

Questions about Promotion & Tenure

Note: The following are frequently asked questions about promotion and tenure. The answers to those questions represent solely the views of the Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs, Tom Mitchell, and therefore may not represent the views of tenured faculty on promotion and tenure committees, department chairs, nor the president.

Q: Of the three categories of professional activity – teaching, research, and service – which is most important?

A: All are important, but of the three, the record of service is definitely less important for gaining tenure than are the records of teaching effectiveness and of research productivity. Over the last few years, in fact, we have consciously tried to lessen the service obligations of tenure-track faculty to the college and the university so that they are not distracted from their research and their teaching duties. We have asked tenured, senior faculty to take on more of the essential service obligations. With service, you are simply expected to demonstrate through community and department service that you have the capacity and willingness to be an effective and collegial participant in shared governance once you are tenured.

Q: Can a faculty member get tenure if he or she is deficient in one area but strong in two other areas?

A: No. Tenure is not an “average” of the three areas. The expectation is that a faculty member who earns tenure has a strong record in all three areas. You might be excellent as a teacher and collegial and constructive in department and college service, but if your publication record is inadequate, you would not be recommended for tenure. It works the other way too. You might have a great record of publication and grants, but if you are ineffective as a teacher, you would not be recommended for tenure. Generally, however, those who are very poor teachers and show no signs of significant improvement by their mid-term review are not around long enough to apply for tenure. Most get negative mid-term reviews.

Q: Is it possible to get acceptable annual evaluations but not be recommended for tenure?

Yes. It probably would not happen because of your teaching or service record, but it could easily happen with your research record. Tenure decisions related to research are based on the totality of your achievements and not on a sum of individual years. For example, in the humanities you could earn a “3” on research for each annual evaluation for a 5 year period but not have an adequate research record. How? The rubric for annual evaluations of research activity allow for a satisfactory score of “3” if a humanities faculty member delivers a conference paper. However, if all that the faculty member does in 5 years is to deliver 5 conference papers and does not publish, that person would not be recommended for tenure.

Q: How many refereed articles must I publish during my tenure-track period to get tenure?

A: This is the most frequently asked question, and the answer -- including the one that follows -- never brings the kind of absolute reassurance that the question is designed to produce. The answer, frankly, is this: it depends. New tenure-track faculty receiving greatly reduced teaching loads will certainly be expected to be much more productive in their research and scholarship than those who earned tenure in past years. The research productivity standards for tenure rise as the university continues to develop and excel as an accredited institution of higher learning.

In general, I would recommend that you strive to publish an average of one referred article a year. This does not mean, however, that you cannot qualify for tenure with fewer. Each candidate's record will be viewed individually on its own merits and in accordance with the standards in the discipline and in relation to peer and aspirational institutions. Some successful candidates therefore might have fewer than one referred publication per year, but faculty should strive for consistent research productivity during their probationary period.

Another consideration in determining if your research record is adequate is this: your publication /research record should indicate that you have established a research agenda that you can and will continue to pursue once tenured and that promises to lead you eventually to a full professorship. Tenure is awarded to those whose record of achievement suggests that they will continue to be productive scholars and excellent teachers and colleagues. You secure a tenure-track position based on your potential, but you earn tenure based on your performance.

Q: Is it just a matter of numbers then?

A: Absolutely not. Quantity counts, yes, but the quality of one's research and publications is more important, just harder to assess. The quality of the journal or academic press in which your publication appears does matter. What constitutes "quality" in a scholarly journal? Generally, the following are characteristics of the top-tier journals in a field: a national and international scholarly audience, high number of submissions but low number of acceptances, frequent citations of journal articles by leading scholars in the field, prestige of sponsoring academic institution, and indexed by leading data bases. The impact of your contribution to your field matters greatly also, regardless of the reputation of the journal -- something that citations by other scholars or critical reviews might reveal. External letters evaluating your research and publications are given great weight in determining the quality of your contribution to your field.

Q: How are multiple authored articles considered?

A: In many fields, multiple authored articles are the norm, and in those fields the position of one's name in the authorship listing is generally important. Being listed as the first author generally indicates a greater contribution to the research or writing of the article than those who are listed in the middle or last. Single-author articles are the norm in many disciplines, and thus carry more prestige in those fields than would co-authored articles. You may wish to indicate the percentage of effort that you made to the co-authored work and/or explain what you did in regard to the publication (e.g., performed the statistical calculations).

Q: How are books considered?

