Many faculty candidates and graduate students look on a tenure-track job as their ultimate goal. Of course, getting tenure is usually their ultimate goal, but given the small number of tenure-track openings, just getting a job is a victory. However, getting a job is no assurance of being awarded tenure, as many of us know from painful personal experience or the experiences of our friends or colleagues.

I conduct workshops on the tenure-review process for aspiring and new faculty members and I’ve been struck by the number of them who lack a clear understanding about what they must do to get tenure. It’s crucial, I believe, for tenure-track faculty members to prepare for their review from the start of their appointment, if not before, and in my workshops I outline several steps that can help:

1. **Know the criteria on which you will be judged.** This may seem obvious, but in my experience, faculty candidates rarely read the policies and procedures for promotion-and-tenure review at the institutions to which they’ve applied. This is like planning a journey without looking at a map. Most P&T policies list the requirements for promotion or tenure at a given rank, and they give specific examples of the documentation that can support a candidate’s application. Taking the time to read these policies can help you determine whether the institution values the same kinds of activities that you do. It also tells you what to focus on in your early years.

Unfortunately, many such policies are vague by design. My college’s P&T guidelines, for example, state that publications in scientific journals are an important way for faculty members to demonstrate that they are contributing to the knowledge base in our field. Upon reading this, many of the junior faculty that I mentor want to know how many publications will be "enough." The short answer, much to their frustration, is, "It depends."

Proactive tenure trackers will ask their department chair and other senior mentors how those productivity standards are applied, so they can gauge where they stand each year relative to those standards. In my workshops, I encourage new and aspiring faculty to find out how teaching, research grants, publication of books or journal articles, etc. are weighed, so they can organize their time wisely and prioritize accordingly.

2. **Keep track of everything you do from day one on the job.** At most institutions, my own included, important activities fall into three categories: education, scholarship or research, and service. It’s, therefore, wise to create a simple tracking system consisting of three folders (paper or electronic) — one for each area — and begin filling them with documentation of everything you have done in each of those areas.

You may have subfolders within your folders (for example, within my education folder I have subfolders for each course I’ve taught and each mentee; these contain all of my syllabi, class activities, and course evaluations, as well as examples of all of the different types of mentoring I’ve provided to students). Be sure to include copies of letters or e-mails from others that provide evidence of your work’s impact. When the time comes to assemble your portfolio, you won’t need every item in these folders, but having everything available to you will be beneficial.

This system also comes in handy when you’re updating your CV. If it’s in your folders, it probably needs to be on your CV, and vice versa. And summarizing the material in your folders is a good way to prepare for your annual review.

3. **Practice assembling your portfolio long before your review.** Some colleges have a “midterm” or “third-year” review that requires faculty to compile many of the components of a tenure packet. Even if your institution doesn’t have a third-year review, I recommend that you work with your chair or mentor to create a “draft packet.” Doing so forces you to think about your accomplishments and future academic plans. And having an opportunity to practice and get feedback from mentors in the early stages of your career is a sensible approach that I wish I’d used myself. (I practiced my job talk about 20 times before giving it, so the fact that I didn’t practice putting together a tenure packet was, in retrospect, rather foolhardy.)

These are just some of the strategies I teach in my “Preparing for P&T” workshops and have used (or wish I’d used!) in my own tenure- and promotion reviews. What other strategies have you used or would you recommend?

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agree in our heads but say nothing to decision-makers or our fellow citizens, we fail the students who most need our help.

tamas
I totally agree but I'm afraid the Repubs will again use blackmail as they did with the tax for the wealthy (they filibustered even getting taxes back to what they were during the Reagan era for the portion of individual adjusted income above 1 million).

shurasiray
I've learned that being afraid gets us nowhere, so I'm trying to leave my fear behind and speak out whenever I can... (I always forget that my name doesn't show when I post here, so I need to remember to sign when I write.)

Betsy Smith, Ph.D.
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Cape Cod Community College