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“Classical ‘Tenure Trek’: In The Search For New Academic Frontiers, ‘Don’t Lower the Bridge, Raise The Water’”

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IN a somewhat quixotic sense, the academic quest for tenure might be said to reflect the rather veiled vision of the classical Sisyphus, ancient Greek king of Corinth, who is forever doomed to roll uphill a heavy stone; only to watch in perpetual despair and frustration as the stone rolled downhill again. Inherent in the ancient myth of Sisyphus’s eternal ‘education’ at the hands of unseen gods is the peculiar manner in which the hero, breathing a final sigh of mingled despair and defiance, utters the cry, “Such is life! What a relief to have understood it!”

Although centuries now separate the ancient myth of Sisyphus from the contemporary arena, the virulence of the deeper undertones of thought regarding the nature of education must impose upon all of us painfully fresh perceptions regarding the intellectual perspective from which to evaluate the current conditions related to a similar classical quest for tenure. And perhaps that is why any representative portrait of Sisyphus-like warriors now engaged in mortal combat for academic tenure should begin initially to consider a basic understanding of the primary strategies that may be involved in enriching the traditional educational relics of teaching, research, scholarship and service.

Basic Blueprint

Any basic, honest blueprint for tenure clearly demands a visionary ‘pre-hiring’ faculty selection committee that understands the significant investment indicated by an advertise-

ment for a tenure track appointment. The decision to ultimately tenure a faculty colleague is a princely investment currently in excess of two million dollars and it is imperative that every opportunity be extended to fairly appraise that investment. That is why the initial review process begin with a well-defined, specific job description that includes an articulate statement of mission, philosophy and expectation related to teaching, research, scholarship and service. There should also be a rigorous review of each applicants credentials and references, including the practice of requesting written responses to specific questions related to educational goals and objectives as well as philosophical points of view on teaching methodology and research techniques. The final candidates invited for on-campus interviews should also be given a rigorous schedule of planned activity that might include

- formal lecture sessions on current research interests
- informal discussion sessions on teaching methodology
- impromptu public forums that explore the candidate's ability to address major issues relevant to the position advertised
- social gatherings that exhibit interpersonal skills, and
- participatory workshop or seminar sessions that indicate the candidate's ability to communicate effectively with diverse interest groups that include faculty, staff, students, administrators and community leaders.

It is important that each of the scheduled project activities present ample opportunity for candidates to engage in active problem-solving and critical thinking exercises that promote academic and professional vision. Considerable time should also be spent in cultivating a 'risk-free' interview environment in which candidates may advance honest, candid evaluations of the review process, the schedule of planned activities and the initial impressions of the academic program.

When the interview process has been completed and the final review of credentials and references has indicated the candidate to whom the position will be offered, the *first crucial step* in the tenure process for the prospective new colleague should be the preliminary address of academic and professional expectations. It is important to secure an early orientation that includes a specific summary of goals and objectives, review of the department and university administrative structure, meetings with key university and community personnel directly related to the new colleague's major teaching or research area of interest, printed materials that define policies and procedures related to the probationary period of appointment and an appropriate social reception that introduces the new colleague to the campus and to the community.

It is important during the orientation session to pursue a written 'agreement' document that spells out specific performance expectations related to teaching, research, scholarship and service during the probationary appointment period and to explore realistic 'activity expectations' on a year-to-year basis. The orientation session is also an excellent opportunity to pair the new colleague with a senior faculty mentor who may assume responsibility for periodic review as well as academic and professional guidance during the probationary period. Additional conferences—on a regularly scheduled semester basis—between the chairperson, mentor and new colleague should then be agreed upon to review progress and to assess productivity in meeting the preliminary 'agreement' and 'activity expectations' documents. It is very important during these initial orientation sessions that new colleagues sense that definitions related to 'excellence' in teaching, research, scholarship and service have been accurately detailed in terms of academic and professional expectations for earning tenure.

It would also be helpful during the initial period of orientation and in subsequent

evaluative conferences to suggest that new colleagues begin to maintain a professional file that would further reinforce department and university tenure expectations. Since both departments and universities periodically 're-define' themselves in terms of mission, goals and objectives that may also affect tenure guidelines, new colleagues must remain current in policies and procedures related to tenure and should be vigilant in consulting with the departmental chairperson, faculty mentor and university administration for accurate interpretation of tenure assessment in the areas of teaching, research, scholarship and service. The rather traditional file of supporting material related to enriching a tenure case may include:

- Letters from national figures who have had positive responses to innovative academic research or professional presentations at national conferences.
- Letters of special invitation to participate in regional or national conferences to present significant research or teaching documents.
- Sample syllabi, examinations, reading lists, video tapes, study guides, critical thinking assignments and curriculum development proposals that help to illustrate teaching methodology.
- Student instructional rating forms, peer classroom evaluations and outside consultant assessments that offer ample evidence of measurable teaching effectiveness in terms of presentational skills, interpretation, content and validity.
- Archeological evidence that includes student enrollment figures, awards, citations, supervised studies, student honors, alumni achievements, comparative faculty loads, publications and regional or national distinctions.
- Assessments of academic or career service by regional and national officers of associations, peer societies or consultants who have first-hand knowledge of professional achievements.

