

How to Get Tenure at a Doctoral Research University **Philip Stoddard's Tenure Tips**

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Florida International University.
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Disclaimer –

These notes have been prepared for Tenure & Promotion workshops sponsored by the United Faculty of Florida. Recognize that they reflect my own views and opinions and not necessarily those of the people who decide your fate. Tenure criteria are a moving target at best.

“It's impossible to get into a routine at Florida International University – the best you can hope for is a rhythm.”

Mark Rosenberg, former provost at FIU

PUBLISH

Your publication record is the chief variable determining whether you get tenure.

Grants come in second, but do not substitute for publications.

Plan your research for depth and quality (not breadth)

Establish a 5 year plan.

View every project in light of the published end product.

Identify your target journals or range of publishers before you begin the research.

Focus on one important area for your research

3 papers on one subject are better than 5 papers on 5 subjects.

You want to make a substantial contribution to one field so as to cement your reputation.

Focus on original research

Editing work of others is considered professional service, not original research.

Do not edit volumes or anthologies unless that is the best vehicle for your own original works.

Do not write text books

Do not spend much time writing reviews.

Book chapters are dicey because they are usually not reviewed as critically as other works.

Assume that you will apply for a new job the year after you come up for tenure, so keep your CV competitive.

Establish your new professional identity

Move beyond your PhD & postdoc research

Publish your PhD and postdoc papers quickly, preferably in your first summer. Completion of graduate or postdoc work forges your identity and reputation professionally,

which helps for letters and grants, but this work will not get you tenure.

You need to establish an active and demonstrably productive research program at FIU.

You must achieve independence and your own identity.

Once your PhD and postdoc papers are out,

DO NOT continue to publish with your advisor.

Playing the paper game

Select the publication outlets (journals or academic publishers) that will enhance your reputation.

Journal or publisher quality counts

1. Grant reviewers are more impressed if you have published in better journals or better presses.
2. Tenure reviewers will more likely have read your work if it is published in a widely read journal.
3. Your dean, provost, and president want you to enhance the reputation of FIU by getting our name into good places.

Avoid relying on conference proceedings to get your work published.

*Publish in *Journal of X* rather than*

Proceedings of the 12th Annual Conference on X.

Books vs. Journal publications

In some fields books are the currency, in others journals. In some areas, other activities such as design competitions or performance are well-regarded. Know your field.

Book contracts in the humanities are getting harder to come by

Many traditional academic presses are focusing on the bottom line and refusing good scholarly manuscripts because they won't turn a profit.

Even Oxford is sending reps around to solicit textbook writers.

If you can't line up a book contract for your great writing project, consider publishing it as a series of peer-reviewed articles instead.

Move quickly

Focus on completing one paper before you begin the next.

Publish sooner rather than later

A burst of late productivity always raises eyebrows in your tenure reviews.

Getting papers out sooner allows them more time for recognition.

Do not rely on long shots

If your paper isn't the strongest or broadest, don't over-reach because that will cost you time.

Achieving balance of duties

High demands but low resources

FIU's administration wants competitive performance, but makes little allowance for common roadblocks, e.g.,

Delays in providing promised resources.

Poor research infrastructure.

Enormous demand for service.

YOU are caught in the middle.

You need to devise a strategy to succeed in this environment.

The right publications

The right service

The right teaching

Adjust day-to-day efforts & habits to achieve your key goal.

which is publishing good works.

You have 3 jobs and a home life

Your teaching and service time may be scheduled, but nobody schedules your research time.

You never have a chair or dean sticking his head into your office and saying

"Shut your door and write. I want to see that manuscript out the door in two weeks!"

You have to protect your research and writing time.

Research first.

Often the first thing you take on in your day takes command over your attention and energies and gets done. That thing should be your research.

The most productive researchers reserve slots in their weekly calendars for research.

Reserve the first 2 hours of the day for writing.

AVOID SUMMER TEACHING so you can focus on getting research done and published.

