

A WHITE PAPER SERIES
FROM THE COLLABORATIVE
ON ACADEMIC CAREERS IN
HIGHER EDUCATION (COACHE)

Benchmark Best Practices: Tenure and Promotion

collaborative on
academic careers
in higher education



This series of white papers is offered freely to member institutions as part of our project's three-year support and engagement plan.

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Benchmark Best Practices: Tenure and Promotion

COACHE Benchmarks

Our surveys of college faculty produce data that are both (a) salient to full-time college faculty, and (b) actionable by academic leaders. The survey items are aggregated into 20 benchmarks representing the general thrust of faculty satisfaction along key themes.

The COACHE benchmarks are:

NATURE OF WORK: TEACHING	TENURE CLARITY	DIVISIONAL LEADERSHIP
NATURE OF WORK: RESEARCH	TENURE REASONABLENESS	DEPARTMENTAL LEADERSHIP
NATURE OF WORK: SERVICE	PROMOTION	DEPARTMENTAL COLLEGIALITY
INTERDISCIPLINARY WORK	FACILITIES & WORK RESOURCES	DEPARTMENTAL ENGAGEMENT
COLLABORATION	PERSONAL & FAMILY POLICIES	DEPARTMENTAL QUALITY
MENTORING	HEALTH & RETIREMENT BENEFITS	APPRECIATION & RECOGNITION
TENURE POLICIES	SENIOR LEADERSHIP	

What is measured in these benchmarks?

TENURE POLICIES

Clarity of:

- The tenure process in my department
- The tenure criteria (what things are evaluated) in my department
- The tenure standards (the performance thresholds) in my department
- The body of evidence (the dossier's contents) that will be considered in making my tenure decision
- My sense of whether or not I will achieve tenure

Agreement (or disagreement) with the following statements:

- I have received consistent messages from tenured faculty about the requirements for tenure
- In my opinion, tenure decisions here are made primarily on performance-based criteria (e.g., research/creative work, teaching, and/or service) rather than on non-performance-based criteria (e.g., politics, relationships, and/or demographics)

TENURE CLARITY

Clarity of tenure expectations as:

- A scholar
- A teacher
- An advisor to students
- A colleague in your department
- A campus citizen
- A member of the broader community (e.g., outreach)

PROMOTION

Clarity about:

- The promotion process in my department
- The promotion criteria (what things are evaluated) in my department

Benchmark Best Practices: _____

Tenure and Promotion

- The promotion standards (the performance thresholds) in my department
- The body of evidence (the dossier's contents) considered in making promotion decisions
- The time frame within which associate professors should apply for promotion
- My sense of whether I will be promoted from associate to full professor

Agreement (or disagreement) with the following statements:

- My department has a culture where associate professors are encouraged to work towards promotion to full professorship
- Generally, the expectations for promotion from associate to full professor are reasonable to me

Why Support for Tenure and Promotion Is Important

Tenure. Administrators and faculty alike acknowledge that, at most institutions, the bar to achieve tenure has risen over time. While it is impossible to eliminate anxiety from the minds of all pre-tenure faculty members, or the pressures exerted on their lives en route to tenure, academic leaders can improve the clarity of tenure policies and expectations, and the satisfaction of their faculty, without sacrificing rigor. After so much has been invested to recruit and to hire them, pre-tenure faculty are owed consistent messages (e.g., written criteria and standards) about what is required for tenure and credible assurances of fairness and equity, that is, that tenure decisions are based on performance, not influenced by demographics, relationships, or departmental politics.

Promotion. While the academy has recently improved many policies for assistant professors (e.g., research leave; stop-the-tenure-clock; part-time tenure-track options), it has done far less for associate professors. Ideas—some truly novel, others novel only to this rank—have emerged from COACHE research on tenured faculty. These include modified duties such as reduced teaching load; sabbatical planning and other workshops; workload shifts (i.e., more teaching or more research); improved communication about timing for promotion and a nudge to stand for full; small grants to support mid-career faculty (e.g., matching funds, travel support); a trigger mechanism, such as a ninth year review; and broader, more inclusive criteria. To clarify the process, criteria, standards, and body of evidence for promotion to full professor, and to provide some semblance of reasonableness of expectations for associate professors, COACHE included two new survey dimensions. The first asks faculty to rate the clarity about the timeframe for putting oneself forward for promotion to full; the second measures the extent to which there exists a departmental culture that encourages faculty to seek promotion to full rather than languish unheeded at the rank of associate.

Getting Started

In addressing issues of tenure for early-career faculty:

- Tell tenure-track faculty what to expect during the interview stage, reinforce expectations prior to their arrival on campus, and discuss them again in orientation sessions during their first year. Too many institutions miss the first two opportunities.
- Set weights or priorities with tenure-track faculty members so that they can focus their work in those areas which count most.
- If collegiality, outreach, and service count in the tenure process, provide definitions, say how they count, and state how they will be measured.
- Provide relevant written information. Pre-tenure faculty members should be informed about where to find all the information they need to feel comfortable with the tenure process and with their campus. They appreciate intuitively-organized websites with easy to access links to relevant policies and people.
- Provide new faculty orientations as well as workshops to support effective teaching and research

throughout the pre-tenure years.