A carefully maintained file of supporting material encourages a thoroughly coherent, documented and historical presentation that indicates a sustained, measurable record of achievement in the specific areas of teaching, research, scholarship and service. It also helps to promote an informed and persuasive account of the implied relationship between teaching, research, scholarship and service to each other and to the overall mission of the individual academic department as well as to the broader context of the university mission. Finally, maintaining an accurate activity file enriches the potential case for tenure by clearly delineating the personal and the professional development of a new colleague in a specific time period and in a specific discipline of academic concern much more succinctly and, further, more perceptively suggests what future academic and professional achievements might be anticipated given the documented track record to date.

Some Illustrations

Now that a basic tenure-trek blueprint has been drawn, perhaps the vision of academic and professional expectations may be more clearly detailed by some illustrations that suggest effective strategies for achieving tenure goals and objectives. These selected illustrations hopefully provide a texture of actual situations and potential consequences that may sharpen

one's ability to think critically and to plan wisely in addressing the multiple complexities and conflicting demands of tenure at traditional research or teaching institutions.

INITIAL APPOINTMENT

Learn from the experiences of others and engage in active research related to the culture of a prospective institution before signing a preliminary contract. It is important to discover the current and past practices on tenure-track appointments and the percentage of probationary appointments that resulted in tenure being awarded. Do not assume that tenure requirements are similar at each institution and review the specific terms of the preliminary contract to clearly ascertain institutional criteria and expectations for both reappointment and tenure. Review the lines of responsibility for recommending reappointment and tenure to determine if the decision is primarily at the department, school or university level of evaluation. Be aware of published deadlines for reappointment and tenure application and work closely with the departmental chairperson, faculty mentor and a senior peer review committee of tenured faculty to advance a well-documented and persuasive application that demonstrates significant achievement in each of the traditional areas related to tenure. It may also be of value in the initial appointment agreement to secure a copy of the original job description that was advertised for the position and to also request a preliminary statement of the academic and professional goals and objectives related to tenure of the advertised position from the departmental chairperson and the dean of the academic unit.

RESEARCH

It is important to know the institutional definition of excellence in research and to determine the extent to which this area of concern is weighted in relationship to the reappointment and tenure recommendation. Provide documented evidence of the significance of research to the specific discipline and also point out the impact of research on individual scholars, schools of thought and related teaching methodology. If the research is applicable, demonstrate the relationship as well as the relevance to other academic disciplines by including a citation index search of significant references. Maintain a supporting file of letters from reputable academic scholars in the discipline who indicate the significance of the research and its potential for promoting meaningful investigation by other noted scholars. A common denominator in validating quality research is the financial support generated from competitive fellowships, grants or awards that call attention to the promise and the potential of the researcher. National or regional visibility and a reputation for expertise in a selected area of intensive research enriches not only the scholar and the university but also the tenure application. It may also be of value to review department and university history related to the type(s) of research that have been funded in recent years and to determine the impact of that research on subsequent tenure applications.

TEACHING

There is no substitute for excellence in teaching when building the tenure case. Every effort should be made to determine the institutional definition of 'excellence' in classroom teaching and to provide multiple means of demonstrating the mutual compatibility of the institutional definition and the documented evidence presented by the tenure application. The multiple means of demonstrating potential excellence in classroom teaching may include traditional student evaluations, peer reviews, invited assessments from professional educators who provide critical commentary on style and technique or curriculum development project activities. Additional strategies that may demonstrate excellence in teaching might

include supporting materials like course syllabi, student testimony, teaching portfolios, study guides, assigned reading lists, interdisciplinary teaching collaborations, representative examinations or sample student classroom assignments and research projects that indicate the academic region, critical thinking, analysis and interpretation skills inherent in the classroom instruction methodology. In some instances, a detailed inventory of recent students who have achieved a recognition may also demonstrate teaching excellence when the relationship between the student and the success is directly related to classroom instruction or the influence of the instructor.

