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A Survey of Accounting Faculty Perceptions Regarding Tenure and Post-Tenure Review

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ABSTRACT

Attaining tenure is a goal of every faculty member. Indeed, at the beginning of every faculty member's career, there is concern regarding the process of earning tenure. Many factors enter into the tenure decision, but most universities place weight on three primary factors: teaching effectiveness, research activity, and demonstration of service to the university and beyond. The relative importance of these three factors varies, but most universities expect "satisfactory" performance in all three areas. One of the historical reasons for faculty tenure is to protect academic freedom. Once tenure was attained, a faculty member's academic freedom was considered safe. Recent developments in academia, however, are challenging the safety of both tenure and academic freedom. Some universities have implemented a post-tenure review process that subjects a faculty member to continuing, periodic review. Some argue that this process impedes a faculty member's academic freedom. Since the university is considered "locked" into an agreement to retain a tenured faculty member, the faculty member has been under little obligation for further development, except for a self-imposed or professional obligation. The rationale behind post-tenure review is to demand a continuing responsibility of a faculty member to participate in faculty growth. The paper will gather and analyze accounting faculty perceptions regarding post-tenure.

KEY WORDS

Tenure, post-tenure review, educators, accounting, faculty

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1. Introduction

Attaining tenure is a goal of every faculty member. Indeed, at the beginning of every faculty member's career, there is concern regarding the process of earning tenure. Many factors enter into the tenure decision, but most universities place weight on three primary factors: teaching effectiveness, research activity, and demonstration of service to the university and beyond. The relative importance of these three factors varies, but most universities expect "satisfactory" performance in all three areas.

One of the historical reasons for faculty tenure is to protect academic freedom. Once tenure was attained, a faculty member's academic freedom was considered safe. Recent developments in academia, however, are challenging the safety of both tenure and academic freedom. Some universities have implemented a post-tenure review process that subjects a faculty member to continuing, periodic review. The result of this process is argued to impede a faculty member's academic freedom.

Since the university is considered “locked” into an agreement to retain a tenured faculty member, the faculty member has been under little obligation for further development, except for a self-imposed or professional obligation. The rationale behind post-tenure review is to demand a continuing responsibility of a faculty member to participate in faculty growth. The paper will gather and analyze accounting faculty perceptions regarding post-tenure review.

2. Literature review

The concept of tenure is derived from early German universities and is embodied in current American academic culture. Proponents of tenure believe that tenure is necessary to provide the academic freedom that is needed by college and university professors to fully develop their ideas, engage in public debate, and encourage students in learning and intellectual pursuits. Opponents of tenure, on the other hand, argue that a grant that assures lifetime employment is inappropriate, particularly in times when the private sector has no such grantees and in fact where downsizing and uncertainty regarding continued employment is in question (Sanders, 2001).

According to the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), academic freedom entails, in part:

a.) ...full freedom in research and in the publication of the results, subject to the adequate performance of their other academic duties...

b.) ...freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject, but they should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter which has no relation to their subject...

c.) College and university teachers are citizens ... When they speak or write as citizens, they should be free from institutional censorship or discipline...¹

A principal tenet of academic freedom is that there must be free discussion in order to develop ideas, which are at the heart of teaching. Scholarship can not flourish in an atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust. Teachers and students must be free to inquire, to study, and to evaluate.

At the core of academic freedom is the First Amendment right of free speech. Due to the nature of academics, public comments by university professors are frequently at the core of disputes. Although the right of free speech is guaranteed under the Constitution, academic freedom is not a license for uncontrolled expression that is at variance with established curricular contents and internally destructive to the proper functioning of an institution. This limit is addressed in *Clark v. Holmes*, which considered the case of a temporary substitute teacher who refused to follow the directives of a department head and senior faculty and the content and method of instruction of **his** course, as well as “belittling” other staff to his students. The court ruled that the instructor had exceeded **his** freedom (Sanders, 2001).