A: In many but not all disciplines, publication of a monograph is much more important than publication of articles. Among books, monographs are considered more important than editing a book for which the editor may have written an introduction and/or one of the articles in the anthology of articles. Would it be better to concentrate on writing and publishing a book than on writing and publishing several articles? In the humanities, certainly. In fact, many universities require a book publication (not a contract) for tenure. In other fields (e.g., behavioral science), publication of articles in referred journals is considered more important than publication of a book.

Q: Will publications before joining TAMIU be considered?

A: Yes . . . But . . . Yes, they will be considered, but more important for determining whether or not you will be a productive researcher for our university over the long term is to examine what you have done in the 5 years on tenure-track. If you are not productive during those probationary years, it is unlikely that you will reverse that trajectory after being granted tenure.

Q: Of what importance are grants in assessing research/scholarship?

A: It varies by discipline. In the humanities, grant funding for research projects is extremely scarce. In the physical sciences, external grants to support faculty research are much more available. Procuring grants in any discipline is quite competitive and of value to the university and to the faculty who receive them. STEM faculty are expected to apply regularly for grants to fund their research, and the tenure-track faculty in the STEM fields that have been hired in the last two years and given greatly reduced teaching loads are expected to secure external grants to support their research. Failure to do so would lessen considerably, but not necessarily negate, their chances to earn tenure.

Q: Are articles on pedagogy acceptable?

A: Yes . . . But . . . Articles that make a significant contribution to how your discipline is taught are valuable. Are articles on teaching your discipline considered as important as works of scholarship as are articles that make a clear and direct contribution to new knowledge or new insights in your discipline? For most disciplines, frankly, no. You were hired because of your expertise in a content area of your discipline, and you are indeed very much expected to be an effective teacher, but you are not expected to become a publishing scholar on the pedagogy of your field. That would be the mission of faculty in the College of Education, but not in the College of Arts & Sciences, the College of Nursing, nor the A.R. Sanchez, Jr. School of Business. If you publish in your discipline, that's expected and required. But, if you also publish in the pedagogy of your discipline, that's even better.

Q: May I get an extension to the tenure-track period?

A: Under normal circumstances, absolutely not, but TAMIU Rule 12.01.99 (see Human Resources website) implements an A&M System Policy which allows institutions to extend the tenure probationary period under "extraordinary circumstances:"

For the purposes of this Rule, "extraordinary circumstances" shall include any catastrophic or life threatening illness, an unforeseeable emergency, or circumstance

of similar severity which would seriously impede progress toward demonstrating qualification for the award of tenure. The University shall have the sole discretion to determine what circumstances rise to the level of an "extraordinary circumstance."

If such an "extraordinary circumstance" exists, then please make sure that you follow all of the procedural requirements for requesting extended time. See the HR website for details.

Q: What recommendations then do you have for tenure-track faculty about publishing?

A: Though by no means exhaustive, here is a list of suggestions:

- Start immediately. Don't wait a year until you feel more comfortable with your teaching and your duties at the university.
- Seek the advice of your chair. Your chair will help you in many ways, perhaps most importantly in recommending as a mentor a senior faculty who publishes frequently. Both the chair and senior faculty may advise you on revisions of manuscripts, on appropriate journals to submit your work, etc. The Faculty Senate has strongly endorsed our having a strong mentorship program.
- Seek out other faculty members in your discipline who would be willing to join you in a "writing group." Writing groups meet periodically, share manuscripts, make suggestions for revisions, and provide much needed structure and moral support. They work well for most, but not all.
- Schedule research and writing time weekly, post those hours on your office door and with your chair, and try as much as possible to adhere to your schedule. If you try to squeeze in research and writing time when you have nothing to do for your classes or at your office, you will find that you never really have time to write. Teaching, like Nature, hates a vacuum and will consume all of your work hours if you don't force yourself to set aside time to research and write.
- Avoid teaching in the summer and instead conduct research and write.
- Write conference papers first but only with the intention of expanding and quickly refining those papers into peer reviewed submissions. Your goal should be to transform a conference paper into a publishable article and have it circulating to editors of journals within 3 months of the conference. Conference presentations and poster boards will not get you tenure.
- Deliver papers at national conferences rather than regional conferences whenever possible. Senior professors who often sit on editorial boards and editors of influential journals attend national conferences. Editors are there to scout for potential contributors to their journals and will often solicit an article from you if they found your conference paper interesting. Your article will still have to be given the green light by two blind referees, but having an editor interested in your work never, ever hurts.
- Aim high. Submit to the most influential journals in your field to which your article is appropriate. If it is rejected, you will still benefit from the editor or reader's report and

then may revise it and resubmit to another journal on your list. If you are in the last year or two of tenure-track, you may need to reassess the wisdom of this advice since you will not have the time to circulate a manuscript to three or four journals before landing an acceptance.