SCHOLARSHIP

Have a very clear understanding of the departmental and institutional definition of scholarship in terms of publications, addresses, convention papers and editorial assignments. If there is a distinction between monographs, textbooks, articles or individual book chapters, be attentive to the relative significance attributed to each. National refereed journals and established academic publishing companies remain the primary indicators of high quality scholarship. High profile regional journals may, however, enrich the tenure application when it can be demonstrated that the individual research is so unique or distinctive that regional journals are appropriate publication avenues to transport preliminary dialogue for research that will subsequently be detailed in national publications. In preparing the tenure case related to scholarship it is important to include a representative sample of the most significant publications rather than append every article, review, textbook, position paper, monograph or book chapter. Selectivity in the supporting scholarship examples appended will help focus attention on the specific area of achievement being detailed and should help to provide a more measurable assessment of the scholarship being evaluated by the review committee. It may also be of value to review the historical evidence of significant publication at the departmental level to determine if there are 'preferred' journals or 'recommended' publishing companies that would enhance the case of scholarship being developed.

UNIVERSITY SERVICE

Making yourself indispensable in university committee work or departmental volunteerism may enhance your campus image as a reliable and responsible colleague but not secure tenure. Although it is important to be an active participant in campus as well as community affairs, the wise candidate for tenure must be able to distinguish between meaningful university service and insignificant activity that does not have a measurable impact on the primary areas of tenure evaluation as they have been defined at the departmental and institutional level. University service related to student advisement and curriculum development has become a more frequent academic expectation and is an additional dimension of the tenure process that each prospective candidate should pursue in the initial period of orientation. Community service that is limited but positive and productive may provide meaningful social or professional opportunities to interact with local leaders who may later provide letters of endorsement that indicate the quality of service from a less academic perspective.

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY

Never underestimate professional activity in terms of the need to maintain an active agenda of convention presentations, keynote addresses, consultancies, summer seminars or leadership roles in learned societies that may enrich the tenure application. Professional activity should be focused, however, on those specific project activities that help to reinforce

teaching, research and scholarship to maximize the potential academic impact on the tenure application. Sustained professional activity like editing national journals, planning national or regional conventions, membership on national education commissions, serving on national accreditation teams or authoring self-study documents and investigative reports on academic issues related to teaching standards or discipline-specific goals and objectives may provide additional testimony of collective professional achievement that reflects favorably on the tenure application. Active professional participation that is sustained from the initial appointment to the final tenure application may also affirm a commitment to academic excellence that, further, brings significant recognition to the university as well. When teaching, research, scholarship and service are of quality, high profile professional activity suggests a versatile and well-rounded tenure candidate who appears to be committed at all levels of university practice and participation.

Additional Dimensions

The complex demands of team-building a successful tenure case also require that care and concern be taken to enroll others in the preliminary planning and to solicit the advice and wisdom of those already tenured colleagues who may provide invaluable review and recommendation from the date of the initial appointment to the final tenure application. The following sample chart may also suggest an 'ideal' approach to building the tenure case in terms of the specific kinds of academic and professional activity one might be expected to embrace in the time frames involved in the traditional seven-year probationary period of review. It is very important to understand the category terms in relationship to one's own university definition of such traditional elements of tenure review as teaching effectiveness, research, creative activity, scholarship or service and to make ample allowance for the distinction between primarily research or teaching institutions. At its most informative, the sample chart suggests the written 'agreement' document that initially spells out specific performance expectations in selected academic or professional areas of concern during the probationary appointment period and also explores realistic 'activity expectations' on a year-to-year basis.

Teaching effectiveness should be demonstrated early in the first year of the initial appointment. Student and peer teaching evaluations should indicate 'very good' instructor in both the first and second year reviews; and from the third to the sixth year, teaching effectiveness should be consistently rated 'excellent' to provide the most positive impact on the tenure application. Teaching effectiveness should also include documented materials related to classroom instruction and multiple means of evaluation that indicate a sustained record of teaching excellence as defined by departmental and university documents. Begin in the first and second year to collect supporting materials related to classroom instruction and in the third, fourth and fifth year, solicit appropriate invited adjudications that offer ample evidence of teaching 'excellence' as defined by department and university documents. In the sixth year supporting materials related to course syllabi, teaching portfolio, student testimony and study guides should be collected and edited to demonstrate the historical evolution of teaching methodology from the initial appointment to the final tenure application.

Creative activity, although not normally thought of as a primary ingredient in the traditional tenure application, may enrich teaching, research and scholarship credentials when directly related to classroom instruction or applied research projects. A creative collaboration that involves the practical application of theory to classroom exploration would be appropriate in the third year and may provide the imaginative thesis concept for subsequent grant proposal as well. If the initial creative activity appears to have been a productive and significant collaboration, in the sixth year it may be appropriate to extend the activity to include a project that directly relates to teaching methodology. The role of creative activity in these two isolated and focused instances may help to suggest an additional

dimension of the decidedly unique department or institution definition of teaching effectiveness and may also assist in building a tenure case for teaching excellence that is not only traditionally sound in theory but also imaginative in classroom practice.

