

# Preparing a Tenure Dossier

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**Acks: slides from previous workshops**



# My Background

- **Research area: computer architecture + systems (PL, OS, ...)**
- **1993: PhD from Wisconsin**
- **1993-99: Assistant professor, Rice University**
- **2000: Associate, full professor, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**

# My Background

- Research area: computer architecture + systems (PL, OS, ...)
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**Two-body solution, first child in 2000, second in 2005**

**Husband went through tenure with young kids**

# Perspective

- **Tenure is not a destination or a goal**
  - **Its purpose is not job security, but the freedom that results from it**

In all lines of academic investigation it is of the utmost importance that the investigator should be absolutely free to follow the indications of truth wherever they may lead. Whatever may be the limitations which trammel inquiry elsewhere we believe the great state University of Wisconsin should ever encourage that continual and fearless sifting and winnowing by which alone the truth can be found. [Wikipedia/UW BOT, 1894]
- **Orchestrating your life only for the sake of tenure defeats its purpose**
  - **Most of your career will be post-tenure, but defined by pre-tenure habits**
  - **Preparing a tenure dossier = Preparing good habits for rest of your career**
- **Almost all in your school will (should) want you to get tenure, use the help**
- **There is life after being denied tenure (and often a pay raise!)**

# Top Five Things To Avoid

5. **Poor (unhappy) personal life – I will work 24/7 until I get tenure**
4. **Blow off service – it is all about research**
3. **Blow off teaching – it is all about research**
2. **No work w/ students/collaborators, no talks, nobody knows you - work 24/7**
1. **A gazillion publications, but no impact**

# Top Things to Consider

Most schools care most about what other successful people think of you

**Reference letters**

Most people will write letters only if they already know you/your work

**Research impact**

Not just from your papers, but conversations, talks, students, ...

**Personal impressions**

**Service** on PCs, leadership, ...

Most universities increasingly care about **teaching**

# The Process (at Illinois)

- **Annual reviews**
- **3 (or 4) year review (review occurs at the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year)**
- **End of year 5: prepare the tenure dossier (see exception on next slide)**
  - **You provide CV + Research, Teaching, Service statements**
- **Dept P&T committee (all full profs) vote on whether to get letters**
- **After letters arrive, small committee adds to the dossier its evaluations of research, teaching, service, promise for the future**
- **Early fall: Dept vote. Head adds his/her evaluation to the dossier**
- **Dossier goes to college, then campus committee, then provost**

# Exceptions and Caveats

- **Every school is slightly different, it is very important to understand how your department/college/university operates**
  - See next slide
- **Most schools will rollback tenure clock for (each) childbirth (for either parent), extenuating circumstances (major illness in family)**
  - Do use this if you have to
  - There is (should be) no stigma attached, for men or women
  - Your case should not be viewed different from a case without rollback
  - But you have to do this in advance
  - Once you go up for tenure, you only have that one shot

## Know the Local Rules (1 of 2)

- There will be a document covering most tenure policies – read it
- There will be some unstated, cultural rules – ensure you know them
  - How to find out?
  - What to look for?
- How to find out culture?
  - Dept head/chair is the best source, but may change over 6 years
  - Talk to many senior people, especially those on P&T
  - Find a mentor (many schools now assign official mentors)
  - May get (unintentional) bad advice from some people
    - \* Use your judgment: if it doesn't sound right, it probably isn't

## Know the Local Rules (2 of 2)

- **What to look for?**
  - **Who will evaluate you? Are there enough people in your area?**
  - **Evaluation of interdisciplinary work**
  - **Evaluation of collaborative work**
  - **Importance of internal and external service and what type of service**
  - **Teaching undergrads vs. grads, large vs. small classes**
  - **Awards; e.g., some universities expect CAREER awards**
  - **How much funding?**
  - **Importance of dept, college, campus, etc. levels**
  - **Journal vs. conference pubs (ECE depts)**
  - **Artifacts vs. papers (systems research)**
  - **Graduated MS/PhD students**
  - ...

## But the Basics are Really Quite Simple

- **Is granting tenure to you in the best interest of the university?**
  - **Excellent research: impact, what do your letters say?**
  - **Excellent teaching: what do your student evaluations say?**
  - **Excellent service: what do your internal and external colleagues say?**
- **But very few people who get tenure are truly excellent at all three**
- **You can just be “good” at some of the above, but you usually cannot get away with being bad at any of the above**
- **Of course, what’s bad, good, excellent varies based on institution**

# So Let's Talk About Research

- **Evidence of scholarly distinction and impact**
  - **Publications, funding, students, artifacts**
  - **Letters**

# Publications (1 of 2)

- **Beware of getting sucked by “publish or perish”**
  - Quantity almost never substitutes for quality
- **Think hard about your research goals, have a coherent plan**
  - Too many projects can spread you too thin to make an impact
  - Many people get tenure based on **one project** that had huge impact
    - \* Illustrated by citations, best paper awards, software downloads, “buzz,” follow on work, ...
    - \* Rarely by “how many papers”
- **Collaborations are great, but stay away from PhD advisor, same senior colleague on all papers**
  - Ensure you establish your identity as an independent researcher

## Publications (2 of 2)

- **Understand which journals, conferences, workshops are important in your area, ensure the dept, college buy in**
- **Serve on committees of these publications to understand the process (your advisor and colleagues may need to help get you on them initially)**
- **For journals, track special issues for faster turnaround**
- **“Position” papers in magazines (CACM), workshops can be a great way to generate buzz, get visibility**
- **Always give polished talks (and make sure your students do too)**
- **If you paper gets rejected, don't despair. Read the reviews, revise, and resubmit**

# Funding

- **Funding is the means, not the end**
- **There is no “right” amount of funding**
  - **Some projects need more, some need less**
  - **Don’t usually get tenure for funding per se**
  - **But need to show you can attract funding for your work, some as PI**
  - **A couple of NSF grants (including a CAREER award), an industry grant (for systems areas) are minimal at many places**
  - **More in other sessions**

# Students

- **Students multiply your impact**
  - Good students can be exhilarating
  - Bad students can be draining (not just on funding)
  - Choose carefully
- **Advisor-advisee is a highly symbiotic relationship**
  - Usually student's success is advisor's and vice versa
  - Every investment in your student is worth it (and your job!)
- **Many schools require evidence of grad student advising – one or more PhD graduates and several in the pipeline**
- **(Ref. morning session)**

# Letters and the Tenure Tour

- **Five to ten letters from senior researchers at peer institutions**
- **You may be able to suggest some (about half) names**
- **Sometimes candidates ask letter writers - ???**
- **Many candidates today do a tenure tour**
  - **Visit places with likely letter writers**
  - **Trend to overdo...**

# Closing Thoughts

- **Make an impact**
- **Have fun!**