Be poor, but get tenure. If you wanted more money you would have become a lawyer or married one.

Don't let your dean or chair snooker you into summer teaching:

FIU's tenure criteria are not those of a community college, no matter how much we may act like one.

Fulfilling your assignment may not get you tenure at FIU

(though failing to fulfill your assignment will probably cost you your job)

In most cases your official assignment will not reflect the reality of your job.

Assignments, Tenure evaluation, and Time required do not match cleanly, e.g.,

Your assignment may be

40% teaching

50% research

10% service.

You will be evaluated for tenure on different weights

20% teaching

75% research (papers first, then grants)

5% service

Time required

30 h teaching

6-8 h service

In a 40 hour week, this leaves 2-4 h for research

75% teaching

15-20% service

5-10% research

NOT ENOUGH TIME FOR RESEARCH.

You will have to work most of the summer, and probably some nights & weekends to have enough time to do sufficient research.

Teaching strategy

John Lombardi (former UF president) asked

“Have you ever heard of someone who got an offer to go to another university because they were a great teacher?”

Excellent teaching won't get you tenure, but bad teaching will prevent tenure.

In recent times FIU has terminated some bad teachers, but FIU has not tenured a professor with a weak research record.

Develop your course roster early and stick to it.

Establish a 2-year rotation of courses.

Work with your chair to develop a finite set of courses the department needs and values, ideally required for your department's majors.

Use your course development time to make these few courses truly excellent.

Do not develop new courses beyond these until tenure is in the bag.

Service strategy

Be a good departmental citizen (but not too good)

Show “potential for service” by serving on one or two department committees per year.

Remember your chair's interests may not coincide with your own.

Your chair has a department to run and may value your skills in easing the administrative burden, but you need to get your papers written.

Do not volunteer for or accept heavy administrative assignments if you are not already exceeding the expectations for research productivity by a significant margin.

Choose your service carefully.

Pick one area where you can make a positive difference in your department.

Avoid politically sensitive service jobs, e.g.,

Assignments that my bring you into significant conflict with faculty or administration.

Avoid Faculty Senate until tenured.

Something that will average no more than 2 hours/week across the semester and which can be dropped cold in the summer.

“Excessive” service to your department, university, or profession will interfere with your chances for tenure.

Heavy service will be appreciated by your chair, but will not compensate for deficits elsewhere in the file.

No letter from your chair will make up for failure to publish work from a solid, independent research program.

Find mentors and seek advice

Ask about

strategy of your chosen path
impression of your progress to date
suggestions for improvement in direction

Ask of

Associate professors who have gone through the process recently

Remember changing duties in a changing institution.

Multiple senior faculty in your department

Dept chair or dean who writes your annual evaluations

Senior colleagues at other, more established institutions, e.g. UCLA, Univ. Texas, Emory, etc.

Their standards may be higher than senior colleagues here at FIU.

What do your dean, provost, and president expect for tenure?

Find out.

DISREGARD

Any faculty member who says “I did a lot of service and I got tenure, so you should too.”

The expectations are higher now, and increasingly unrealistic in light of resources and infrastructure made available by the institution.

Behavior inside FIU

Make yourself known in a positive light

Dean

OSRA (Office of Sponsored Research Administration)

Ask for what you need

e.g., lab space, graduate assistants, release time, etc.

Ask (in this order) explaining your need,

chair

dean

DSRT

Do not DEMAND it

People may not have the resources to get you what you need right now, but antagonizing them will keep them from trying in the future.

Recent tenure decisions highlight the importance of getting the hell out of FIU ASAP if you cannot get what you need, or what you were promised.

The administration will NOT cut you a break if they fail to uphold their side of any bargain.

If you cannot get what you need to do your research:

1. Start looking for another job immediately!
2. Drop all service like a hot potato and do the minimum of teaching necessary not to be fired immediately. Focus all energies on publications that will make you portable.
3. Adjust your research program to do something equally productive, but still showing independence, quality, and published productivity.
4. Make sure your department underscores the resource problem in your tenure file, but remember that the Dean and Provost probably won't care.
5. Two years in advance of tenure, apply for a 1 year extension.

