Preparing a Tenure Dossier

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Also: **https://cra.org/resources/best-practice-memos/incentivizing-quality-and-impact-evaluating-scholarship-in-hiring-tenure-and-promotion/**

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Background

- Greg Hager
  - Research area: vision, robotics, computer-integrated medicine
  - PhD from UPenn, 1988
  - Assistant/Associate Prof. at Yale from 1991-1999
  - Full Prof., Johns Hopkins University, 2000-present, Mandell Bellmore Professor
  - Department Chair, Johns Hopkins University, 2010-2015

- Vivek Sarkar
  - Research area: programming languages, parallel computing
  - PhD from Stanford, 1987
  - Research Staff Member / Senior Manager at IBM Watson, 1987-2007
  - Full Prof., Rice University, 2007-2017, E.D. Butcher Chair in Engineering
  - Department Chair, Rice University, 07/2013 – 12/2016
  - Full Prof., Georgia Institute of Technology, Stephen Fleming Chair

First, a quick survey …

1. Do you feel like you understand the tenure process and tenure expectations at your university?

2. Do you have a mentor whom you trust, and who is likely to invest time to help you with the process?

3. Do you know which area of Computer Science your research will impact?

4. How many Ph.D. students do you expect to be mentoring when you are being evaluated for tenure?
    - One?
    - Two?
    - Three?
    - More than three?

5. Do you feel like you have a plan for what you will include in your tenure dossier with respect to research, teaching, and service?

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**

- **Most faculty in your school will want you to succeed -- use their help**

- **There is life after being denied tenure, or opting out of tenure (and often a pay raise!)**

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, software releases, …**

  - **Personal impressions**

    - **Service on PCs, leadership, …**

Most universities increasingly care about teaching

Increasingly, entrepreneurship plays a role (but not uniformly accepted)

A "Typical" Process

- **Annual reviews**

- **3 (or 4) year review (review occurs at the end of 2nd or 3rd year)**

- **End of year 5 (or 6): prepare the tenure dossier (see exception on next slide)**
  - **You provide CV + Research, Teaching, Service statements**

- **Dept committee (all full profs) vote on whether to request 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/Chair adds his/her evaluation to the dossier**

- **Dossier goes to college/school (there may be more information gathered here). Department representative (typically head/chair, or subcommittee chair) presents case at the Dean's level.**

- **On to campus committee, then Provost (perhaps Board of Trustees …)**

Exceptions and Caveats

- Every school is slightly different, it is very important to understand how your department/college/university operates

- Most schools will roll back 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

- In case you transfer to another university before tenure, the tenure clock usually gets reset to zero by default, but the department may support your going up for tenure "early" in that case (at a normal schedule relative to the start of your academic career)

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

- **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

  - Invited talks

  - . . .

Some Things to Do Along the Way

Keep your CV up to date and available

Keep track of all of your activities – its much easier to write it all down when it happens, and later remove things you don't need

Make sure to keep an active and updated web page, and check your external profiles (e.g., Google Scholar) for accurancy

Research impact is as much about communication as what you do

Invest early in teaching – you'll reap the rewards downstream

Find local mentors and maintain good contact with them

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? (can include viewpoints on your citizenship and collegiality)**

- **But very few people who get tenure are truly excellent at all three**

- **You can just be "good" at some of the above (esp. teaching & service), 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**

- **Beware of getting sucked by "publish or perish"**

  - **Quantity almost never substitutes for quality**
  - **See also https://cra.org/resources/best-practice-memos/incentivizing-quality-and-impact-evaluating-scholarship-in-hiring-tenure-and-promotion/**

- **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**

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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

- Writing proposals is different than writing papers – get help and feedback from colleagues early on!

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**

    - **Postdoc mentoring can also help contribute to evidence of advising, but is not a substitute for student mentoring**

- **(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**
  - **Other names are usually reviewers who have an "arms length" distance from you (no coauthors, co-PIs, etc.)**

- **Sometimes candidates ask letter writers - ???**

- **It's important to give talks once you have some results**

  - **Visit places with likely letter writers**
  - **Everybody understands the game --- indeed it makes it easier to write letters so definitely worth doing**

  - **Trend to overdo…**

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

Closing Thoughts

- **Make an impact**

- **Have fun!**