Staying On-Track for Promotion and Tenure: Six Pitfalls to Avoid*

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Nancy H. Barry, Professor and Department Head
Curriculum and Teaching
Auburn University

Don’t be invisible
With modern technology, it is possible to carry out much of our work as college faculty from an off-campus location (such as our home or a favorite internet café). Indeed, with many universities encouraging faculty to develop distance courses, it may no longer be necessary to come to campus even to teach. Certainly, the temptation to become a “virtual” faculty member can be quite compelling.

There is nothing wrong with working off-campus, but it is important for the new faculty member to maintain a physical presence within the department. The following practices demonstrate a professional attitude, commitment to the work of your department, and support for the professional activities of your colleagues:

- Attend departmental faculty meetings, convocations, and committee meetings.
- Attend university ensemble concerts.
- Attend faculty recitals and lectures.
- Be accessible to your colleagues and your students -- Keep regular office hours and make a practice of responding to email within a reasonable time frame (about 48 hours if possible).
- Notify your departmental office if you will be out of town or unable to keep your normal office hours.

Don’t be the Lone Ranger
Some new faculty members are reluctant to seek help from colleagues. Typical reasons for “going it alone” include fear that asking for assistance might be viewed as a sign of weakness, or concerns about bothering a busy senior colleague. However, most senior faculty are genuinely pleased to assist new colleagues and are likely to be flattered if asked to help.

- Take advantage of any mentoring or networking opportunities available on your campus. Even if this type of support is not offered within your Department, assistance may be available at the University level (and don’t forget the Mentoring and Career Development opportunities provided by national organizations such as the College Music Society).
- If a formal mentoring process is not available on your campus, seek out a senior colleague with whom you share professional interests to form your own mentoring relationship.

Don’t procrastinate on the paperwork
Having a thorough, accurate, and well-organized tenure dossier is an essential component of the tenure process.
• Begin preparing your CV and Dossier in standard format for your particular institution as soon as you are hired and make a point of updating your information on a regular basis (at least once a semester).
• Ask a recently-tenured faculty member in your department if you may see her/his CV and Dossier as a model.
• Ask senior faculty to review and critique a draft of your dossier.

**Don’t rely solely upon standard university evaluation as evidence of your teaching**

Standard university course evaluations can be useful as a general overview of teaching, but it is wise to solicit additional data to provide a more comprehensive picture of teaching effectiveness.

• Most campuses have some sort of teaching center that can assist faculty with improving their teaching and with getting additional feedback about teaching effectiveness from students. If this type of support is not available on your campus, work with colleagues to develop systems for soliciting feedback from your students that will be more specific to your course content and instructional goals.
• Invite colleagues to observe your classes. They may be able to provide useful suggestions for improving your teaching. This is also a great way to cultivate advocates who will be able to comment about your teaching in letters of support and in meetings.

**Beware of Gaps**

Gaps in productivity (such as going a few years with no significant performances or publications) give rise to questions about a faculty member’s competence. Avoid the pitfall of having “too little, too late” when the time for the Promotion/Tenure vote comes around.

• Maintain and sustain a consistent record of scholarly and creative work.
• Don’t wait until one project is complete to begin planning the next. Plan ahead and strive to have a series of projects in various phases of development.
• Build time for scholarly and creative activity (writing, research, rehearsal) into your weekly schedule and stick with your plan!

**Don’t Become Too Provincial**

Avoid the trap of becoming too provincial (a particular problem if you are in a relatively small town or a rural area). It is important to achieve a record of performances, publications, and presentations. Performances at the local Women’s Club and lectures for the Kiwanis may be great community outreach activities (and this is important), but in order to advance your career you must maintain balance and seek involvement in refereed or peer-reviewed activities at the national level.

• Ask senior colleagues for suggestions about respected venues for performance, publication, lecture recitals, and presentations. (CMS is a great example!)
• Balance is important – say “Yes” to some local activities in order to establish a strong presence within the community, but also learn how to decline an invitation to speak or perform locally in order to protect some time for professional activities at more prominent national or international venues.