2.1. Tenure

Tenure is normally achieved through performance in three areas: teaching, research, and service. Many faculty view writing for publication as a necessary evil of pursuing tenure, but the research process can have its own rewards. In addition, writing for publication should never be separate from teaching, according to Kenneth T. Henson, Dean of Education at the Citadel. Rather than taking time and energy away from teaching, the process of writing an article can help crystallize ideas that apply to an instructor’s classes as well as amplifying the feeling of connection

¹ American Association of University Professors, 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure with 1970 Interpretive Comments.

that comes with sharing insights with students (Reviewing Post-Tenure Review; Publishing and Teaching; Too Many Honorary Degrees; Neighborhood Decline, 2003).

A tenure decision, which typically comes at the end of six years' probationary service, usually leads to a much longer period of guaranteed contract renewal. Tenure creates a presumption of an individual's excellence. Many opponents of tenure question whether the institution and its public receive enough benefit from a faculty member to guarantee employment for the next "thirty-years" regardless of the rigor of the probationary review (Johnson and Kelley, 1998).

In law, tenure is a property right to a position extended by a state and protected by the due process provision of the Fourteenth Amendment. The strength of a tenure system lies in its protection of faculty who take unpopular positions or whose professional reputation has been achieved by means other than the administration's definition of faculty success. However, following adequate due process, faculty can be terminated from a tenure position for demonstrated financial exigency, programmatic discontinuance, medical incapacity, and forms faculty malfeasance, such as professional incompetence or moral turpitude. Because relatively few tenured faculty members—about 50—are dismissed for cause each year, many question whether the academy is effectively screening tenured ranks. Under the rules of tenure, the failure to remain intellectually engaged merits termination after due review and corrective efforts (Johnson and Kelley, 1998).

If tenure is to survive, it can not be seen "as an end in itself" or as "a personal entitlement" that evokes sinecurism. Rather, it must be understood as protecting the freedom of investigation and the search for truth. If universities are to meaningfully consider the public's concern, teaching effectiveness must receive major attention. Although publication is the most consistent and objective discriminator of a faculty member's success, institutional success depends on clearer articulation and communication of the teaching mission. If faculties are unable to convince the public of the effectiveness of its self-policing process, it is quite possible that tenure reform will eventually abolish tenure. The abandonment of tenure, however, is not likely to bring the advantages assumed by those who criticize it. In fact, the services offered by those faculty members will be lost as they become replaced with temporary contract faculty (Johnson and Kelley, 1998).

An argument for tenure's preservation is the reciprocal bond of tenure between the individual and the whole institution that serves as the most effective basis of a community capable of long-term commitment to a shared mission. There are three characteristics that allow tenure to serve this role. First, tenure helps us define our work in collaborative terms. One of the original purposes of tenure was to create a bond of mutual benefit among faculty members coupled with a bond between the individual and the institution. In recent years, some view faculty as a collection of individuals bound only by a parking lot, a common pay source, and a class schedule. However, those who hold tenure have a responsibility to act as steward for the entire college or university and to place the work of the individual—including those who are ineligible for tenure—within the context of that whole institution. Second, tenure is a concept that has value and meaning only when it is attached to a specific community that is committed to a distinct mission. The community determines the character of the institution and has a major impact on the values associated with the degree it grants. Tenure is often mistakenly assumed to be attached to a department, a discipline, or a school. However, most tenure policies make it clear that tenure is linked to the entire college or university. Finally, tenure is a matter of mutual trust and responsibility. These attributes are manifest in a college's or university's system of shared governance (Plater, 2001).

2.2. Annual Review

Regardless of the profession, there is a rebuttable presumption of an individual's professional excellence. However, review for cause has long been an acceptable means of reviewing a faculty member's proper fulfillment of duties. In fact, a common public perception is that, once tenured, faculties are immune to further review or assessment. Colleges and universities have long addressed the question of adequate performance of tenured faculty by a process called the annual review. The annual review is intended to evaluate all faculties for purposes of salary increments, promotion, and job performance. An effective system of annual review assumes rigor in its application, just as the tenure system assumes rigor in the probationary review (Johnson and Kelly, 1998).

