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Foos, Annabelle; Holmes, Mary Anne; and O'Connell, Suzanne, "What Does It Take to Get Tenure?" (2004).
Papers in the Earth and Atmospheric Sciences. 88.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/geosciencefacpub/88>

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WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO GET TENURE?

Annabelle Foos, Mary Anne Holmes and
Suzanne O'Connell

Data from the National Science Foundation and the American Geological Institute indicate that women geoscientists remain under-represented at all levels in academia. In addition, the proportion of women geoscience faculty declines with increasing rank, from around 20 percent as assistant

professors to 5 percent as full professors.

In 2001, we began a project to collect information that can help mentor women faculty early in their geoscience careers and improve their chances of obtaining tenure. We also wanted to provide institutions with information on retention, tenure and promotion procedures and criteria as they are practiced across the country.

The Bureau of Sociological Research at

the University of Nebraska-Lincoln sent a survey to the chairs of all U.S. geoscience departments. The survey consisted of questions that assessed what the relative weights were of research, teaching, service and other activities when an academic is judged for tenure. They distributed 628 questionnaires, of which 321 were returned. Of those surveys returned, 280 were complete and provided useful data for this study. Some surveys were returned unanswered and some institutions stated that they did not have tenure and promotion plans, so these were not included in the analysis.

The responses came from a broad spectrum of institutions, ranging from two-year community colleges to major research universities. Department chairs were asked to rate the relative importance of various cri-

Teaching excellence

All of the institutions considered course evaluations as a means of evaluating teaching and 76 percent rated them as very important. Course enrollments and alumni recommendations were rated as the least significant criteria (see chart, top of next page).

Activity importance

Responses to the question, "how much weight does your department place on the following types of activities?" varied widely. The most common responses gave equal weight to teaching and research and less emphasis on service. Four percent of the departments place more than 80 percent weight on teaching, and less than 1 percent do not consider teaching when evaluating a tenure candidate. In contrast, 6 percent of the departments do not consider research when evaluating a candidate for tenure.

TYPE OF ACTIVITY	AVERAGE WEIGHT %
TEACHING	47.9
RESEARCH	37.1
SERVICE	14.2
OTHER	0.8

Research excellence

Criteria for the documentation of excellence in research were divided into two categories, publications and funding. Seventy-four percent of the departments require faculty to publish in refereed journals in order to receive tenure. Twenty-seven percent of the departments have guidelines that specify the number of publications required for tenure. For these departments, the number of required publications ranged from 1 to 12 with an average of 3.7. Not surprisingly, publications in national and international journals were rated the highest, with 87 percent of the department chairs indicating they are very important.

In the funding category, 41 percent of the departments require that faculty generate research funding in order to receive tenure. Only 6 percent of the departments specify a specific number of proposals or dollar amounts. The number of grants these departments require ranged from one to three. Specific dollar amounts ranged from \$10,000 to \$500,000 with an average of \$162,000. Federally funded grants that generate overhead were rated the highest, followed by competitive grants from research foundations and federally funded equipment grants (see chart, bottom of next page).

teria that are typically used to document excellence in teaching, research and service. Not surprisingly, three-quarters of the department chairs rated course evaluations, publication in national and international journals, and obtaining federally funded grants as being very important.

One of the first things a new faculty member should do is to determine the relative weight of those criteria in their own department. It is also important to consider that within one department there can be a range of expectations. As an example, it is not uncommon for major research universities to hire a faculty member whose major responsibilities are predominantly teaching or predominantly research.

New faculty should focus their energies on activities that are rated as most significant

by the department chairs. This is not to say they should not do some of the activities that were not rated as significant, as those activities often lead to research opportunities. For example, internal institution grants provide seed money that can eventually lead to a federally funded grant.

Networking activities such as organizing a symposium or publishing in a symposium volume, though rated as less significant, are essential to establishing a good reputation in the field. Also important to consider is the return on investment of time. Writing a textbook is only considered moderately significant, despite the fact that it requires a significant investment of time and energy. It would be better to spend that energy on a few refereed publications and save writing the textbook until after receiving tenure.

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Funding for this survey was provided by the Association of Women Geoscientists Foundation (AWGF) and the National Science Foundation (grant #0123669). Cheryl Wiese and Connie Frey from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Bureau of Sociological Research, administered the survey. The authors wish to thank the 321 department chairs that took the time to complete the survey.

TEACHING EXCELLENCE: RESPONSES TO THE PROMPT "PLEASE INDICATE WHICH METHODS YOUR DEPARTMENT USES TO DOCUMENT EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE"

Method of documentation	% OF RESPONSES					Average responses
	1 Very important	2	3	4 Not important	5 Not considered	
Course evaluations	76	20	3	1	0	1.29
Peer evaluation	36	32	16	5	11	2.23
Recommendations from students	25	34	22	5	14	2.50
Course syllabi	13	34	32	12	10	2.71
Teaching related publications or grants	9	32	31	15	13	2.91
Teaching portfolio	12	32	25	9	23	2.99
Number of graduate or undergraduate advisees	12	22	30	14	21	3.10
Advisees' publications or accomplishments	14	22	22	12	29	3.21
Course enrollments	3	13	39	24	22	3.49
Recommendations from alumni	10	15	13	16	46	3.73

RESEARCH EXCELLENCE: RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION "HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF PUBLICATIONS WHEN EVALUATING A FACULTY MEMBER FOR TENURE?"

Type of publication	% OF RESPONSES					Average responses
	1 Very important	2	3	4 Not important	5 Not considered	
National & international journals	87	8	2	1	1	1.22
Chapters in a book or special publication	29	47	20	2	1	1.99
Highly specific or regional journals	32	42	22	3	1	2.00
Refereed electronic journal	30	35	20	5	10	2.30
Symposium volumes	13	48	28	9	1	2.38
Government publications	8	34	34	19	5	2.79
Textbook	8	28	42	17	5	2.83
Lab manual	8	28	42	17	5	2.83
Field guide books	5	30	41	18	5	2.86
Unpublished technical reports	3	5	35	42	15	3.63