

# The Process of Tenure: The Effect on Women and Faculty Members of Color

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*Academic freedom is something that we must maintain as members of academe, but an alternative to the incurious process of tenure that exists today must be found. Issues of trust, respect, equity, growth and diversity must continue to be addresses.*

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Tenure is perceived by many academics as the pinnacle of professional success. Gaining membership into this much-sought-after exclusive group so prized by faculty members on campuses around the world may be more of a hazing ritual than anything else. The abuse and torture sustained by many seeking tenure, including white males, is legendary. For some women and faculty members of color, the barriers to achieving tenure may be insurmountable.

The subject of tenure has been hotly debated in journals and the media for years. Most of the issues surrounding this debate focus on due process and academic freedom of academics, who are often judged by administrators who may have institutional perspectives that limit diversity and dissension.

What has been ignored is the prevailing, agonizing, and unfair process that tenure has become for women and faculty of color. It is a closed system where a few individuals can easily open gates, while making it unnecessarily harder for others, as the deciding committee sees fit. Too many of these committees are made up of tenured and promoted white males who are feeling the pressures of change around them. They are privileged within institutions of higher education and the tenure process has served them well. Although it may be difficult at times, the system works better for them than for other groups. They are often unaware of their privilege and deny that it exists when brought to their attention (McIntosh, 1988). Peggy McIntosh points out that:

Obliviousness about white advantage, like obliviousness about male advantage, is kept strongly inculturated in the United States so as to maintain the myth of meritocracy, the myth that democratic choice is equally available to all. Keeping most people unaware that freedom of confident action is there for just a small number of people props up those in power and serves to keep power in the hands of the same groups that have most of it already. (McIntosh, 1998, p. 94)

Value for minority scholarship

In seeking to understand the negative effects of this so-called power to admit some and keep out others who do not look or behave in the same manner, university faculty must

look at the negative effects of limiting the membership of the Professoriate. The numbers of females and faculty of color on campuses are few enough, but there are even fewer who are in decision making positions and who comprise the committees who make major decisions on tenure and promotion. Majority white mainstream faculty will continue to reject the work of colleagues that does not look like their own.

In an article written by Paul Ruffins in the journal of *Black Issues in Higher Education*, he cites an interview with Dr. Phyllis Bronstein. She is a tenured professor at the University of Vermont who is conducting qualitative research study analyzing the lives and careers of thirty scholars who have focused their research on feminist and multicultural issues. She points out that tenure committees often treat ethnic and women's studies as ghetto disciplines, and that ethnically oriented journals are often viewed as inferior publications outlets. "It appears that differences may add up against you," she says. "It looks like the more people differ from the mainstream model, the more difficulties they have in their institutions-particularly on a personal level" (Ruffins, 1997).

## Trust

An important issue that appears to be key to a successful process of tenure is the issue of trust. Max DePree, *Leading without power: Finding hope in serving community*, talks about trust as a something that begins with a personal commitment to respect others and to take everyone seriously. Unfortunately women are not always taken seriously by faculty that is predominantly male nor are faculty of color always respected by all white faculties. DrPree clearly feels that trust begins with respect and respect demands that we first recognize each other's gifts, strengths and interests; he feels that we must integrate them into the work of the organization. Only then can we reach our common and individual potential. Max DePree describes seven essential beliefs and initiatives for trust to occur:

1. A personal commitment to respect others and to take them seriously
2. Trust grows when people see leaders translate their personal integrity into organizational fidelity
3. The moral purpose of our organizations and our personal commitments is the soil in which trust can take root and grow
4. Trust is built on kept promises
5. Trust in organizations depends on the reasonable assumption by followers that leaders can be depended on to do the right thing
6. The building of trust in organizations requires leaders to hold the group accountable
7. For trust to be maintained over time, leaders must demonstrate competence in their jobs-just like everyone else

Building trust in organizations has become a chief responsibility of leaders and true

leaders take time to develop the persistence, the patience, and the discipline that will ultimately result in trust. The lack of trust in a reward system that injures will continue to erode the goal of universities to retain faculty of color and women.

### A New Reward System

One way to address the inequities with which many reward systems are laden is to examine the current system. We need to ask ourselves, "who is this system consistently admitting and who is being kept out?" But this process requires serious listening to the faculty, especially those that have been most injured by the process. Their responses cannot be ignored, including those assistant professors that have left. It may help to take a good look at those that are pleased with the current system. Are they part of the "good old boys" network and do they represent the mainstream group that has continued to have success within the organization?

In January of 1998 the Dean of the College of Education at Northern Illinois University initiated the development of a Reward Restructuring Committee (RRC) to investigate needed changes in the current rewards system. Three purposes guided the committee's efforts. The first purpose was to provide maximum rewards to faculty members doing the academic work that they do best including research in ethnic and women's studies. Too often, these contribution's have gone unnoticed in the tenure process. The second purpose was to reward faculty for responding to the needs of the community and society. Their community-based works must /can be designated service. The third purpose was to create a reward structure that encourages collaboration rather than competition. The aim was to create a more positive working environment by valuing research and enhancing the retention of excellent faculty of all ranks, but particularly of assistant professors. The third purpose may be the most difficult to achieve. Good leadership is essential for this to occur. We are lucky to have a good leader and it is still difficult, especially when there is lack of support in the higher ranks. Sabotage and turf wars persist in most organizations that require change and reform.