Examples of how annual reviews are conducted vary widely. Professors at Northeastern University are reviewed each year for merit raises. Those who perform poorly simply get low raises or non at all. A proposed policy at Northeastern would evaluate a faculty member's performance in three areas: research, teaching, and service. A sub par performance in any of the three areas would expose the tenured professor to termination. Professors who receive poor merit ratings two years in a row would be counseled by a three-faculty community that would craft a plan aimed at helping the professor improve his or her performance. If, after two follow-up reviews, the committee determined that the faculty member's performance was still sub par in any area the university could take steps to fire the tenured professor (Wilson, 2001).

2.3. Post-Tenure review

In recent years, colleges and universities have faced increased educational costs and greater demands focused on outcomes. As a result, public sentiment and legislative intervention have demanded accountability from colleges and universities. One facet of this accountability is the academy's responsibility to defend the tenured status of unproductive and underperforming faculty (Johnson and Kelly, 1998). The demand so far has been for tenure reform rather than its abolition. The implementation of post-tenure review has been aimed at preventing something worse occurring—the abolishment of tenure all together (Edwards, 1997). Post-tenure review is a practice that the academy has instituted to pacify the public and legislators. Post-tenure review constitutes a review of tenured faculty, absent cause, in order to address issues on productivity (Trower, 1996).

Edwards (1997) suggests that a system of post-tenure review that is both effective and supports the spirit of critical inquiry that tenure is supposed to nurture has several dimensions. First, post-tenure review should sustain the faculty's habit of critical inquiry. Second, the process should be faculty-owned, faculty-driven, and mainly faculty-operated. Third, the process should be narrowly focused on certain faculty. Fourth, the process should help faculty who are seeking aid and identify poor or unacceptable performance.

Post-tenure review was initiated at the University of Hawaii in 1981 and has rapidly become popular (Kaller, 2000). According to the Higher Education association in 2003, post-tenure review policies are in place or are being developed at public institutions in 37 states; approximately 48 percent of private institutions endorse a post-tenure review system according to 2000 study by Harvard University (Fogg, 2003).

Post-tenure review generally follows one of two models: professional or punitive. The model of post-tenure review that incorporates correction is often described as the "professional" model. The psychological literature provides ample support to positive reinforcement, such as the feedback from post-tenure review conducted according to the professional model (Johnson and Kelly, 1998). Most in the academy believe that post-tenure review should first be corrective. That

is, the design of post-tenure review is to help professors improve their performance rather than getting rid of them otherwise. Accordingly, any linkage with “dismissal” language would be inconsistent with the spirit and purpose of such reviews. In fact, the AAUP approved guidelines for post-tenure review policies in 1998 that excluded the possibility of dismissal for poor-performing professors (Wilson, 2001). Moreover, the AAUP has been on record since 1983 as believing that post-tenure review of faculty would bring scant benefit (Altman and Allan, 1999).

Under the “punitive” model, faculty may be terminated because of poor performance. For years professors have faced criticism from those who view tenure simply as job security, and sabbaticals as paid vacations. The post-tenure review process must have not only rewards but consequences. That means some faculty could lose their positions as a result of poor reviews. Tenure was created to protect academic freedom, not to guarantee continuing employment for chronically poorly performing faculty (Magner, 1999).

Based on other studies and their own findings, Patriquin et.al. (2003) argue that externally mandated post-tenure review has failed in its primary objective to motivate professors. They assert that for post-tenure review to become an effective policy, faculty and administrators must devise processes that deliver meaningful feedback, rewards, and recognition for solid faculty performance and that tie institutionally supported professional development to tangible outcomes.

The Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) proposed a review of tenured professor that initially sent shockwaves throughout its faculty. Its President, Albert J. Simone, announced that the institution needed a way to force out underperforming professors. He envisioned rigorous reviews every five years for all tenured faculties. Professors immediately decried the idea. Nearly half the faculty signed a petition opposing the concept. The expected battle between faculty members and the administration, however, was avoided by a compromise that turned dissenters into believers. This compromise, called Faculty Evaluation and Development (FEAD), offers to help both successful faculty members and those who fall short. Professors do not consider the FEAD program a post-tenure review, but the program accomplishes the same thing. In conjunction with a beefed-up annual review policy, the program allows administrators to weed out professors who have fallen behind in their teaching, research, or service, and gives them the chance—and the resources—to get back on track. Each year, RIT’s program has about \$300,000 for faculty development grants (Fogg, 2003).