Do not wait until it's time to submit your file.

Ask your chair to request this of the dean, who will request it of the Provost, who might turn it down (but at least you asked).

Never antagonize your colleagues or supervisors.

If you have a major problem that is likely to ruffle some feathers, see if you can get your chair or another tenured faculty member to take care of it for you.

It's their job.

Department and university politics are the realms of the tenured faculty.

Follow with interest, but keep out of it until you have tenure.

Then you can test the waters, and rest assured, your seniors will tell you when you are in over your head.

Behavior outside FIU

Get to know people professionally

You will need outside letters for your tenure file.

Make outside professional contacts.

Conferences

Collaborations

Exchange manuscripts & reprints with people working in similar areas

Host their visits to FIU when the weather is nice

Grants

In principle, grants bankroll research, which in turn, is evidenced through good publications.

In a research institution, grants are always welcome because indirect costs float the boat, and they show you are competitive, thus grants can only help your record.

Grants should facilitate publication, but cannot replace it.

Faculty with good grants but no good papers have been denied tenure at FIU and elsewhere.

Release time

A few funding agencies will pay part of your salary during the 9 month calendar so you can better fulfill the research.

Check with your chair & dean to see if you can obtain some course release on a grant (your college should have a formula).

If the Dean says yes, get it in writing and keep it in your grant file.

If the Dean says no, apply for a jobs elsewhere.

Attractive activities that won't get you tenure include:

Lucrative contract or consulting work that doesn't lead to peer-reviewed publications or other valued academic products.

Contract reports won't usually cut it.

A book contract without a book

A contract is not a book and will not be regarded as such.

Writing reviews or editing anthologies

Regarded as service to your field, not original research.

Unreviewed book chapters

If a chapter receives serious peer-review, be sure to get a letter from the book editor that describes the review process.

Summer teaching

Big distraction & time sink

Think "community college"

Heavy service as a favor to your department, chair, dean, or profession.

Strong letters from your chair saying you did extraordinary service will be met with: "I see you did a lot of service, but I just don't see the papers I need to recommend tenure."

Working within the contract

Collective Bargaining Agreement

The super contract governing your job.

Every faculty member should **READ THE CONTRACT.**

By the way, your union dues go to pay for the negotiation of this contract.

A legally binding document (at least to some extent) when it's ratified.

The University is bound by the Collective Bargaining Agreement in these 3 areas

1. ASSIGNMENT OF DUTIES
2. ANNUAL EVALUATION
3. TENURE CANDIDACY

Assignment of duties

1. You undoubtedly assume (or at least hope) that if you do a good job that you'll get tenure.

The question is good job at what?

2. Each year you must receive an assignment of duties.

This should be real, not boiler-plate.

This assignment must give you the opportunity to fulfill applicable criteria for tenure & promotion,

See the Collective Bargaining Agreement:

BOT-UFF POLICY

ASSIGNMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES

Your opportunity must be equitable relative to others in your unit.

You have the right to discuss your assignment with your chair.

Concerns like qualifications, professional development, preferences.

Annual Evaluation

You must receive a written evaluation of your performance every year.

Tenure and other personnel decisions must take these evaluations into account.

2 parts to the written annual evaluation

1. Fulfillment of your assigned duties in light of the nature of your assignments.

2. Your progress towards tenure

1. Appraisals of progress towards tenure are not binding on the University.

You can get "Excellent" every year and be denied tenure.

2. Annual evaluations go into the tenure file at the candidate's discretion, but any evaluator can ask to see them.

Not including poor annual evaluations is usually worse than including them – leave nothing ill to the imagination.

You have the right to discuss the evaluation with your chair prior to its being finalized and placed in your file.

You can use your annual evaluation to set useful goals towards tenure.

