material
  - » Know how previous instances of the course were taught
  - » Use texts that provide support material (e.g., slides)
- Set up your "kudos" file and keep it up-to-date
- Request a peer evaluation
  - » don't depend solely on student evaluations

Dossier Preparation

- Long CV
- Research statement- 3-5 pages long
- Teaching statement - 1-2 pages long
- Up-to-date web page
- Teaching Evaluations
- Letters of Recommendations
- Assessment of your case
  - » Department personnel committee
  - » Department chair
  - » College and Dean

Dossier Preparation

- Long CV
  - » List everything only once and carefully
  - » Education, Employment history
  - » Publications (books, book chapters, journals, conferences (with acceptance rates), workshops
  - » Awards, Recognitions
  - » External Funding
  - » Service to Profession
  - » Service to Department (College, University)
  - » Seminars given, Classes taught
  - » Students supervised/graduated (awards, committees)

Research Statement

- Your chance to tell your story
  - » Explain what is hard, interesting, and exciting about your work
  - » Highlight your best work
  - » Show how your past results have impacted your current research direction
    - – Show relationships among your different research thrusts
  - » Show that you have a coherent, long-term research plan
  - » Pitch it for the audience
- Have several savvy faculty members read your statement and listen to their advice

External Evaluators

- External letter writers
  - » Some selected by you
  - » Some selected by your department
    - – Can usually black list one or two people-- but do so carefully
- Can informally suggest names or venues
  - » Program committee from major conferences
- Some departments exclude/include:
  - – Thesis advisor, post-doc advisor
  - – Co-authors and collaborators

External Evaluators

- Your selected letter writers
  - » Number of people you suggest depends on department
    - – Don't provide more names than requested, since your names are marked as devalued
    - – Make sure they are supportive
  - » Department will ask only some of the evaluators from your list
  - » OK to ask someone if you can recommend them as a letter writer
    - – Watch their body language--few people say "no" outright

External Letter Writers

- Make a list of potential candidates
  - » knowledgeable in your research area(s)
  - » from the senior ranks
  - » from schools ranked equal or above yours
- Try to meet the candidates on this list
  - » Talk to them at conferences
  - » Invite them to give a colloquium
  - » Interact with them at program committee meetings
  - » Visit them during your "pre-tenure" tour

CRA CMW 2010 - 29

Overall Advice

- The most important thing is to enjoy the work you do
  - » Keeping in mind the milestones you need to reach to be successful at what you do
- Strike a balance between your family and social life and your career
  - » Don't be consumed by the process
  - » Know if family events (e.g., birth of a child) can impact your tenure clock
- Some institutions have ways to stop the tenure clock
- Above all, remember that there is life out there with OR without tenure

CRA CMW 2010 - 30

Questions that may not have a simple answer

- My record is above that of other assistant professors. It is a good idea to pursue an early promotion?
- How can cultural differences in writing letters of recommendation impact a tenure case?
- After my Ph.D. I spent 3 years as an "Assistant" at University X in Europe. How is this factored into the time when I come up for tenure?
- I have some concerns. Is it a good idea to ask for advice at my institution outside your department?
- Can one come up again in the final year after a negative tenure decision?
- Under what circumstances would pursuing a grievance be warranted?

Dos and Don'ts

- Do become someone other faculty want as a colleague
- Do make a good first (and lasting) impression
- Do be a team player
- Do get to know leaders in your field
- Do take criticism/feedback/complaints seriously
- Do find mentors
- Do get along well with staff
- Do keep records
- Do choose your battles wisely

- Don't let your research get off to a slow start
- Don't be labeled as a bad teacher
- Don't be viewed as unsupportive of department goals
- Don't do anything weird, irregular, or unethical
- Don't brown-nose or be insincere
- Don't make enemies, but speak up

Good luck!

QUESTIONS?