

“Publish or Perish”: Analysis of Tenure in U.S.A. Universities

Kimiko AKITA

Introduction

One metaphor commonly used to describe the work of the contemporary college professor in the U.S.A. is that of the “three-legged stool”: with the three legs representing research (or scholarship), teaching, and service. The perfect stool would be one on which the legs are thick and sturdy and of a good length that provides balance. The metaphor does not favor any one of the three but instead values each in relationship to the professor’s strengths and the institution’s needs and goals. This stool metaphor today is a long evolution away from the medieval university model created during the Middle Ages (Fifth through Fifteenth centuries) to advance learning through higher education of almost exclusively men and boys then. Those ancient universities grew exponentially in Europe during the Fourteenth Century as they moved away from monastic schools taught by Christian monks and, sometimes, nuns (Rait, 1931).

Today’s universities in the U.S.A. bear some similarities to the medieval model, though no longer do institutions exist solely to support professors by tolerating students to pay the bills. But there do exist many large differences among the work required on the three legs at the thousands of universities in the West and particularly in North America. For example, the U.S.A. classifies all institutions of higher learning according to a system that defines their relative emphases on research/scholarship, teaching, and service—as well as whether a given institution relies on external funding to support research and pay a professor’s salary. This article seeks to explain the differences among the three legs of the stool and through the history of tenure to illustrate the benefits and value of high-quality intensive research as a vital

part of a professor's work.

Background

Classifications. The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Learning applies to the 6,000 U.S.A. institutions eligible to receive Title IV funding to award student financial aid (Interfolio, 2019).

- **R1 (Research 1): Doctoral Universities** — Highest research activity. Includes universities such as Harvard, Duke, and Stanford.
- **R2: Doctoral Universities** — Higher research activity.
- **R3: Doctoral Universities** — Moderate research activity.
- **Master's:** Award at least 50 master's degrees and fewer than 20 doctoral degrees per year. (Most likely, APU, which prioritizes teaching over research, would belong here.)
- **Baccalaureate:** Includes most four-year private, liberal-arts colleges.
- **Associate's:** Includes two-year community colleges and colleges that confer associate degrees.

Academic Ranks. For instructional university faculty (not institutional administrators or support staff), there are essentially four titles, in ascending order: lecturer/instructor, assistant professor, associate professor, and (full) professor. Other embellishments exist. The precise job title may vary from institution to institution, but the basic frameworks and job descriptions are similar.

- **Lecturer or Instructor:** Usually *non-tenure-track* positions offered through one-year contracts.
- **Assistant Professor:** Typically, entry-level new hire or newly minted master's or doctoral graduate in a "tenure-track" (tenure-eligible or tenure-earning) position that allows up to seven years of probation before consideration for promotion and the granting of *tenure*.
- **Associate Professor:** Achieved after a years-long review period, usually accompanied by awarding of tenure, too.
- **Professor:** The ultimate goal on the tenure track.
- **Distinguished or Endowed Professor:** Or "named" professorship or

“University” professorship. These may be accompanied by special pay increases or resources for programming, research laboratories, or travel.

Other ranks and titles exist, including adjunct or graduate teaching assistant at the bottom level and research associate, clinical professor, professor of practice, or visiting professor within a higher category, but not typically a tenure-eligible or permanent position. Additionally, retiring professors of distinction may be granted emeritus/emerita status, with no salary or faculty voting rights but maybe perks such as office space or library and technology privileges.

Academic Promotion

After a five-to-seven-year probation period, which may include both annual and midterm reviews of cumulative progress at the departmental and college/school level as well as a cursory review at the university level for record keeping, an assistant professor will be considered for promotion to associate professor and an associate professor will be considered for promotion to professor (known as a full professor). Criteria for promotion at either level varies from institution to institution, but certain universal achievements are required, such as evidence of good teaching (through student and peer evaluations, documentation through syllabi, lesson plans, and exams or assignments). Both internal and external awards for excellence are usually regarded highly. Sometimes, external evaluations are solicited; generally, that reviewer must be at *arm's length* and not a former mentor, adviser, colleague, or relation.

