

## **Strategies for Getting Tenure SWS summer meetings, Atlanta 2003**

“Strategies for Getting Tenure” was a panel hosted by the SWS Career Development Committee at the summer meetings in Atlanta. Panel members were: Betsy Lucal (Indiana Univ-South Bend), Kristen Myers (Iowa State Univ), Joey Sprague (Univ of KS), Melissa Milkie (Univ of MD), and Beth Rushing (GA College and State Univ). The following is a brief summary of their advice. If you are interested in receiving an e-file with more detailed information, please contact Tamara Smith at [tsmith@albany.edu](mailto:tsmith@albany.edu).

Start thinking about tenure and publishing early, even in graduate school. Different schools have different tenure requirements, and you want to plan your publishing for the type of tenure work you want to do. Graduate school is the place to learn how to publish (e.g., through co-authoring with faculty members) since you will not have time once you are in your job. Collaborating with other authors can also help you publish more and find mentors. When you co-author, be sure to document what your role is. The tenure committee might ask for such statements from your co-authors as well. Find out if articles published in graduate school will count for tenure at your institution. Early in your career, you also have time to send papers to the top journals to get valuable feedback from top scholars. To rank journals you publish in, tenure committees often call journals for their acceptance rates. A 30% acceptance rate is good.

Letters of support from outside reviewers are vital for the tenure committee. The committee often asks the candidate for a list of outside reviewers, so develop your list early through networking. Try to be sure that everyone on your list has met you. Go to section meetings and meet the senior scholars in your field. Talk to people at ASAs who present papers in your area. SWS, of course, offers great networking possibilities. Every time someone says

something good about your work, put that person's name in an "outside reviewer" file that you can go back to when developing your list. When you send your work to outside reviewers, be sure the articles show the breadth and depth of your main work so they can write the best letters possible.

Each institution is different, so be sure you know what you need to do for tenure at yours. The department may have their own documents with tenure requirements or they may be in the faculty handbook. Know what your institution's rules are, who makes the decisions, and at which level the important decisions are made. You will want to know the timeline for the decisions so you know if "no news is good news" and your case is still in the pipeline. When preparing your file, be jargon-free for those readers outside your discipline. Be sure to clearly explain why you do what you do and why it is significant. Ask to see the files of those in your department who have gotten tenure recently, especially those from white men! See how they present their accomplishments. Ask for advice on your portfolio at multiple levels, from experienced people both inside and outside your department. Develop a mentor web of both experienced people and those going through tenure at the same time you are.

When considering opportunities for research, teaching, and particularly service, constantly ask yourself, "Will this count for tenure?" A good knee-jerk reaction to any request should be, "I will think about it." Never say yes off the bat, no matter what it is. You need to be a good departmental citizen, but you can try to arrange your service work to be visible, yet less time consuming. If your chair or other seniors are allies, they would be good people to ask if you should accept a service request. Faculty members receive many review requests, but try to do only one article review a semester, no more than one book review per year, and be sure they are right in your area. You can say no to review requests, especially if you already have one on

your desk. Reviewing can be good because it reminds you how to make a good argument. Also, if you are publishing in that journal, it is wise to stay in the editor's good graces.

Keeping your tenure materials organized throughout your junior years is important. Keep records of everything you do! For example, include the committees you serve on, students you advise, and talks you give. One way is to keep three folders of records – one each for research, teaching, and service. Early in your new job, you also want your colleagues to have a good perception of you. New faculty members are labeled very early as people who will get tenure or not.

If your tenure case is unusual in any way, be sure you can explain it. Going up for tenure early is a tricky thing. Committee members can think it is arrogant, but if your department says you are ready to go up, you might want to. Before going up early, find out if anyone else on your campus has done it successfully. If you have switched jobs, be sure to know how much time towards tenure you will get. Having tenure beforehand, unfortunately, makes you less marketable in a second-job search. If you have stopped the clock (e.g., for a baby or post-doc), note this plainly in your file as committees can forget you stopped the clock when looking at your portfolio. You can also ask to stop the clock, and then not stop it if you get the work done.

So, you want a life while you work on tenure? Think carefully about what you want out of your life. Think about what you would and would not do to get tenure. For example, match up the kind of family life you want with the kind of job you take. You may realize that you do not want tenure at the place you initially got a job. Do not ask about family policy at the job interview, since it can alter the hiring committee's perceptions of you. Get the policy from the university website, faculty handbook, or call the HR department. Having kids, the panel members say, is hard at all stages, even after you have tenure and/or when the kids are older. It

is easier to have a baby in graduate school, when you have more control over your time. You get to be a very efficient time manager when you have kids! The AAUP website has a section on work and family that may be useful.

What about support for feminist work? The key is to help your colleagues appreciate your feminist scholarship without scaring them off. People are more convinced when you acknowledge competing frameworks. Others do not have to buy your feminist approach, but they should respect it. Assume support, but sometimes you have to be your own cheerleader. Once you get tenure, you can then work to change the profession to be more feminist friendly and family friendly!