Professional activity should begin with some energy in the first year of the appointment with attendance at state, regional or national conventions. It is important in the first year to make those initial professional connections which may later translate into program proposals, panel presentations or co-authored publications. In the second and third year it is important to appear at national and regional conventions as an active participant presenting juried position papers, conducting workshops and servicing on primary planning committees. In the fourth and fifth year professional activity should be national in emphasis with the submission of 'open competition' position papers and short courses. In the third and fourth year there should also be an attempt made to serve as a regional or national officer in a professional association and to begin the preliminary service to the association that may later result in major roles of academic or professional leadership like planning a convention, editing an association journal, chairing a policy committee or serving as a member of the executive council of the association.

Scholarship definitions and a 'research agenda' should be very clearly defined in the first year of the initial appointment. In the first and second year it would be appropriate to publish book reviews and state or regional journal articles to learn the basic principles of academic publication and to become familiar with the process of review-and-revision that is an integral part of the academic publishing process. In the third year it would be important to publish a primary article in a major national refereed journal and to be actively pursuing a monograph or textbook proposal with a reputable academic publisher. The publication of primary articles in national refereed journals is an expectation in the fourth, fifth and sixth year as well and it is important to set realistic goals related to the number of quality articles that might be possible on an active research agenda. In the fifth and sixth year a book chapter or single monograph publication would be appropriate to suggest that there is a sustained record of significant research and scholarship concerned with salient issues that are judged as worthy of publication by national peers. In the sixth year it would be a positive tenure strategy if the potential textbook proposal explored in the third year were to be in the final stages of editorial review at a major academic publishing company and scheduled for release and distribution in the following year.

Service to the campus and to the community needs to be in moderation. The first year of service should be primarily devoted to observation of department and university committees and to a review of potential community project activities that may compliment and enrich the later tenure application. In the third year campus service should include membership on a university committee of special interest and in the fifth year it would be appropriate to serve as a chairperson of a major policy-making university committee. In the second year potential community service projects of interest should have been identified and in the fourth year there should be active participation in those selected community projects that have the potential to extend classroom teaching or advance the stated research agenda. Whenever possible, it is also a good strategy to attend campus and community socials, receptions, galas or other public events that attract university faculty, administration or staff and to seize the opportunities presented to cultivate associations that may be beneficial to the subsequent tenure application.

Postscript

The successful tenure candidate is quick to recognize the immediate issues related to presenting a compelling case for positive evaluation in the area of teaching, research, scholarship and service. No small part of the tenure-trek process is the incisive and persuasive argument(s) advanced to suggest a sustained, well documented history of achievement in

each area of tenure assessment. It is important, therefore, to *begin* the initial probationary appointment with a sense of vigor and commitment to published departmental and institutional goals and objectives related to academic and professional excellence criteria; and to skillfully relate teaching, research, scholarship and service activities to achieving the broader implications of those documented goals and objectives. The basic ingredients of academic promise and professional productivity that serve to heighten the competition for tenure do not require that we 'lower the bridge' of our expectation, but it does necessitate that we 'raise the water' of our exposition or risk the enforced anguish and perpetual despair voiced by Sisyphus so many centuries ago.

| CATEGORY | FIRST YEAR | SECOND YEAR | THIRD YEAR | FOURTH YEAR | FIFTH YEAR | SIXTH YEAR | SEVENTH YEAR |
|---|--|--|---|--|--|--|---|
| TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS | Very Good Evaluations (Collect supporting materials) | Very Good Evaluations (Collect supporting materials) | Excellent Evaluations (Invited adjudication) | Excellent Evaluations (Invited adjudication) | Excellent Evaluations (Invited adjudication) | Excellent Evaluations (Collect sample syllabi) | Excellent Evaluations |
| CREATIVE ACTIVITY | | | Creative Collaboration | | | Teaching Collaboration | |
| PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY | Attend state, regional or national convention | Present at regional or national convention | Present at regional or national convention | Present juried papers at national convention | Serve as officer in association | Serve as officer in association | |
| SCHOLARSHIP | Publish book reviews and regional or state essays | Publish book reviews and regional or state essays | Primary article and textbook proposal | Primary article in national journal | Primary article and chapter or monograph | Primary article and book chapter or monograph | Book publication |
| SERVICE DEPARTMENT UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY | Observe committee procedures | Department committee and community project | University committee | University committee and community project | Chair a University committee | University committee | |
| LONG-RANGE CONTRIBUTIONS | Excellent teaching and research | Excellent teaching and publications | Excellent teaching and convention presentations | Excellent teaching and book proposal | Excellent teaching and national officer | Excellent teaching and publications | Excellent teaching and book publication |
| ADDITIONAL DIMENSIONS | | | | | | | |

REFERENCES AND NOTES

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