Additionally, a steady growth in research/scholarship is expected and evaluated, similar to the review conducted for consideration for tenure, which is detailed below). Typical expectations range greatly depending on the institution, but an output of one scholarly publication or academic conference presentation per year is the minimum; generally, two of either is required. The record is expected to be substantial as an accumulation in progress—and not to reflect a rush to produce at the end of the probationary review period. Solitary authorships are best, but co-authorships are fine, too—as long as

the candidate's name does not appear low on the list of authors. Depending on the discipline, an author who appears after the third on a list might have contributed only, say, access to a statistical analysis package installed on an office computer or graduate lab assistants. This is not considered to be a significant contribution to the creation of knowledge, which is what meaningful research truly produces.

Tenure

Origins. The concept of “modern” tenure in the U.S.A. dates back to the founding of the country's first college, Harvard, in 1636. When U.S.A. “framer” Thomas Jefferson created the University of Virginia in 1819, he hoped it would be free from the religious intolerance of earlier colleges (Gittleman, 2015). But it was another 100 years before tenure was popularized.

The idea of tenure was born of trustee, donor and presidential abuse, the destruction of the German and European universities by Hitler, the extraordinary transformation of American higher education after World War II from mediocrity to world-dominating excellence and the enormous demand for talent that took America to the top of the academic mountain in the thirty years of the Golden Age of research, from 1945 to 1975. (Gittleman, 2015)

AAUP. John Dewey (1859–1952), the Columbia University philosophy professor generally regarded as the most influential philosopher in American history, in January 1915 founded the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) as a union of sorts to survey tenure enforcement and protect the job security of college teachers (Gittleman, 2015). Dewey was therefore made AAUP's first president.

In March 1915, seventeen professors at the University of Utah resigned in protest after four of their colleagues were fired by the president and board of trustees. AAUP begins an investigation a month later, the first of five such actions in its first year.

The 1940 Statement. Its purpose was to improve the level of support

offered to high-quality faculty members (AAUP, 2020). The AAUP itself defines tenure as

“a means to certain ends, specifically: (1) freedom of teaching and research and of extramural activities, and (2) a sufficient degree of economic security to make the profession attractive to men and women of ability.” For a university to fulfill its “obligations to its students and to society,” it must ensure educators’ freedom of teaching and economic security.

Challenges. In 1900, the widow of Leland Stanford, the railroad magnate who was Stanford University’s founder, had, as a member of the board of trustees, ordered the firing of a professor for attacking the railroad industry—her family’s source of billions of dollars in wealth. Too late for that professor, but if tenure had been in effect then, it would have ensured that he couldn’t be fired. Much later, during the anti-Communist era of the early 1950s, dozens of American faculty members with tenure were fired anyway as patriot compliance boards sprung up around the country—an exception to tenure protections. In many states, all public employees, including professors, were required to swear an oath of loyalty to the U.S.A. and to renounce communism. But, by and large, tenure held fast after World War II as thousands of new professors were needed to staff university jobs that increased as veterans returned from wars abroad and headed to college.

Exceptions. Still, tenure does not protect a professor who is found to have acted inappropriately. Professors at the University of Southern California, Central Michigan, and Duquesne have recently lost their jobs for making racial slurs in the classroom; professors at Indiana and Louisiana-Monroe have been fired for their controversial posts on social media (Drozdownski, 2021). Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker’s 2016 budget in Wisconsin not only cut \$250 million from higher education but also severely weakened shared faculty governance and effectively destroyed professor tenure at state universities. Specifically, any professor in the system—tenured or not—could be dismissed or laid off by the 18-member Board of Regents (Schuman, 2016).

Predators. One major problem for institutions is the *predatory journal*,

which “lacks meaningful peer review and engages in questionable business practices” (McQuarrie, Kondra, & Lamertz, 2020). These substandard journals are flourishing because of increasing expectations for desperate academic researchers who want to appear to be productive. The authors examined tenure guidelines at Canadian universities but did not find any language that explicitly discourages publications in predatory journals. They argued that predatory journals threaten the integrity of academic research and knowledge dissemination and that universities need to take substantive action to guard against them, including discouraging faculty members from publishing in predatory journals. Brezgov (2019) cited among these predatory journals David Publishing Company, which publishes 50 journals annually, as a “massive spammer” based in Jiangnan District, Wuhan, Hubei, China, and among the “most annoying scholarly open-access publishers.” David Publishing typically promises a peer review in no more than three weeks—not nearly enough time, as any scholar knows—and that authors pay an author fee and hand over their copyright.

