

**PREPARING FOR TENURE  
SWS WINTER MEETING 2006**  
Sponsored by the Career Development Committee

**Panel Organized by Joan Spade, SUNY Brockport**

**Panelists:**

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**PROCEDURES**

- Every institution SHOULD have written procedures for Promotion and Tenure. Not every institution HAS clear, unambiguous guidelines for Promotion and Tenure. It is your obligation to find out what the procedures are IN your department and AT your institution.
- This document SHOULD be available at your job interview. If it is not offered, you could ask about the expectations for Promotion and Tenure during your interview.

**FORMAT/PACKAGE**

- Your “package” is the most important document in this whole process. **START TO PUT TOGETHER YOUR MATERIALS THE FIRST YEAR YOU ARE ON THE JOB.** Make sure you document everything you have done. Pulling it together into a package that is neat, easy to use, and highlights your strengths is critical. Use a notebook, if allowed, with tabs and a table of contents. The notebook prevents readers from scattering materials in ways you never intended and the tabs, combined with the table of contents, directs readers to sections quickly. Try to put only the most critical material in your main file. Put supplemental materials in carefully labeled containers/boxes or additional notebooks.
- Don't lie. While you want to highlight your strengths, don't hide or try to obscure your weaknesses. If you have three publications, but two are book reviews, then you should indicate so. Any reader can see the obvious, and readers get angry if they think they are being deceived.
- Your curriculum vitae is the most important element in your tenure and promotion package. Spend a lot of time on it, get comments from colleagues from other colleges and in your department to make sure you are presenting your materials in the best possible way.
- Supporting documentation is critical but can vary from institution to institution. Regarding support for research, everyone should have copies of all published materials and most places would want copies of materials under review or forthcoming. If an article is forthcoming, you should include documentation indicating so. As for teaching, consult the literature describing teaching portfolios and do so early on in your tenure as it takes time to develop a strong portfolio. You should contact the teaching and learning center, if there is one, for support. Most places want teaching evaluations from students as well. (See the section on teaching below for additional information.) Whatever documentation you include for teaching, present it in an orderly manner. Use tables, listing student evaluation scores and number of students taught by course. Service is more difficult to document. When you serve on a committee, ask the chair for a letter thanking you for your service. Yes, it is possible to ask for such things and these letters are nice supporting document, especially if the person you worked with details your contributions. You can list other service, such as attendance at graduations, honors convocations, open houses, etc.

## RESEARCH

- This is an area where you really need to get clear answers from your institution. If your department or campus does not have a clear, written description of requirements for promotion and tenure, talk with more than one person in a position of authority. Try to get clear answers on what counts and what doesn't. For example, a piece on teaching and learning in *Teaching Sociology* counts as a journal article some places and as an "extra" publication on other campuses. A book may count if you have a contract some places, only if published at others. These are very important pieces of information for you to know as you BEGIN your career, so you can make educated choices as you decide how to spend your time.
- Be aware that there is a great deal of leeway in how your research is evaluated, so talk with people in your department and make sure they know what you are working on so you can "sense" their reaction to the type of research you are doing and the journals where you are submitting for publication.

## TEACHING

- Even in places where teaching is not considered to be "important" it can be considered for promotion and tenure.
- Get advice about what to include in your teaching portfolio. If teaching is a substantial part of the promotion and tenure decision at your institution, document your teaching from a variety of different angles. Peer evaluations are important, especially if peers are reviewing your syllabi and class materials. Syllabi may be the most important component in your portfolio because they provide information on how you organize your classes and your expectations for students. You can always do open-ended evaluation forms in addition to "standard" evaluations at your school. Use students' responses to your teaching cautiously if they are self-collected. Some schools survey students when someone is coming up for tenure to systematically document teaching and advising. Document work with graduate students (TAs and RAs). You could include student papers and show how your feedback led to stronger writing. If you use student portfolios for assessment, include some.

## SERVICE

- Given that service is the area least likely to count in a meaningful way toward tenure (with local variation, of course), in practical terms you need to find out how much service is expected and do the minimum.
- Do not get sucked into doing service that interferes with your ability to establish excellence in teaching or research/scholarship. But think about strategic service that can be used to bolster that record. Is there a committee that awards small research grants to faculty on your campus? Serving on it can give you a leg up on what's required for a successful application. If teaching is your area, then get on the Editorial Board of *Teaching Sociology* or do some similar work.
- Ask your department chair whether the department is willing to protect junior faculty members from undue service burdens. If so, take them up on this. If not, decide whether you can persuade them to do so if service really isn't going to help your tenure case. If not, practice saying "no" on your own.
- Don't immediately say "yes" to a service commitment. Say you'll think it over; or just say no and plead the demands of working toward tenure. Find out how much time it will require, how often the committee meets, etc. before making your decision.
- What if you're one of a few people of color/queer people (etc.) on your campus and there is a need for "diverse" members of committees? Choose wisely and remember it's not your fault they're in that quandary.

- Try to do service that you find satisfying and/or easy. Again, think practically. Lisa Brush, borrowing from Aristotle, said “the reward for service is service,” so volunteer cautiously.

## **DANCING**

- Almost all of our recommendations obviously require some sort of dancing. That is trying to find out what information you need without criticizing, sounding anxious (of course you are anxious), and/or sounding dumb (as if you should know how tenure is done at your institution). The first step is to find what is written about tenure (at the time you were hired) in your department. The second step requires dancing as you need to find out what the “requirements” really mean. You can accomplish the second step by asking people in your department, giving them examples of what your portfolio would look like. At the same time, develop a “knowledgeable friend” in a department that is similar to yours and find out what they know about the tenure process at your institution.
- Dancing would not be necessary if every institution had clearly specified guidelines for attaining tenure. Unfortunately, many do not and those that do may be so murky that the actual expectations for tenure are not clear.