



Inspiring Innovation and Discovery

## ADVICE TO NEW FACULTY MEMBERS TO INCREASE YOUR CHANCES OF GETTING TENURE MUFA Executive (Tenure)

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The following pieces of advice are based on consultations with faculty members in tenure cases. It is not a complete list of things to keep in mind when beginning a tenure track appointment at McMaster, nor does it have any official standing. But, you may find it 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.

### **Getting Ready**

The university values transparency in the tenure process and has policies in place to ensure that cases are considered on the basis of merit alone. Become informed about the tenure process *as soon as you begin* your tenure-track position to increase your chances of getting tenure down the road.

Prepare yourself by reading and understanding the university’s tenure policy and procedures. You can find this same information in two places – on the [University Secretariat Policy, Procedures & Guidelines website for Appointment, Tenure and Promotion](#) and also on the [MUFA website](#). This advice sheet will take you to the information on the MUFA website.

You should have a copy of the [MUFA Faculty Handbook](#) which you can access online or you can order a hard copy of it from the Bookstore.

Know your rights and obligations. They are laid out in the [Policy and Regulations in Respect to Academic Appointment, Tenure and Promotion](#) (rev. 2007) (often referred to as the ‘*yellow document*,’ since it was once printed on yellow paper) as well as the various [Supplementary Policy Statements \[SPS\]](#).

Know where you can find help along the way. There’s the [MUFA Executive Tenure Committee Representative](#), whose job is to give advice and help ensure that proper procedure has been followed in tenure cases. There’s also your departmental chair, who should be guiding you as you go through the process, as well as your dean. And, don’t forget your tenured colleagues, who themselves have been through the process.

Be sure that the formatting of your vita is consistent with regulations outlined in [SPS 15a Curriculum Vitae Guidelines](#) as well as any departmental guidelines that may exist. When in doubt, ask informed others about where to place information on your vita.

Have a good understanding of both department and broader disciplinary expectations for research and grant-getting productivity. Remember, external referees are disciplinary scholars and researchers from *outside* the McMaster university community. Their assessment counts. Take a look at [SPS 13 Guidelines for External Referees](#) to see the questions that are asked of

the referees when considering your case.

Make sure to use the two-page research statement that is provided to external referees according to [SPS 12 #4 Procedures for Selection of and Communication with External Referees](#). Use them to reveal your intellectual growth since your dissertation research. Highlight the significant features of your past research, and outline your future research plans. This is your opportunity to shine – take advantage of it!

Seek ongoing feedback about your progress. Every year in your tenure track, ask your chair for a written assessment of your performance in research, teaching and service. Then ask for a follow up meeting to discuss this written assessment. Your chair will find it easiest to prepare this written assessment during the preparation of the annual recommendation for your merit rating. Such assessments will have no evidential value when it comes to deciding on your tenure, but they are *useful feedback for you* about what areas your chair thinks you need to work on in time for you to do something about them before you go up for reappointment and tenure.

Many departments in various faculties have a mentorship program for tenure track faculty members. If you have one, consult your mentor on a regular basis. If you don't have one, seek to get one either formally or informally. It helps to have the advice of someone who 'knows the ropes.'

If, for some reason, you are still finishing up your PhD thesis when your appointment starts, you will be given a contractually limited appointment at the rank of lecturer, with automatic conversion to a tenure-track position at the rank of assistant professor when you complete the requirements for the PhD. Remember, any time spent on a dissertation is time taken away from your tenure-track teaching, research, and professional service. Ensure that your career starts out on the right foot.

Check your letter of appointment to make sure that you understand how much time you have on your 'tenure clock.' If for some reason your appointment begins at some date *other than* July 1, your tenure clock at McMaster starts on the first July 1 following the beginning of your appointment at McMaster.

Do not sign any documents without having read them thoroughly and understanding fully their implications regarding your tenure clock. If in doubt, consult.

If your letter of appointment gives you credit for previous service elsewhere, that means your case for tenure and promotion may be considered before the fifth year of your appointment without be treated as "accelerated" [see T&P Policy III 28 d]. This possibility of early consideration does not reduce the total number of years that you can remain at McMaster as an untenured Assistant Professor. This possible early consideration is not mandatory and the Department's tenure and promotion committee should consult with you to determine at the appropriate time if the case should be developed to be presented to the Faculty committee.

If you have an illness or career interruption during your probationary period that significantly and adversely affects your ability to do research and publish and/or to teach, make sure that you get documentation of the duration and severity of this illness and that this documentation is taken into account in the consideration of your case.

If your situation entitles you to take sick leave, and doing so would extend your clock, think seriously about taking this opportunity for a leave. ‘Soldiering on’ without taking a leave, when illness is taking time from your research activity, can cost you when it comes time to be considered for tenure. See [SPS 18 Guidelines regarding Leaves and Career Progress](#).

Only birth mothers are able to take pregnancy leave, whereas *all* parents, including adoptive parents, can get parental leave. Take advantage of the pregnancy/parental leave opportunity outlined in [SPS 19 Pregnancy/Parental Leave Policy for Faculty and Librarians](#). It complies with federal and provincial law and recognizes the role of *both* parents in childbirth, adoption and child rearing.