Several other legitimate scholars have exposed the practices of predatory journals. Alf (2020) brazenly sought and succeeded in publishing a fake paper in *US-China Education Review*, which is owned by David Publishing, to demonstrate that the journal paid no attention; the fake co-authors—Pinkman and White—are not real people but rather characters from the popular American TV miniseries *Breaking Bad*. One open-access predator, *International Journal of Advanced Computer Technology* (which is also owned by David Publishing), even accepted a totally fake article submitted by an Australian computer scientist provocatively titled “Get Me Off Your F---ing Mailing List” (Safi, 2014). The entire paper consisted only of the title’s seven words repeated over and over. Jeffrey Beall, an academic librarian who researches predatory journals, discovered that 10 percent of open-access journals “were exploiting the model by charging a fee to proofread, peer-review and edit a research paper without actually carrying out the work” (Butler, 2013). Predatory journals prey on young, inexperienced researchers.

T&P process

Not all faculty positions come with tenure and not all faculty promotions ensure tenure, though in most systems, the two concepts—tenure and promotion—are considered and awarded concurrently. The tenure-and-promotion (T&P, or P&T) case for a faculty candidate usually begins with the university’s central administration (perhaps Human Resources department) notifying the candidate’s immediate supervisor—usually a department/division chair—to initiate a file documenting that professor’s accomplishments in research, teaching, and service, per university guidelines. The file, which the candidate himself must compile and submit, consists of a uniformly formatted curriculum vitae (CV) and supporting documents; this is often the first and foremost object of scholars’ complaints about the system because the CV “obliterates nuances essential for showcasing work in one’s specific discipline” (Utz, 2020). In multidisciplinary divisions or at small schools with few faculty members, a physicist might be responsible for evaluating the work of a philosopher, for example.

The in-unit committee consists of all previously tenured colleagues. They constitute the internal reviewers. Their focus is on teaching observations and less on research impact. The assessment of research impact is generally left to external reviewers. The unit chair must also solicit letters from between two and 10 external reviewers chosen for their expertise in the candidate’s field, to evaluate the impact of the candidate’s research. Usually, the candidate submits a list of scholars in his/her field that the candidate thinks would be good, qualified reviewers. These reviewers are being asked essentially to assess the impact of the candidate’s work; therefore, that work must be well known enough to impress an outsider. These reviewers must not, however, be co-authors, former classmates, advisers, mentors, intimates, or anyone with a potential conflict of interest.

Next, there is also usually a personal narrative, an essay usually between 1,000 and 2,500 words, that describes the logical progression of the candidate’s research agenda and which highlights any notable teaching achievements, such as an innovative lesson plan.

Peer teaching evaluations, assigned within the academic unit, are included, along with student evaluations of instruction.

Finally, some rationale for the faculty member's service record must also be included.

So, although all three legs are said to be important and of equal value, research/scholarship is the only part of a professor's record that gets careful scrutiny. This is why in the U.S.A., the operative phrase is “publish or perish”—meaning that a professor who does not produce peer-reviewed research will be fired through the tenure process.

This complete file is reviewed first by a committee of a candidate's home unit colleagues, who record their vote on their recommendation and send the case to the chair for a first-level administrative review. The file is accompanied by an evaluative essay—commonly called a *write-up*, authored by a committee member who was assigned the duty. All members of the committee must “sign off”—literally, sign their names—on the recommendation. This is the most important step in the process in the context of faculty self-governance since the committee comprises colleagues who must work most closely from then on with the faculty member.

Likewise, the chair, who has overseen the cumulative progress, adds a write-up linking the candidate's achievements to the original contract or hiring letter that outlined job expectations years ago. Although administrators throughout the rest of the process may reject the recommendation, nothing in the file at this point should surprise anyone since there has ostensibly been an annual and a midterm review that preceded it.