- Host Q&A sessions or provide other venues where pre-tenure faculty can safely ask difficult questions.
- Provide plenty of feedback along the way—annually, and then more thoroughly in a third- or fourth-year review. Annual reviews, put in writing after the face-to-face discussion, are particularly helpful; midpoint reviews with specific guidance are crucial to pre-tenure faculty sense of clarity, satisfaction, and ultimately, success.
- Teach departments chairs to deliver clear performance feedback to pre-tenure faculty annually and more comprehensively at mid-point.
- Provide sample dossiers to pre-tenure faculty and sample feedback letters to those responsible for writing them.
- Hire tenure-track faculty with the explicit and repeated expectation that they will achieve tenure, not that they might be “weeded out.”
- Ensure open doors for early-career faculty to chairs and senior faculty members in the department. The most clear and satisfied pre-tenure faculty have such access not only for questions about tenure, but also for feedback, opportunities to collaborate, and collegueship.

Many of these policies, and the principles behind them, apply similarly to associate professors on the path to promotion in rank. Additional considerations include:

- Be cognizant of the workload placed on associate professors. They often find themselves buried suddenly with service, mentoring of tenure-track faculty, and more student advising, as well as more leadership and administrative duties that may get in the way of their trajectory to promotion.
- Provide mentors. Just because a faculty member earns tenure and is promoted to the associate rank does not mean that s/he no longer needs or wants a mentor.

What's Working

COACHE researchers interviewed leaders from member institutions whose faculty rated items in the Tenure and/or Promotion themes exceptionally well compared to faculty at other participating campuses.

Hamilton College

Hamilton offers a clear timeline and descriptive procedure for all parties—the department/program, faculty member, committee on appointments, dean, and president—for tenure decisions and for promotions to full professor. The Faculty Handbook outlines the priorities: “Of the three criteria [teaching, research, service], the first two are the more important, but all weigh in the decision and the quality of teaching is the most heavily weighted criterion.” While outlining principles of evaluation for teaching, scholarship, and service, the Handbook goes on to address pre-tenure faculty fears: “It is understood that the standards of merit and the relative emphases in the application of these criteria may vary among evaluators and from case to case.” Hamilton’s Dean of Faculty website provides specific tenure and promotion guidelines for each department; chair review forms for assessing faculty performance alongside guidelines for annual reviews; and description of the department chair’s role in the tenure process.

Hobart and William Smith Colleges

HWS offers each new faculty members a “Standards and Criteria” (SAC) document, based on institutional bylaws and designed to clarify standards and criteria, which are tweaked to fit individual departments. The provost reviews this document with each new faculty member, who signs off on their SAC and takes it along should he or she change divisions.

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Kenyon College

At Kenyon, promotion procedures are transparent, and criteria are clear and available for review in the handbook.

Middlebury College

Middlebury expects its associate professors to take up to 10 years to come up for full professor. “My sense is that faculty members appreciate having up to 10 years to stand for full professor,” according to the Vice President for Academic Affairs. “In some instances it presents as career flexibility when tenured faculty feel like they can relax a bit, and some colleagues appreciate that they can take their time and put their best foot forward.” Middlebury also provides long-term funding for research, which allows faculty to chart a longer course for their research and promotion to full professor.

Stonehill College

At Stonehill, tenure policies and practices regarding tenure are described as “flexible” and “human.” For example, if requested, an additional year on the tenure clock is typically approved by the provost. Procedures (available for download in the faculty handbook) are clear and transparent for promotion to full, with candidates informed at every step of the review. The handbook states the requirements of “sustained effectiveness” in teaching, a “sustained record of acknowledged professional contributions” in his or her field, and service activities “involving leadership” for promotion to professor. In addition, the handbook notes that candidates for full professor must have at least twelve years of full-time teaching experience (three or more at Stonehill) and at least five years at the rank of associate professor.

University of St. Thomas

The Promotion and Tenure Committee at the University of St. Thomas reviews tenure policies annually and recommends revisions to the Faculty Affairs Committee. Following a new faculty orientation which includes a section on tenure expectations, deans and chairs are encouraged to work with and mentor tenure-track faculty toward tenure. The Faculty Handbook states that “the mission provides the framework for faculty evaluation.” The Handbook continues, “Within the context of faculty commitment to that mission, teaching is the most important criterion. Engaging the profession is the next most important criterion, closely followed by service as the third most important.”

Resources

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COACHE Benchmarks

This benchmark report is part of a series of white papers available through COACHE. The complete list of white papers includes:

APPRECIATION & RECOGNITION	INTERDISCIPLINARY WORK & COLLABORATION	NATURE OF WORK: SERVICE
DEPARTMENTAL ENGAGEMENT, QUALITY & COLLEGIALITY	MENTORING	NATURE OF WORK: TEACHING
DEPARTMENTAL LEADERSHIP	NATURE OF WORK: RESEARCH	TENURE & PROMOTION

About COACHE

The Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) is a consortium of more than 200 colleges and universities across North America committed to making the academic workplace more attractive and equitable for faculty. Founded in 2002 with support from the Ford Foundation and Atlantic Philanthropies, COACHE is based at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and is now supported by its members.

Designed to generate not simply “interesting” data, but actionable diagnoses, COACHE’s suite of faculty job satisfaction surveys have been tested and continuously improved across multiple administration sites and cycles. Institutional reports and executive dashboards provide college leaders with a lever to increase the quality of work-life for their faculty; to advance a reputation as a great place for faculty to work; to provoke better questions from and more informed decisions by prospective faculty; and to generate ideas and initiatives from faculty that enrich and expand the range of possible improvements.

COACHE also brings academic leaders together to advance our mutual goals of maximizing the impact of the data, with many opportunities to meet with counterparts from peer institutions and to discuss COACHE findings on faculty affairs.

Call (617) 495-5285 to request your invitation to participate.

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