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Marilyn Grady

University of Nebraska–Lincoln, mgrady1@unl.edu

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New Professors: Promotion and Tenure Issues

by Marilyn L. Grady, Ph.D.

The purpose of this manuscript is to report the findings of 25 years of observation, conversation, and study of the promotion and tenure challenges experienced by new or junior professors. New professors may encounter unique conditions as they begin their careers in higher education. As new professors share their "new learnings" about the professoriate, they uniformly report encountering a workplace that has no peer in the professional world. Based on these conversations with new professors about their experiences as they sought promotion and tenure, the following "tips" are offered to those who are new to the role of professor.

Introduction

When a professor joins a department or unit, she may be surprised to realize that the promotion and tenure experiences of the faculty members in that department or unit may not have been uniform. For instance, the oldest members of the department simply may have been informed that it was "time" for them to be tenured and promoted. These individuals may have never published in refereed journals. They may not have been required to prepare promotion and tenure materials for review. Their tenure decisions may not have been reviewed by peers or committees. These individuals were simply "tapped" for promotion. They may have been the beneficiaries of the "Old Boys Network."

Other faculty members may have been tenured at a "different time" in the institution's history. Changes in expectations for promotion and tenure are continuous. Changes in faculty membership, changes in department and college promotion and tenure committees, changes in deans or vice chancellors for academic affairs

may precipitate changes in expectations. University regents or governance boards as well as legislative initiatives may influence changes in expectations.

Shifting emphases on number of publications, types of publications, research grants, amount of service, or focus on teaching may cause changes in expectations. In some institutions, excellence in teaching is sufficient for tenure and promotion. Faculty in a department may have very different and unequal publication records. Faculty may be appointed and given different assignments that do not involve significant research and writing expectations. Sometimes these "special assignments" are honored in the promotion and tenure process. In other instances, these individuals may be held to two different sets of standards. They may be held to their special assignment standards and then to the same expectations as other college faculty members.

These differences in the faculty may leave the new professor in a very lonely situation. The new professor may encounter faculty colleagues who have no publication records; there may be faculty members with no research skills; faculty members with no experience as journal editors or members of editorial review boards; and there may be faculty members who make no presentations at the annual national meetings of professional associations. Although the faculty in these departments may be supportive of the new faculty member's quest for promotion and tenure, these individuals may not be able to offer any "real" assistance to the new professor. New professors may feel isolated or extremely lonely while surrounded by professors of "good will" who possess few "tricks of the trade."

New professors may encounter these situations and many other unique conditions as they

begin their careers in higher education. As new professors share their "new learnings" about the professoriate, they uniformly report encountering a workplace that has no peer in the professional world. Based on these conversations with new professors about their experiences as they sought promotion and tenure, the following "Tips" are offered to those who are new to the role of professor.

Know The Expectations

For individuals hired as professors, it is essential to know the expectations. Each professor is hired with a unique set of expectations. As one assumes the professoriate, one recognizes that the expectations change from one generation of untenured professors to the next. This truth is revealed as the histories of a department's professors are examined. Even professors hired at the same time may have different performance expectations. Different individuals are hired to accomplish different institutional objectives. Cahn's (1993) *Saints and Scamps: Ethics in Academia* and Editors Cooper & Stevens' (2002) *Tenure in the Sacred Grove: Issues and Strategies for Women and Minority Faculty* further elucidate these issues.

Different expectations exist at the department, college, and university levels. Since judgments are made about the tenure and promotion of professors at each of these levels, it is essential for the new professor to have as much understanding of these expectations as possible. This means that the new professor must review all written promotion and tenure materials available at all three university levels. The new professor must discuss these documents with individuals who can offer clarification of the documents. Chairs of department promotion and tenure committees in the department or college and the dean of the college may be helpful as may long-term faculty members who have served on promotion and tenure committees as well as faculty mentors who can be helpful in clarifying expectations. In addition, reviewing promotion and tenure portfolios of recently promoted and tenured individuals may be helpful. Permission

to review these materials should be sought, particularly if the individual's work is in a similar area. The university's head of academic affairs may offer written materials or workshops related to promotion and tenure. Faculty groups on campus may offer workshops that can be helpful in understanding the institution's "track record" concerning promotion and tenure.