If some unusual action is taken with respect to your pre-tenure period, such as extending the time limits or a consideration of your case (‘stopping the clock’), make sure that all the procedures in the University’s policy are followed exactly. Related to this, do not sign any documents without having read them thoroughly and understanding fully their implications regarding your tenure clock. If in doubt, consult.

### **Publications and Research**

Know that *the timing of tenure is deceptive*. This has repercussions for your publications and research. The tenure clock is six years and you ‘go up’ for tenure in year five, but how long do you have to produce the publications you need to get tenure? Fewer than four years from the start of your six-year clock. Your publications will go out to external tenure referees at the end of your fourth year for your tenure case to be decided at the beginning of year five.

Also, keep an eye on the *timing* of your submission of articles to peer reviewed journals and publishers. Don’t forget that typically there is some time lag between the submission of an article and its final publication if it is successful, and while your tenure external referees will be examining works that are ‘in press’ and ‘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...’

With this in mind, it’s a good idea to submit your research to the peer-review process as soon as possible. Don’t postpone the submission of work to journals, presses, and their external referees. Learn about the journals that you are sending your research to - their wait times, impact factors, and rejection rates - so you can make informed decisions about where and when your 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 your tenure to the use of data over whose ownership you may find yourself in a dispute.

### **The Process**

You will have the opportunity to view the list of potential external referees for your tenure case according to [SPS 12 #2 Procedures for Selection of and Communication with External Referees](#). Register your objections and state your reasons in writing if you do not agree with a

name listed.

If you are invited to speak to your Departmental or Faculty Tenure and Promotion Committee when it is considering a recommendation for your reappointment or tenure, do not treat this invitation as a mere formality. The reason could be that the committee intends to recommend that your appointment be allowed to lapse. Be prepared to explain and show the committee why they should not make such a recommendation.

You are allowed to 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.

McMaster is a community of supportive scholars but if you think that your departmental tenure and promotion committee and/or your departmental chair is biased against you, don't ask higher administrative officials to change the procedure to compensate for this bias. There are safeguards in the procedure against bias, and it is better to rely on those safeguards than to expect the senior administration to invent a new procedure off the top of their heads that will be fair to all concerned.

### **A Note about Teaching**

Contrary to what you may have heard about research-intensive universities like McMaster, teaching counts. It counts a lot. You can have an impeccable body of publications and still be denied tenure on the grounds that your teaching is not good enough.

Be sure to understand and carefully follow the [SPS 10 Policy on the Encouragement of Teaching Excellence](#) (rev. 2009) and [SPS 15B The Preparation of Dossiers for Tenure and/or Promotion](#) (rev. 2009). Make sure to include your (about one page) statement identifying and describing your teaching philosophy. In this, you should also outline how your teaching practices conscientiously implement your philosophy and provide evidence that your teaching practice is effective. Highlight the significant contributions to the curriculum and pedagogy that you have made. This one-page statement is another opportunity to shine – take advantage of it!

Make sure that the newly revised [SPS 10](#) (rev. 2009) guidelines are followed. Speak to your departmental chair about how the new rules demand more attention to peer evaluation. Peers are to evaluate your teaching a number of times and in varied settings. They should occur with more than one evaluator and more than one site or occasion of evaluation. Also, be sure that during annual reviews with your department chair that you have detailed discussions about your teaching effectiveness. The teaching dossier is an invaluable resource in framing the discussion. Have any areas of teaching weakness or areas in need of improvement identified to you in writing so that you can attend to them.

Every year, pay close attention to the student evaluations of your teaching. They count. Familiarize yourself with the questionnaire used, and the sorts of information about your teaching that it does and does not provide. Find out where your teaching ratings sit in relation to those found in the rest of the department.

If your teaching ratings are low relative to departmental expectations, it will help your case for tenure down the road if you can document that you took advantage of opportunities to improve your teaching provided by the [Centre for Leadership and Learning](#), particularly its [Resources for McMaster Educators](#). If you take advantage of these resources and opportunities and they help improve your teaching ratings, make sure that this fact is recorded in your teaching dossier. Seeking help to improve your teaching generally increases ratings.

### **Some Final Thoughts**

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

As you go along, keep things in a healthy perspective. Be patient with the process. Talk to people who 'know the ropes' and learn from them. Manage your stress levels well by nourishing your body, mind, and spirit. And, finally, get plenty of sleep, good food, exercise, fun, rest, and relaxation. These things really help.

Web links:

[University Secretariat Policy, Procedures & Guidelines website for Appointment, Tenure and Promotion](#) (<http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/facappt.htm>)

[MUFA website](#)

(<http://www.mcmaster.ca/mufa/>)

[MUFA Faculty Handbook](#)

(<http://www.mcmaster.ca/mufa/handbook/cover.htm>)

[Policy and Regulations in Respect to Academic Appointment, Tenure and Promotion \(2007\)](#)

([http://www.mcmaster.ca/univsec/policy/T&P\\_Policy\\_2007.pdf](http://www.mcmaster.ca/univsec/policy/T&P_Policy_2007.pdf)) [\*'yellow document']

[Supplementary Policy Statements \[SPS\]](#)

(<http://www.mcmaster.ca/mufa/handbook/AppendixC-sps.html>)

[MUFA Executive Tenure Committee Representative](#)

(<http://www.mcmaster.ca/mufa/MUFA%20Executive2008.pdf>)

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