If the system works, if communication has been clear, and if everyone has been doing her due diligence, there should be no surprises. Usually, negative decisions along the way are caused by poor communication between the candidate's home unit and external audiences—no fault of the candidate.

Duke University is a private research university on the U.S.A. East Coast founded in 1838. Since the 1970s, it has been ranked among the top universities in the world, spending more than \$1 billion on research last year, making it one of the 10 largest research universities in the U.S.A. (Duke, 2021). As such, it attracts top faculty from around the world. Its T&P

guidelines are clear and simple and accessible to the public. Candidates must include a personal statement summarizing research, teaching, and service activities:

- **Research/scholarship/artistic development.** Describe candidate’s research interests; how candidate’s work contributes to field of study; research trajectory including new projects, works in progress, and future; role in collaborative research.
- **Teaching:** Describe philosophy, goals, and strategies in courses taught, mentoring of undergraduate students, and other accomplishments. Address any issues with teaching evaluations. Describe teaching and mentorship plans.
- **Service.** All department, university, and disciplinary service.

Sometimes, a tenure candidate’s life events significantly disrupt the process, in which case, a progressive university such as Duke (2021), in the U.S.A., may in fairness “stop” the tenure clock for one or two semesters of tenure clock relief, equal to the length of the leave. Duke acknowledges five categories of leave: personal leaves without pay, government service leaves, military leaves, temporary medical leaves, and temporary parental leaves. The latter may result in tenure clock relief of one full year, subject to the faculty member’s requesting it.

A sample letter that Duke asks of external evaluators, among other things:

- please comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the candidate’s scholarship and standing in the discipline.
- who the top scholars are in the candidate’s peer group and where the candidate ranks compared to scholars at similar stages in their careers.
- evaluation of whether the candidate would receive tenure in your university.

The latter is controversial and a bit absurd since the faculty member is a candidate for tenure at their home university and has been following those T&P guidelines for several years.

Finally, Duke seeks up to ten (total) of the candidate’s self-ranked and annotated most important and influential publications and/or professional contributions.

The tenure process everywhere is presumably rigorous because so much weighs in the balance. For the successful candidate, it is a job protection, a near-guarantee of a job for life. For candidates who come up short, there is almost always a “bonus” year after notification to allow the faculty member to remain employed while searching for the next job.

Conclusion

The number of tenure-track university faculty has shrunk from 57 percent of faculty at its peak in 1975 to just above 30 percent today (Gittleman, 2015). The current U.S.A. higher education workforce is more than two-thirds part-time, adjunct or limited-contract hires.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created serious financial difficulties for universities across the U.S.A., which will eventually impact tenure and promotion and pay for faculty, as well as the research funding that motivates many and makes T&P possible. For example, Ohio Wesleyan University recently eliminated 18 majors, jeopardizing the need for faculty to teach in those programs (Hubler, 2020). The University of Florida has furloughed faculty to save money. The University of California, Berkeley, has paused admissions to its Ph.D. programs in anthropology, sociology and art history. Other colleges froze faculty pay and urged early retirements.

Florida Gulf Coast University, founded in 1991, boasts that it does not have a tenure system; faculty members work on multi-year contracts (FGCU, 2020).

In a rare move, Florida Southern College went 40 years without granting tenure, then revived the system recently to attract better scholars and teachers (McMullen, 2010).

Tenure was originally created to protect professors’ academic freedom and to encourage the unrestricted creation of knowledge: the very essence of scholarly work and the very reason why universities exist.

Tenure protections are even more necessary today, especially given conservative politicians’ opposition to liberal arts education and a fixation on high-stakes testing and the linking of students’ test scores to teacher

evaluations (Gittleman, 2015). In the U.S.A. system today, teaching remains very important, but it must remain secondary to scholarship in what is expected—what is most needed from professors. Academic researchers invest great time and great mental energy in the creation of knowledge. It is the most important human activity. It is the only way that society and civilization progress. As then-United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan (1938–2018) said in his address to the World Bank, “Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress...” (U.N. Staff, 1997).

