

**MUFA**

SINCE 1951



McMASTER UNIVERSITY  
FACULTY ASSOCIATION

# Guidance for Faculty Members – Tenure and Promotion

## **MUFA Tenure Representative**

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(posted on web site with permission)

# **‘ADVICE TO NEW FACULTY MEMBERS TO INCREASE YOUR CHANCES OF GETTING TENURE’**

- **MUFA website – updated version**
- **Advice based on consultations with faculty members at McMaster.**
  - **Neither complete nor does it have any official standing.**
  - **But, it may be useful.**

- **Many people focus on the endpoint of the tenure process – what happens when your case ‘goes up,’ forgetting that tenure really is a process that starts from the first day of your appointment.**

# **Topics Covered in Advice:**

- 1. Getting Ready**
- 2. Publications and Research**
- 3. The Process**
- 4. A Note About Teaching**
- 5. Some Final Thoughts**

# 1. Getting Ready

- **Transparency valued in tenure process**
  - **policies to ensure that cases considered on the basis of merit alone**
- **Read and understand McMaster's tenure policy and procedures**
- **Know your rights and responsibilities**
  - **MUFA Faculty Handbook**
  - **Policy and Regulations in Respect to Academic Appointment, Tenure and Promotion (rev. 2007) (\*often referred to as the '*yellow document*')**

- **Know where you can find help along the way**
  - **MUFA Executive - Tenure Committee Rep**
    - to give advice and help ensure that proper procedure followed
  - **departmental chair**
    - guiding individual through the process
  - **faculty dean**
  - **tenured colleagues**
    - themselves have been through the process.

- **Be sure that vita formatting is consistent with regulations:**
  - **SPS 15 Curriculum Vitae Guidelines**
  - **any existing departmental guidelines**
- **When in doubt, ask informed others about where to place information on your vita.**

- **Understand both department and broader disciplinary expectations for research and grant-getting productivity.**
- **External referees as disciplinary scholars and researchers from *outside* the McMaster University community**
- **Their assessment *counts*.**

- **Be aware of questions asked of the outside referees, for example:**

***e.g. Is the candidate's scholarship of a sufficient quality to be acceptable for tenure and/or promotion at your institution? Please explain the basis of your assessment of his or her scholarship. We recognize that scholarship/research is not the only criterion for tenure and/or promotion, but expect that it is the only one about which you have information. [\[SPS 13\]](#)***

- **Be strategic when writing 2 page research statement, e.g.:**
  - **Highlight significance of past research**
  - **Reveal intellectual growth since dissertation.**
  - **Outline future research plans.**
- **Take advantage of this opportunity to shine!**

- **Seek ongoing feedback about progress.**
- **Mentorship programs – ‘knowing the ropes’**
- **Get yearly written assessment of performance in research, teaching and service from your chair.**

- **Meet and discuss the assessment\*.**
- **\*it will have *no evidential value* when it comes to deciding on your tenure, but it is *useful feedback***
- **identifies areas your chair thinks need work, so you can do something about them in a timely way**

- **Illness or career interruption**
  - **get the duration and severity of illness documented**
- **If situation entitles you to take sick leave think seriously about taking advantage of it. [SPS 18.]**
  - **vs ‘Soldiering on’**
- **Only birth mothers can get pregnancy leave, whereas *all* parents, including adoptive parents, can get parental leave. [SPS 19]**

## 2. Publications and Research

- Know that *the timing of tenure is deceptive.*
- Tenure clock - six years
  - 'go up' for tenure in year five
  - publications go out to external tenure referees at the end of your fourth year for tenure case to be decided at the beginning of year five.

- ***timing* article submissions to peer reviewed journals and publishers.**
  - **time lag between submitting of an article and successful final publication**
- **external referees examine works that are ‘in press’ & ‘submitted for review,’**
  - **it’s always best to have works that are actually published in final form for them to examine when considering your file.**
- **As the saying goes, ‘*A bird in the hand...*’**

- **Submit research to peer-review process as soon as possible.**
  - **Don't postpone it.**
- **Learn about the various journals being submitted to**
  - **wait times, impact factors, and rejection rates**
  - **make informed decisions about where and when research ought to be submitted.**

- **It is unwise to tie your tenure to multi-year projects with publications that are projected far into the future.**
- **It is also unwise to tie tenure to the use of data over whose ownership may be disputed.**

# 3. The Process

- **Pay attention to details along the way:**
  - **e.g., Register objections and state reasons in writing if you do not agree with a name listed as a potential external referee [SPS 12 #2].**

- **If invited to speak to a T&P Committee, do not treat this invitation as a mere formality.**
- **It might be intending to recommend that your appointment be allowed to lapse.**
- **Be prepared to state the reasons why they should not make such a recommendation.**

- **You can take an advisor with you if you are invited to meet with the Faculty Committee.**
- **This advisor need *not* be at arm's length, and might very well be someone who is familiar with your publications and who can provide you with intellectual and emotional support.**

- **If you think that your departmental T&P committee and/or your dept chair is biased against you, don't ask higher administrative officials to change the procedure to compensate for this bias.**
  - **Better to rely on safeguards than to expect senior administration to invent a new procedure off the top of their heads that will be fair to all concerned.**

## 4. A Note About Teaching

- **Contrary to what some may have heard about research-intensive universities like McMaster, teaching *counts*.**
- **People with an impeccable body of publications can still be denied tenure if their teaching is not good enough.**

- **Understand and carefully follow the SPS 10 (rev. 2009) and SPS 15B (rev. 2009) regarding teaching excellence and the preparation of dossiers**

- **Create 1 page statement identifying and describing teaching philosophy.**
  - **take advantage of it!:**
    - **outline how teaching practices implement your philosophy**
    - **provide evidence of effectiveness of your teaching practice.**
    - **Highlight your significant contributions to the curriculum and pedagogy**

- **Speak to department chair about teaching effectiveness**
- **Use teaching dossier as an aid to frame the discussion**
- **Have any areas in need of improvement identified to you in writing so that you can attend to them.**

- **Pay close attention to teaching evaluations**
- **Know that peers will evaluate your teaching a number of times and in varied settings.**
- **Find out where your student evaluations sit in relation to the rest of your department.**

- **If your teaching evaluations are low relative to dept expectations:**
  - **take advantage of opportunities to improve your teaching provided by the CLL**
  - **If this helps improve your teaching ratings, record this fact in your teaching dossier.**

## 5. Some Final Thoughts

- **Going up for tenure can be a stressful experience, but *it needn't be.***
- **Taking an active, strategic, and thoughtful approach *helps a lot.***
- **Strive for developing excellence in teaching and research from the start of a tenure track, since that is the goal being pursued.**

- **Keep things in a *healthy perspective*:**
  - **Be *patient* with the process.**
  - **Talk to people who ‘know the ropes’ and *learn from them*.**
  - ***Manage stress* levels well; nourish your body, mind, and spirit.**

**And, get *plenty of sleep, eat good food, exercise, fun, rest, and relaxation*.**