Interestingly, when the RRC disseminated a survey asking the faculty if change was needed, what strengths and weaknesses they saw in the current system and what an ideal systems looks like, the faculty responded with seven characteristics. The seven characteristics distilled from responses were:

- Climate of respect and trust
- Flexibility
- Culture of support/learning
- Structure of fairness and equity
- Criterion-referenced
- Communication

- Sensitivity to the community

You may notice that trust was ranked most important and remained an essential part of an ideal system. The survey's findings called for changes in the current reward system. The incorrect assumption had been that the current system was fair to all, but the practice of rating and ranking faculty against each other created practices that resulted in decidedly unequal access to rewards, especially for women and faculty of color.

Research, teaching and service, and their associated rewards have been the conventional arrangement of faculty work. In the new reward system, faculty work falls into two distinct arrangements, each with multiple components:

Expanded Scholarship	Expanded Citizenship
Discovery	Program
Integration	Institutional
Teaching	Instructional
Application	Professional Self-Development

### Expanded Scholarship

Expanded Scholarship, the first area of faculty work, includes the four areas of faculty work that Boyer (1990) believed to be true scholarship. Boyer believes that scholarship is equally apparent in applied work or service that is "...tied directly to one's special field of knowledge..." (Boyer, 1990, p. 22) as it is in discovery work or basic research. Scholarship is equally apparent in intellectually engaged teaching and the work of integrating ideas as it is in basic research. The RRC's direction for this area of faculty work was guided by discovery, integration, teaching, and application as key components of expanded scholarship. ([See Table 1](#)).

### Expanded Citizenship

This second area of faculty work also influenced by Boyer's ideas (1990) may require different forms of evaluation. He pointed out the problematic characteristics-vagueness, low status, and a "catch-all"-of the service category of faculty work, a problem created by the conflict between the goals of the academic and those of the larger world. This endless and often invisible and usually non-rewarded cluster of activities poses a particular hazard for women and minority faculty.

It is important to note that faculty committees made up of males will seek a female member to demonstrate a commitment to equity. A committee made up of white

members may seek a minority member. Unfortunately and too often minority members may be invited to be seen, but not necessarily heard.

"Expanded citizenship" provides the avenue for two areas of growth. This category had two components; program, institutional and processional responsibilities (committee work and bureaucratic activity that often accompanies the institutionalization of work), and professional self-development, a formal avenue to develop each faculty member's growth. ([See Table 2](#)).

Another area that was added to the new reward system included a team to help assistant professors with the process of tenure and promotion. Too often, new professors arrive on the job with little guidance about how to make the transition from expert learner to novice teacher. Without mentorship, they will not learn what is expected of them as professionals. Unfortunately not enough is done to help women and faculty members of color go through the process of attaining tenure. Many leave positions or higher education feeling frustrated and abused by the process of tenure and promotion. At most universities, women and minorities express lack of trust in the reward system. This must change. I feel our university has made a serious attempt to address these issues. But we must also take a close look at whether faculty members of the mainstream still have reservations about female and minority faculty achieving tenure. They will make up part of the teams and councils that will ultimately make the decision for tenure and promotion yet may view culturally different faculty and their research as inferior. Issues of trust, respect, equity, growth, and diversity must continue to be addressed.

The injurious effects of this process called tenure will continue to limit diversity of faculty. Individuals will eventually move on rather than endure the abuse. Their departure will continue to be a source of missed opportunities for universities to expand their missions through the addition of multiple perspective. The bleak numbers of females and faculty of color on campuses who are tenured and in decision making positions ensures that little will change. Pressures like RRC are one way to rectify this continuous saga of exclusion.

Academic freedom is something that we must mainstream as members of academe, but an alternative to the injurious process of tenure that exists today must be found.

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Table 1. Category of Expanded Scholarship with Four Components and Examples Related Work Tasks

Discovery Scholarship/Artistry	Integration Scholarship/Artistry	Teaching Scholarship/Artistry
Basic Research Presentations Publications Grants Professional Organizations Other	Interpretive Work Theory Development Course Development Program Development Collaboration Teamwork Publications Presentations Workshops Grants Professional Organizations Other	Creation of Learning Materials Strategies and Environments Research on Teaching Presentations Workshops Grants Professional Organizations Currency of Syllabi Other

Table 2. Category of Expanded Citizenship with Two Components and Examples of Related Work Tasks

Institutional, Instructional, and Professional Responsibilities	Self-Development Responsibilities
*Assigned Courses *Dissertation Direction *Student Advisement *Mentoring of Colleagues and Students	Group Work/Team Skills Development Teaching Skill Development Technology/Software Skill Development

*Committee Work Program Reviews, IBHE, NCATE Committee Meetings Professional Organization Responsibilities Other	Writing/Research/Presentation Skills Being Mentored Improving Licenses/Credentials In-sevice/Workshop to Maintain Licenses/Credentials Clinical Practice Experiences Self Improvement Plan Other
* = Instructional Responsibilities	+ Development in this context is limited to those activities that enhance one's professional role at the university.

Note: It is expected that growth and productivity in both the scholarship and citizenship categories (not necessarily all components) be maintained. Faculty members are encouraged to choose which components within scholarship and citizenship are conducive to the development of their talents. Effectiveness in instructional responsibilities are required for tenure.