Jacob Neusner (1932–2016), an American professor and scholar of Judaism, wrote or edited more than 900 books, making him one of the most published authors in history (Grimes, 2016). Neusner (1993) sharply criticized the Florida education Board of Regents and legislature for requiring that the state’s professors begin to teach more and conduct less research—even though without scholarship, the creation of knowledge, there is nothing to teach. Neusner argued adamantly: “First, professors who do not pursue scholarship and research should not teach at all. They don’t belong on campus. Second, good teaching on campus in particular comes about only through vivid (rigorous), weighty research, leading to publication.”

Cultural critic Neil Postman’s (1931–2003) disdained the children’s TV show *Sesame Street* as a flawed and fraudulent form of entertainment as pedagogy (Lule, 2018). Similarly, Neusner (1993) argued that to teach unsupported by one’s own research was to act as “not a scholar but a dilettante, a politician of ideas, a dealer in manufactured and ready-made notions” (p. 1D). In essence, he asserted, good performers—say, for instance, unemployed actors—could stand in front of a classroom and performatively teach from notes or textbooks. Education deserves better.

References

- AAUP. (2020). Timeline of the first 100 years. *AAUP*. <https://www.aaup.org/about/history/timeline-first-100-years>
- AAUP. (2021). 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure with 1970 Interpretive Comments. *AAUP*. <https://www.aaup.org/file/1940%20>

Statement.pdf

- Alf, B. (26 November 2020). I published a fake paper in a ‘peer-reviewed’ journal. *Undark*. <https://undark.org/2020/11/26/fake-paper-predatory-journal/>
- Brezgov, D. (16 August, 2019). David Publishing Company, a massive spammer from China. *Opptrends*. <https://scholarlyoa.com/david-publishing-company-a-massive-spammer-from-china/>
- Butler, D. (2013). Investigating journals: The dark side of publishing. *Nature* 495: 433–435. <https://doi.org/10.1038/495433a>
- Drozdzowski, M. J. (5 March, 2021). What is tenure? A look at the past, present, and future. *Best Colleges*. <https://www.bestcolleges.com/blog/what-is-tenure/>
- Duke Today Staff. (2 February, 2021). Duke’s research expenditures exceed \$1.2 billion. *Duke Today*. <https://today.duke.edu/2021/02/dukes-research-expenditures-exceed-12-billion-latest-federal-data>
- FGCU. (2021). Discover our unique campus and living labs for learning. *Florida Gulf Coast University*. <https://www.fgcu.edu/about/>
- Gittleman, S. (29 October, 2015). Tenure is disappearing. But it’s what made American universities the best in the world. *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2015/10/29/tenure-is-disappearing-but-its-what-made-american-universities-the-best-in-the-world/>
- Grimes, W. (10 October, 2016). Jacob Neusner, Judaic scholar who forged interfaith bonds, dies at 84. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/11/us/jacob-neusner-judaic-scholar-who-forged-interfaith-bonds-dies-at-84.html>
- Hubler, S. (2 November, 2020). Colleges slash budgets in the pandemic. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/26/us/colleges-coronavirus-budget-cuts.html>
- Interfolio Team. (7 November, 2019). Everything you need to know about academic tenure. *Interfolio*. <https://www.interfolio.com/resources/blog/everything-about-academic-tenure/>
- Lule, J. (17 November, 2018). On reading *Amusing ourselves to death*, chapter 10. *Medium*. <https://jacklule.medium.com/on-reading-amusing-ourselves-to-death-chapter-10-84b3101c4633>
- McQuarrie, F. A. E., Kondra, A. Z., & Lamertz, K. (2020). Do Tenure and Promotion Policies Discourage Publications in Predatory Journals? *University of Toronto Press Journals*, 51, 3: 165–181. <https://utpjournals.press/doi/abs/10.3138/jsp.51.3.01?journalCode=jsp>
- McMullen, C. (14 May, 2010). FSC brings back tenure system to lure best faculty. *The Ledger*. <https://www.theledger.com/article/LK/20100514/news/608079605/LL>

“Publish or Perish”