Talk to chair about setting specific goals & expectations for the coming year IN YOUR WRITTEN ANNUAL EVALUATION.

Few chairs do this, so you have to ask.

Ask your chair to state what YOU should do differently next year to make good progress towards tenure.

e.g., "You have done X, now you need to do Y.

Get this in writing.

If the evaluation doesn't contain this information, ask your chair for a more specific evaluation.

Annual evaluation differs from the annual assignment

The assignment cannot say you must get funded or write X paper, but the chair can state in the evaluation that obtaining a steady source of funding in the next year, publishing last year's work, or expanding your teaching in a particular avenue will aid your progress towards tenure.

Evaluation file

There can only be one evaluation file, although material not in this file can be used in the tenure process.

Know what's in your file.

You have the right to see it.

Monitor it.

Make sure good stuff gets in.

Stuff that is contrary to fact must be removed.

Anything negative can be countered with a letter from you.

Nothing anonymous can be in the file except teaching evaluations.

If there are problems with your file, take care of them immediately.

The Union can help but there are time deadlines on everything (often 1 month).

Take control of your career & your file.

1. Get promises in writing.

Assume the administrator will be gone.

The chair, dean, provost, and president who made a promise to you is likely to be gone when you need to call in that promise.

Ask for documents when you must count on future agreements or resources

memoranda of understanding
commitments for resources, etc.

Sometimes it might be important to get a document into your evaluation file.

2. Keep copies of EVERYTHING

3. If FIU breaks the terms of these agreements, consult the UFF Grievance Chair and a lawyer

Membership in the United Faculty of Florida (UFF) gives you free annual consultation with a lawyer retained by UFF.

FIU will not retaliate against you for your filing formal complaints since this would only add fuel to your grievance or lawsuit.

Note: A grievance will not get you tenure, but it may get your contract honored. Lawsuits can achieve all manner of results but they're expensive in all respects and should be pursued only when diplomatic avenues fail. Even academics who win a lawsuit often lose their love for the job.

Tenure file preparation

A Major document,

Look at some tenure files of people who were awarded tenure in the past 2 years.

The file takes 2-3 months to prepare, but requires advance preparation because you will need to save odd things.

Read the T&P manual

Get a bunch of file folders, label them according to the sections of the tenure file.

Start adding stuff.

You can be selective when you assemble the notebook.

A. Make your case; don't make a case that doesn't conform to the facts of your career.

1. Don't gloss over things that might be perceived of as weaknesses. Address them. e.g.,
few pubs but good ones giving you an international reputation
no lab but worked with students in the field
teaching started out ragged but has steadily improved
changed research direction is now taking off.

2. Don't whine.

3. Follow the letter of the guidelines but:

at the beginning of each section (Research, Teaching, Service) include a one page summary explaining your accomplishments.

Second to the CV, these are the most important part of the document, and, ironically, it's outside the specified format. Revise this until it sings.

You can send it to your outside reviewers as well.

B. Write & include thoughtful Summary Statements for research, teaching, & service

Your research summary statement should explain two things: coherence & momentum.

1. Why and how your various works form a coherent whole that address an area of interest.

2. Where your work is going, & what can be expected of you after tenure.

Get a second & third opinion on the quality of this statement.

Revise revise revise, until it sings.

If teaching evaluations summaries aren't easily read, provide summary charts.

Type hand-written evaluations verbatim

Include the nasty ones and the misspellings.

Everybody gets some of these so it's a red flag if you exclude them.

C. Save everything but be selective about what goes into your file.

The University T&P Guidelines require certain documents, but don't throw everything in you have in your drawer.

FIU has 1000 faculty, half in Arts & Sciences, so increasingly we don't know each other and your case has to be made in the file,

More isn't better.

Organize carefully, winnow documents, don't duplicate unless required to by the guidelines.

As a rule, it's not necessary to include thank-you notes.

As Bruce Harvey says, "don't clog the arteries" of your file or people will overlook the important things.

