

[Welcome to Column 3 of Hey Jane! This is a project of the SWS Career Development Committee. Questions and answers are generated by the committee and SWS members. Answers are compiled from several anonymous sources. All columns are archived on our committee's page on the SWS website.]

November 11, 2004

Hey Jane!

“I earned tenure four years ago and am now swamped with committee work in my department and college/university that I was protected from before. How can I find time to work on promotion to full?”

Jane says:

Senior faculty members have a commitment to faculty governance, desire to have a faculty voice in campus decision-making, more experience to bring to committees, the rank to serve on a wide variety of committees, and want to support colleagues and students who may need friendly voices in their corners. Seniors also help protect junior faculty from too many service obligations, so those juniors can get tenure and stay at the institution. Seniors want to do service! Seniors are good at service! But, many seniors also want to attain full! The key is to make choices and not be afraid to say “no.”

Things to think about:

\* What are the most important criteria to promotion to full?\* For some colleges and universities, service is a large chunk of the expectations. Yet, teaching and/or research are generally more highly valued. Get exact clarification as to how much research, how much teaching proficiency, and how little service will qualify you for promotion to full. Look at other files of recent promotions to full, both in and outside of your department.

\* How can you get more time for research?\* Ask your chair to schedule fewer teaching preps, ask about sabbatical time, and ask about getting leave with grants. Apply for grants and fellowships that provide leaves or at least money to buy out of courses. Form reading groups with colleagues (in or outside of the department) to help each other stay motivated, keep writing, and read/listen to each other's work in progress. Also, if the opportunity comes up to be on a really big important committee such as a faculty task force, see if you can negotiate a course release. It can't hurt to ask and this can free up some time.

\* How can you say no?\* Firmly! One strategy is to make your research schedule visible and firm. Establish and communicate the hours, days, and/or weeks when you cannot do anything but your research. This can make it clear to your department that you are working hard even if you are not visibly sitting in committee meetings.

\* Which committees shall I serve on?\*

You will have to serve on committees as a senior scholar. But, some committees' work might be too high for the value. One thing you could say is, "I cannot be on the undergraduate committee (imagine it reviews all majors' transcripts) because of my research commitments, but I will be glad to serve on the advisory committee (which meets once per semester)." Sometimes a vague offer to serve on the workhorse committee in the future ("when I complete my book") may be thrown into the bargaining. If you are known for doing your share of the work, these strategies can be effective.

\* There are too many committees!\*

Sometimes large committees take unnecessary time and effort just to get a meeting together. It might help to ask, "Do we really need a [large] committee for that task? Could the ground work be accomplished by an individual or a smaller group and then shared with others?" Also, senior faculty can work to restructure governance in ways that might be more efficient and take less committee time. There might be overlaps or glitches in the current structure of committees.

\* But they say I am good at committee work!\*

As with juniors, compliments about your committee work can compel you to take on more service than you would ordinarily. Remember that a compliment does not compensate you for the time you may have taken away from your research.

\* But no one else is doing it!\*

Do not see it as your responsibility to do what others are not doing. You cannot carry the department, or your college/university for that matter, on your shoulders. A big part of your job is to gain promotion to full and this can be vital to you being able to help the department more in the future. This is particularly hard in small departments. It is easy to be guilt-tripped into picking up the slack for others – you should stand your ground, do your share, but protect yourself from exploitation as well.

CAVEAT to all professional advice: Always check with your departmental colleagues, chair, dean, etc. to find out what the norms and expectations are in your institution.

I hope this helps! Stay tuned next month for Question 4!

-- Jane