Historically, there have been institutions of higher education that have encountered difficulties with promotion and tenure decisions. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Academe* have been consistent in reporting these difficulties. Occasionally, at some institutions, new, junior faculty will be hired, will work for a number of years, and then not be granted tenure. It is important to understand the experiences of other junior faculty and other institutions so that a clear understanding of the expectations of the institution can be developed. New faculty members should attempt to meet other new faculty members as well as recently tenured faculty members to discuss the promotion and tenure process. Participating in national meetings and attending sessions related to the promotion and tenure experience may be helpful. Reading about college and university promotion and tenure practices as reported in journals, monographs and books may be helpful as well. The burden is on each individual faculty member to identify the expectations that will guide that individual's quest for promotion and tenure.

Know Who Can Help—The Network

Perhaps each professor should have a personal guide through the promotion and tenure process. Some colleges and departments have created formal mentoring programs to assist new professors on the path to tenure and promotion. Due to the intricacies and complexities of the promotion and tenure process, a mentor or personal guide would be an asset.

A mentor program for new faculty may be initiated at the department, college, or university level. Mentors may be senior faculty members or

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recently promoted and tenured faculty members who may volunteer or be assigned to the role. In formal mentoring programs, mentors may be given specific guidelines for their responsibilities to the individuals they will mentor. These guidelines may include a specific timeline for meetings with the new faculty member, letters to be written annually documenting the new faculty member's progress as well as specific suggestions for the new faculty member in relation to the areas of teaching, research and service. The mentoring program may include department, college, and university workshops for new faculty as well as meetings throughout the academic year specifically for new faculty. A mentor may be required to assist the new faculty member in preparing materials for the promotion and tenure process.

The mentor and mentoring activities may assist new faculty in understanding institutional expectations, can provide new faculty with personal contact with individuals who are responsible for guiding them in the promotion and tenure process and can answer questions as they arise. A mentor program may personalize the process for the new professor and is usually a separate program from the formal promotion and tenure process.

Identifying "buddies" who are at similar career stages is essential. Buddies help in deciphering the unwritten rules of promotion and tenure. Sometimes individuals have colleagues in their own departments or colleges who can fill this colleague role. Often, however, the help must come from colleagues at other institutions.

New professors may find themselves in departments where they are the first new professors who have been hired in many years. The other professors were tenured during times when the expectations were different than the current conditions. In the absence of departmental colleagues who are up-to-date on contemporary promotion and tenure strategies, the new professor must seek colleagues who understand the current challenges of the promotion and tenure process.

Attendance at national meetings of professional organizations provide opportunities to meet other new professors in the same academic discipline. Because conference sessions are often grouped thematically, it is possible to meet and present papers with others who share the same interests. Through these sessions, one has the opportunity to develop a network of national colleagues who can provide the support and guidance new professors need as they seek promotion and tenure.

The new acquaintances from the national meetings may lead to research and writing collaborations. Opportunities to contribute to journals, prepare book chapters, serve on editorial boards, serve on committees, or share in panels at national meetings may emerge from these associations. This national network also will be useful when it is time to seek external letters in support of promotion and tenure. The time, effort, and money invested in travel to national conferences are an excellent investment in a professorial career.

Know Who Can Hurt

The academy is populated by a wide range of individuals who are variously talented and untalented. The higher education environment may foster some professorial behaviors that are dangerous to the new professor. *Saints and Scamps: Ethics in Academia* (Cahn, 1993) provides useful guidance in identifying the occupants of professorial roles.

The *Vultures* are particularly lethal to new professors. The vultures recognize the talents, abilities, enthusiasm, and desperation of the new, untenured professor. Consider the following scenario. On occasion, a tenured professor will approach a junior professor and invite the new person to collaborate on a research project. To the new professor, this may be very flattering. It may feel like a lifeline is being extended to the new person.

Beware of the Vulture! The senior professor may be harvesting the junior professor's abilities and time. There have been instances when new professors have invested significant effort in collaborations that have resulted in no publications and lack of recognition. Negotiating the intended outcomes of collaborations at the beginning of the experience is essential. Authorship and the order of authorship as well as a timeline for completion of activities are critical to the junior professor's future

In institutions that demand consistent research and scholarly productivity from faculty members, such instances may occur. They may be precipitated by senior professors who cannot keep up with the constant demands of the institution or some may feel jealousy or competition toward junior faculty. The senior professor may be in a position of supporting or blocking a junior professor's quest for promotion and tenure. The junior professor may feel threatened by the senior professor and thus be forced to permit these situations to occur.