Make sure that information is clearly laid out and accessible.

Don't make reviewers plow through and search for stuff. e.g.,

a. Make sure that refereed journals are clearly marked.

b. Make sure that the journal's refereeing process is described clearly but briefly.

D. Letters

Outside letters

Some colleges allow you to select 2 of the people to write outside reviews.

Good people to write letters are those with impressive CVs:

Endowed chairs

Presidents of professional organizations

Full professors at big-name research universities

Journal editors

Excellent but, curiously, Provost Berkman regards these as a conflict of interest.

Outside letters that address your work in a knowledgeable way are crucial, so you have to get known in your field.

Do not rely on those with obvious vested interest in your success:

Former or current collaborators

Former professors or academic advisors

BUT these can write a useful letter interpreting your contribution to collaborative efforts.

If your outside letter writers are a big deal in the field, make sure that point is made

preferably by someone other than yourself (chair or dept. colleague).

Inside letters and the Chair's statement

These can provide a lot of important info like the stature of outside letter writers, problems with equipment, the way in which this candidate involves undergraduates in research, etc.

Higher Evaluations

Department, Chair, College Committee, Dean, Provost, (President?).

Any decision below the Provost, is advisory to the next review level, and not a final decision, though the Dean's call tends to stick far more often than not.

T&P Committee decisions

Role of the department vs. the School or College Committee varies from unit to unit.

T&P Committee is looking for evidence that you will remain active in research after you get tenure.

Depth

Quality

Passion about your work

In general committees prefer to support departmental decisions.

Three cases where a committee is likely to overturn a departmental decision:

1. If the department is perceived of as absurdly soft.

2. If the department is politically riven.

A good candidate with a split or bad vote is always suggestive of a department rift. Explaining the context can help the committee though the administration often allows dysfunctional departments to shoot themselves in the collective foot.

3. If the department's letter neglects to address issues of apparent concern in the file.

Dean is like a gardener, deciding what to keep and what to weed in order to determine the character of the garden.

A good dean works from before hiring until tenure to make sure that the right sort of faculty are in the units.

A bad dean does not.

We have had both kinds and still do.

Typically a dean makes the decisive call on tenure, but in recent history the Provost has exercised his independence.

Deans try to guide a department towards quality and hold a department together, but they also serve at the discretion of the provost & president.

Provost may understand each field less than a dean, but looks very carefully to assure overall quality.

A former FIU provost said: "The file speaks for itself. If the file is borderline, I won't approve it."

Listen carefully to your Provost to figure out how your dean will rank your file.

A dean will rarely send recommendations to the provost that he or she thinks the provost will disagree with, even if the dean has special insights the provost may not share.

If a provost feels he has to reverse a dean's vote too often, he will conclude he has the wrong dean.

3rd Year Review

How the 3rd year review changes things.

Your record will be judged for evidence that you are proceeding satisfactorily towards tenure.

If you are not, your contract may be terminated.

Special strategies for success with 3rd year review

Get off the block quickly

3 year plan

Identify stepping stones in your 5 year tenure plan

Mark your progress along this time line

Make sure you have planned a few items that will demonstrate progress.

Produce tangible evidence of efforts, even if those efforts have not yet borne fruit.

Proposals of all sorts

Grant proposal submissions,

even in-house and small grants

Paper submissions

Book prospectus submitted to publishers

Research project reports

Grad students

If your unit has a significant graduate program, you will need to participate.

Work to recruit one or two good graduate students for whom you will serve as advisor.

Give engaging seminars at good undergrad institutions.

Let your colleagues at other schools know you are looking for students.

Recruit from best FIU undergrads.

WARNING: A bad grad students is worse than none –

Weak or troubled grad students waste your time and slow you down.

Final message:

PUBLISH PUBLISH PUBLISH

Other information

<http://www.fiu.edu/~stoddard/tenure/>

Links to

This file

Tenure tips by various faculty

Tenure & promotion manual & forms