Drexel University also has a system of post-tenure review that its professors love. They like it because the system is crafted by the faculty itself, rather than imposed from above, and because it gives professors the tools—such as personal attention and travel to conferences—to meet professional goals. The process is also voluntary. At the end of the three-year process, whose terms are tailored to each faculty members’ aspirations, gives participants a raise in base pay. The program focuses on renewal rather than on review. Many faculties perceive the program as being a rejuvenator. Drexel’s policy was designed to avoid the kind of punitive, top-down policies that are instituted at places like the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, whose policy makes reviews mandatory and can ultimately lead to disciplinary action or even dismissal (When is Post-Tenure Review Not Post-Tenure Review?, 2001).

Under a proposed post-tenure review policy for the University of Missouri system, professors would be reviewed on five-year cycles based on a compilation of annual reviews. The professor would be rated either as satisfactory or unsatisfactory depending on the results of the review. If the professor is assigned an unsatisfactory score, then he or she would undergo a process to boost his performance. The process is a three-year development plan to help the professor improve his evaluation scores and ability to teach effectively. Of course, these measures are only taken when a tenured professor is under strict review, but both administrators and

faculty estimate that only a small fraction of tenured professors would ever be affected by any post-tenure review policy (Shields, 2000).

The University of Missouri’s proposal, if adopted, would either eliminate academic freedom or protect it, depending on whom you ask. This proposal was formed to develop a review policy that was “not onerous or overly bureaucratic.” In addition, administrators desired to create a plan “before someone else did it for us.” Though initiated by administrators, the proposal was to be created by the faculty. Faculty who do not perform satisfactorily must improve over the next three years, or they could be fired. The decision would be made by a Committee on Tenure and Promotion and the vice-president or provost for academic affairs. Many admit that the plan would appear to be fair on paper, but its application produced unexpected adverse results. The process did not have the proper checks and balances in place to ensure that people were being judged on performance and that politics would not be involved (Kaller, 2000).

Kansas State University has undergone recent dismissal proceedings stemming from its post-tenure review policy. Under the university’s post-tenure review process, a professor was dismissed after receiving unsatisfactory performance evaluations two years in a row. Students complained that he repeatedly missed classes. Accordingly, the committee terminated the professor. Predictably, the professor took the matter to court. However, a state-court judge upheld the decision of university officials (Wilson, 2002).

3. Data

The data in this study is based on a mail survey designed to assess perceptions regarding tenure and post-tenure review. The survey, which was designed to obtain faculty perceptions regarding tenure and post-tenure review, was mailed to a random sample of 180 faculty members throughout the United States. Responses from 54 faculties were collected, representing a response rate of 30 percent. Their responses were coded and evaluated using the Statistical Analysis System (SAS).

4. Results

Table 1 presents mean perception ratings by faculty to eleven statements regarding tenure. Of the eleven statements, respondents most strongly agreed that tenure shields faculty who are not productive (4.04). Other statements on which faculty generally agreed include: the absence of tenure outside academe fuels criticism of the tenure system (3.81), and the tenure system exists to protect academic freedom (3.63). Of the eleven statements, respondents most strongly disagreed that tenure should assure future salary increases (1.98). Other statements on which faculty generally disagreed include: use of part-time and non-tenure track personnel erodes the tenure system (2.43) and tenure guarantees that a faculty member’s salary will not be decreased (2.47). Faculties were more neutral (2.50 – 3.50) toward the remaining five statements. Significant differences to statements two and four exist when viewed by job function and for statements eight and eleven when viewed according to whether the faculty’s university has a post-tenure review process.