In a different scenario, a senior professor may block the publication of the results of a collaborative research project by insisting that the manuscript is not "ready" to be submitted. When a considerable investment of time and effort in a project does not lead to the submission of a manuscript for publication consideration, then the junior professor has lost time and momentum on the tenure and promotion clock. Junior professors are given a limited number of years before they must submit their promotion and tenure materials. Each person must carefully guard the use of time and ownership of work. It may be safer to work alone than to invest in collaborations that may not further the junior professor's career.

Jealous Peers also populate the academy. Not everyone who has been hired in a tenure-track position or who has been tenured has the skills of a researcher or writer. Individuals who lack these skills may resent a new professor who has these skills. In universities where schol-

arly productivity is valued, those who do not have those skills may be jealous of those who do. Comments that disparage research, writing, and publication may be designed to undermine the work of the new professor and have the potential to force the new professor into isolation. Work in the academy may require that one be comfortable working in isolation so that the expectations for promotion and tenure can be met.

Another group who may influence the new professor is the *Effete Snobs*. These individuals take pleasure in diminishing the work of the junior professor by finding the work to be inferior to the work of the senior professors. Given the opportunity to critique the junior professor's work, the *Effete Snobs* will make every effort to denigrate the new professor's contributions.

Given the existence of *Vultures*, *Jealous Peers*, and *Effete Snobs*, the new professor would be well-advised to study departmental colleagues carefully and make alliances cautiously. A career in higher education is built upon individual accomplishments. However, the academy is a political environment. If promotion and tenure decisions are the result of individual judgments, personalities and personal issues may filter into the decision-making process. The new professor needs to study the environment and be wary of traps embedded in the history of the department.

Know the Pitfalls

Some departments are populated by senior faculty who are not helpful to the new professor. Sometimes this situation is described as a department that "eats its young." Clearly, not all higher education environments are negative places. However, you may encounter senior professors "who could help, but don't" or "who would help, but can't." You also might encounter an attitude of "I've got mine, you get yours!"

The new professor may also encounter faculty who preach collaboration and teamwork in all areas, except research. Faculty members may be afraid to share research as though it is an expendable resource that could be used up—only a finite amount is available—a scarce resource!

Know the Peer Review Process

There are two types of review for promotion and tenure materials—internal and external. The internal review process includes the procedures that occur at the department, college, and university levels. At the department level, one expects the faculty to be most familiar with the junior professor's field—the journals, the professional organizations and the knowledge base or content areas. Department colleagues review promotion and tenure materials with a specialized expertise and should be able to recognize the individuals who hold the highest status in the field and the institutions that are considered to be most prestigious. Because of their working proximity, they can reflect on the junior professor's contributions to the department, collegueship, teaching, service as well as scholarly productivity. This is one level of internal review, but a very significant one. The department members or department promotion and tenure committee provides a letter that indicates the results of the review at the department level.

The department chair may provide an independent review of the dossier as well. Usually a letter is prepared by the chair that reflects the outcomes of the assessment.

At the college level, a promotion and tenure committee may consist of representatives of the departments in the college. When materials are submitted to this group, the junior professor must remember that there will be a number of files presented for review. It is essential that the promotion and tenure materials be documented and arranged so that individuals from other departments understand: the contributions of

the person applying for promotion and tenure, the contents of the file, and the impact of the person's work. Ambiguity must be eliminated. Providing a succinct statement of the work that aids in viewing the materials seems prudent. The college committee may present a letter that reflects the outcomes of the assessment of the file.

At the college level, the dean may conduct an independent review and judgment of the promotion and tenure file. How the file meets the college mission and goals should be represented in the materials prepared by the junior professor. The dean will provide a letter that reflects the results of the review.

A next level of internal review may occur in the university's office of academic affairs. The head of academic affairs may have a committee that reviews files at the university level or may review the files with other members of the office staff. At some institutions there is a university-wide committee that is elected. The letters prepared at the department and college levels by faculty and administrators, specific materials prepared by the junior professor, and the external letters are examined. A decision on promotion and tenure is made and forwarded to the governing body of the university.

External letters are a second type of review. A formal procedure usually exists for soliciting the external letters. Sometimes the junior professor is permitted to suggest names of professors at other universities who will be asked to review the promotion and tenure materials. In other cases, the department decides who will be asked to review the materials.

At some universities, the candidate for promotion and tenure cannot be externally reviewed by individuals with whom they have worked, or co-authored manuscripts. It is helpful to the new professor to understand these rules early in their professorial careers so that they can anticipate the procedures for soliciting external letters.