- Neusner, J. (28 February, 1993). The necessity of scholarship. *St. Petersburg Times*. <https://www.tampabay.com/archive/1993/02/28/the-necessity-of-scholarship/>
- Rait, R. S. (1931) [1912]. *Life in the Medieval University*. Cambridge University Press.
- Safi, M. (25 November, 2014). Journal accepts bogus paper requesting removal from mailing list. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2014/nov/25/journal-accepts-paper-requesting-removal-from-mailing-list>
- Schuman, R. (21 March, 2016). The end of research in Wisconsin. *Slate*. <https://slate.com/human-interest/2016/03/university-of-wisconsin-and-the-aftermath-of-destroying-professor-tenure.html>
- U.N. Staff. (23 June, 1997). If information and knowledge are central to democracy. *United Nations*. <https://www.un.org/press/en/1997/19970623.sgs6268.html>
- Utz, R. (13 October, 2020). Anatomy of an academic genre. *Inside Higher Ed*. <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/10/13/advice-chairs-how-write-effective-tenure-and-promotion-letter-opinion>

“Publish or Perish”：米国の大学の テニユア制度考察

秋 田 貴美子

概 要

米国の大学教員採用は、テニユア取得系 (tenure track) とテニユア無し系 (non-tenure track) の2種類に分かれる。前者はテニユア (終身雇用) を目指す専任教員で、後者は毎年契約更新が必要な任期付き教員、非常勤講師、客員教授などである。テニユア取得系採用者は、Tenure-track Assistant Professor として着任し、毎年厳しい業績審査を受け、業績を積み上げた後 (着任5-7年目)、テニユア審査 (T&P: Tenure & Promotion) に臨む。この審査は非常に厳しく、合格者は Tenured Associate Professor に昇進し、終身雇用が保証されるが、不合格者は解雇される。テニユア取得した Associate Professor は終身雇用を確保した後は、Professor への昇進を目指さず、Associate Professor の職位のまま定年を迎える者も多い。

テニユア取得には、バランスが良い「3本脚の椅子」の原理が不可欠と言われる。研究者の3つの業績：①研究、②教育、③サービス (学内の様々な委員任務) が、椅子を支える3本脚を意味する。脚が軟弱だと、椅子は立ってられない、つまり昇進できないという比喩である。本研究では、最初に「3本脚の椅子」の各脚の違いを解明し、3本の中で最も重要な「研究業績」を考察する。“Publish or Perish” (出版せざるものは破滅すべし) とよく言われるが、テニユア取得系教員は自分の専門研究分野で有力な研究ジャーナル (著名な研究者たちの査読付き) に毎年1-2本論文を出版する必要がある。

テニユア審査は、internal reviewers (学内評価委員) と external reviewers (学外評価委員) が行う。まず学科内で、既にテニユア取得をした教員 (テニユア取得済み准教授以上) 全員が internal reviewers になる。この者たちは候補者の授業を見学し、主に候補者の教育に関する評価をする。次に、候補者の分野で著名な研究者2-10名を学外から選ぶ。学科長がこの著名な研究者たちに候補者の研究業績の評価の依頼をする。この著名な研究者たちが external reviewers と呼ばれる。審査は、学科長、そして学部長の判断が出た後、学内の全学部から選ばれたテニユア取得済みの教員で構成される評価委員会を確認し、最終判断は学長に委ねられ、学長が合否判定を下す。

“Publish or Perish”

本論文では、テニユア制度の歴史を調べ、テニユア取得のための3本脚の中で最も重要とされている「研究業績」が、米国の大学の教育、研究、運営でどのような役割を果たしてきたかを考察した。「大学教員は優れた研究者でなければならない。研究者は自分の研究で得た最新の、最高の知識を世の中に生み出す使命がある。また、他人の研究結果や知識を教えてばかりいるのではなく、自分の研究で得た最新の、最高の知識を学生に教えなければならない。これが大学教育である。」という考えに基づき、テニユア制度が続いてきたが、これを脅かす様々な問題が生じている。例えば、テニユア取得系教員がハゲタカジャーナル (predatory journals) の被害に遭うこともある。候補者とは研究分野が全く違う教員がテニユア審査をすることもあり得る。この他、州政府から大学への助成金が削減され、テニユア取得した教員が解雇されることも起こり得る。大学運営のコスト削減のために、「大学教員は教育だけに専念し、研究をする必要はない。テニユア制度は廃止すべきだ。」という意見もある。