Table 1. Summary of perceptions about tenure in general

(1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree)

Statements Regarding Tenure	Mean Response	Significant of Difference According to:				
		Accreditation Status	Job Function	Academic Rank	Tenured Status	Post-Tenure Review Process
Tenure is a lifetime guarantee of a job.	3.26	.19	.25	.34	.52	.24

Statements Regarding Tenure	Mean Response	Significant of Difference According to:				
		Accreditation Status	Job Function	Academic Rank	Tenured Status	Post-Tenure Review Process
The tenure system exists to protect academic freedom.	3.63	.85	.07	.34	.95	.22
Use of part-time and non-tenure track personnel erodes the tenure system.	2.43	.26	.66	.21	.38	.52
Tenure guarantees that a faculty member's salary will not be decreased.	2.47	.81	.07	.37	.92	.49
The increasing numbers of corporate universities are forcing change in tenure policies at traditional universities.	2.83	.24	.34	.64	.60	.98
The present tenure system fails to reward outstanding faculty members.	2.89	.29	.89	.98	.91	.46
Tenure shields faculty who are not productive	4.04	.20	.22	.57	.54	.18
Tenure is an outdated system.	2.75	.63	.61	.54	.33	.02
The demise of tenure would be the death knell of the American academy.	2.67	.47	.94	.13	.59	.40
Tenure should assure future salary increases.	1.98	.12	.18	.95	.40	.31
The absence of tenure outside academe fuels criticism of the tenure system.	3.81	.22	.63	.34	.92	.08

Table 2 presents mean perception ratings by faculty to eight statements regarding tenure at his or her university. Of the eight statements, faculty most strongly agreed that the length of time before tenure review is about right (4.06). Other statement on which faculty generally agreed include: the tenure process at my university is sufficiently rigorous (3.89), it is more difficult to achieve tenure at my university today than it was ten years ago (3.81), and grade inflation is prevalent at my university (3.68). Of the eight statements, faculty most strongly disagreed that the pre-tenure period is too short at my university (1.85). Faculty perception ratings were more neutral for the remaining three statements.

Table 2. Summary of perceptions about tenure at respondents' universities

(1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree)

Statements Regarding Tenure	Mean Response	Significant of Difference According to:				
		Accreditation Status	Job Function	Academic Rank	Tenured Status	Post-Tenure Review Process
The length of time before tenure review is about right at my school.	4.06	.76	.47	.94	.30	.03
Pre-tenure research requirements at my university are too vague.	2.77	.19	.24	.42	.24	.39
The trend at my university is to hire fewer tenure-track faculty and more temporary or adjunct faculty.	2.98	.13	.38	.55	.78	.82
The pre-tenure period is too short at my university.	1.85	.93	.00	.21	.02	.10
At my university, a faculty member is rarely denied tenure.	2.60	.02	.05	.71	.35	.66
Grade inflation is prevalent at my university.	3.68	.93	.38	.28	.45	.74

Statements Regarding Tenure	Mean Response	Significant of Difference According to:				
		Accreditation Status	Job Function	Academic Rank	Tenured Status	Post-Tenure Review Process
It is more difficult to achieve tenure at my university today than it was ten years ago.	3.81	.84	.55	.24	.34	.14
The tenure process at my university is sufficiently rigorous.	3.89	.00	.50	.26	.00	.21

Table 3 presents mean ratings by faculty to thirteen statements about post-tenure review. Faculty most strongly agreed that post-tenure review can be an effective strategy for increasing public trust in higher education (3.90). Other statements on which faculty generally agreed include: post-tenure review is essential if the integrity of tenure is to be maintained (3.88), universities should do a better job of evaluating faculty (3.85), post-tenure review will provide useful guidance for faculty members who are failing to perform adequately (3.73), post-tenure review should not be used as a re-evaluation of tenured status (3.63), and post-tenure review should permit the dismissal of a non-productive faculty member (3.51). Faculty members most strongly disagreed that post-tenure review threatens academic freedom (2.17). Faculty perception ratings were more neutral for the remaining six statements. Significant differences to statements three, six, and eight when viewed according to job function, to statement ten when viewed according to accreditation status and statements nine and thirteen when viewed according to whether the faculty's university has a post-tenure review process.