Know Your Line of Scholarly Inquiry

The time between being hired as an untenured faculty member and being considered for tenure and promotion passes rapidly. Establishing a line or lines of scholar inquiry early is essential. Give consideration to your areas of expertise. The dissertation may provide several avenues of inquiry and may provide several manuscripts.

Consider your passions. It is always easier to write about a topic for which you have passion. When the portfolio of materials is prepared for the promotion and tenure quest, the junior professor has to identify one or two areas of research expertise. This suggests that a steady stream of research and writing in those areas must be maintained throughout the professoriate.

Finding a niche is essential. All the research and writing matters little unless the manuscripts are publishable. One must select areas of inquiry that are valued by editors. Some areas are saturated, so writing in those areas may be futile or difficult. Writing in areas that are not sought by journal editors may be futile as well. Even though the topic may be important, if the journal editors do not have space in the journal or interest in the topic, the manuscript will not be published. Therefore, it would be wise to consider "what's publishable" and "what's hot and what's not."

As a research focus or foci are identified, keep in mind how deeply one can dig in the areas. It is better to pursue areas that offer many aspects for exploration or veins of possibility. "One shot" explorations do not contribute to one's reputation as a "leading authority."

In the process of identifying the line or lines of scholarly inquiry, one should consider multiple thrusts in the beginning stages. By doing this, one has the opportunity to determine which areas of inquiry will be most productive and most marketable to the journals. Identifying

the dry wells and dead ends early in a career is helpful as a research focus or line of inquiry is established.

Know the Scholarly Outlets

Journals have reputations and while some are considered extremely prestigious; others are less so. Some journals have very low acceptance rates; others have high rates; some have large circulations; others miniscule. Some journals are sponsored by professional associations; others are not, and some are national, some regional, and some are state-based. There are specialized and general journals that may accept only data-based articles, others will accept literature reviews. Some outlets accept only quantitative studies and some only accept articles employing data-based research. Other journals will accept research articles as well as literature reviews. Audiences also vary and journals may serve practitioners or researchers. There are refereed and non-refereed journals. Some institutions require professors to publish only in refereed journals; other permit publications in refereed and non-refereed journals. Journals may be published monthly, quarterly, or semi-annually. Knowing the journals in the field and being aware of their status in relation to these issues will be helpful in identifying outlets for publication.

Submitting work to the "wrong" journal wastes time and the time of the journal editor. Knowing the audience for whom is writing is critical. An article prepared for the research community is written very differently than an article written for the practitioner community.

Know the Production Cycle

It is essential to have several manuscripts in progress simultaneously because it can take as long as 18 months for an article to be published after it is submitted to a journal. Given this long time frame, the cautious junior professor must plan to have two or more different articles under consideration for publication simultaneously. To achieve this objective, a

constant cycle of writing, submitting, revising, and resubmitting must be maintained. If a manuscript is rejected by a journal, the author should review the editor's comments, make whatever revisions are appropriate, and submit the manuscript to the next appropriate journal on a list of outlets. A manuscript collecting dust on one's desk is no help at all.

Establishing goals for the production cycle can be helpful. Multiple authors can lead to multiple products. If one finds colleagues who are at similar career stages and share a similar work ethic, then it may be possible to collaborate and become more productive through the association. Working with similarly motivated individuals can be stimulating and rewarding, if the collaboration is based on equity and mutual benefit.

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About the Author

The purpose of this manuscript is to report the findings of 25 years of observation, conversation, and study of the promotion and tenure challenges experienced by new or junior professors. During these years, I have been a professor at two Research Extensive Universities and a Municipal University. I have served on college promotion and tenure committees, department promotion and tenure committees, and a special college committee appointed to merge the promotion and tenure policies and procedures documents from two colleges into a single college document.

During this time I chaired a campus Chancellor's Commission on the Status of Women and a system-wide Chancellor's Commission on the Status of Women. I founded and coordinate an annual Women in Educational Leadership Conference that is in its 19th year. I am the founding editor of the refereed Journal of Women in Educational Leadership.

I serve as an external reviewer of promotion and tenure materials for professors from other universities when I am asked to do so. Twice each year for the past 20 years I have conducted workshops on Promotion and Tenure issues at national conferences. Through these national presentations, I have met many individuals who have shared their interests and experiences with the promotion and tenure processes at their institutions. These experiences provide the basis for my findings.