Table 3. Summary of perceptions about post-tenure review

(1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree)

Statements Regarding Post-Tenure Review	Mean Response	Significant of Difference According to:				
		Accreditation Status	Job Function	Academic Rank	Tenured Status	Post-Tenure Review Process
Post-tenure review is essential if the integrity of tenure is to be maintained.	3.88	.21	.52	.24	.96	.72
Post-tenure review threatens academic freedom.	2.17	.69	.86	.14	.73	.37
Post-tenure review can be an effective strategy for increasing public trust in higher education.	3.90	.11	.03	.48	.89	.80
Post-tenure review should only occur if triggered by certain events.	2.90	.75	.64	.86	.58	.19
The creation of a post-tenure review is an attack on tenure itself.	2.54	.73	.45	.71	.66	.36
Post-tenure review will do little more than produce additional paperwork.	2.73	.12	.00	.60	.86	.14
Tenure means nothing if faculty members must constantly submit to evaluations in which they could lose their tenure.	3.22	.24	.69	.53	.19	.27
Universities should do a better job of evaluating faculty.	3.85	.78	.00	.76	.68	.61
Post-tenure review should not be used as a re-evaluation of tenured status	3.63	.86	.38	.07	.66	.07
Post-tenure review will help						

Statements Regarding Post-Tenure Review	Mean Response	Significant of Difference According to:				
		Accreditation Status	Job Function	Academic Rank	Tenured Status	Post-Tenure Review Process
effective faculty members perform even better.	3.21	.09	.34	.73	.84	.31
Post-tenure reviews will provide useful guidance for faculty members who are failing to perform adequately.	3.73	.40	.84	.38	.58	.71
Post-tenure reviews will turn tenure into multi-year contracts.	2.77	.86	.52	.15	.26	.15
Post-tenure review should permit the dismissal of a non-productive faculty member.	3.51	.83	.63	.54	.26	.08

Table 4 reports the mean rankings by faculty for six factors that are often considered in the tenure decision. The first column of rankings reflects faculty perceptions regarding how important a factor *is* in the tenure decision. The second column reflects faculty perception regarding how important a factor *should be* in the tenure decision. As column one shows, quantity of research (2.24), ratings on student evaluations (2.86), and quality of research (3.05) are the three most important factors in the tenure decision. As column two reflects, quality of research (2.41), non-student perception of teaching effectiveness (3.07), and quantity of research (3.24) are the three most important factors in how the tenure decision should be made. Notably, the correlation coefficients indicate that significant differences exist for all six factors regarding how important the factor is in relation to how important the factor should be.

Table 4. Importance of factors in the tenure decision

(1 = Most Important; 6 = Least Important)

Factor	Average Importance Ranking of Factor:		Significance of correlation
	<i>Is</i>	<i>Should Be</i>	
Quality of Research	3.05	2.41	.00
Quantity of Research	2.24	3.24	.00
Collegiality With Other Faculty	4.40	4.27	.00
Non-student Perception of Teaching Effectiveness	3.71	3.07	.00
Ratings on Student Evaluations	2.86	3.44	.02
Service	4.74	4.56	.00

Conclusions

Generally, faculty agrees with the general public that tenure may shield unproductive faculty and that the absence of tenure outside academe fuels criticism of the tenure system. In addition, faculty does not believe that tenure should effect compensation. Also, faculty believes that the tenure process is about the right length and is sufficiently rigorous at his or her university.

Based on the respondents in this study, faculty believes that the tenure process places too great of importance on quantity of research and too little of importance on quality of research. Regarding teaching effectiveness, faculty believes that ratings on student evaluations carry more weight than is appropriate; conversely, faculty believes that non-student teaching effectiveness carries less weight than it should. Faculty generally believe that collegiality with other faculty does not and should not carry significant weight in the tenure process.

Based on the respondents in this study, faculty is generally supportive of post-tenure review. They believe that post-tenure review is important in increasing public trust; however, they believe that universities should do a better job of evaluating faculty. Contrary to popular opinion, these faculties disagree that post-tenure review threatens academic freedom.

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