

# Getting Promoted

Processes, Priorities, and Strategies

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- department: invested in you, grown to rely on you
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As a community it is important to . . .

- de-mystify (and thereby de-stress) the process
- talk about what really matters
- talk about what doesn't matter (or matters less)

especially if we want to promote a diverse professoriate.

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I've solicited 100+ letters for 12 promotion cases

- seen some great/terrible letters
- seen frank responses declining to write letters



# The process (roughly)

Year 1: your hired!

Year k: reappointment review (internal vs. external w/letters)

Year 5: last year you can influence your promotion packet

Year 6: tenure and promotion process under way

- develop list of letter writers (P&T, candidate) in May
- solicit letter writing commitments in June
- send packet out in August
- receive letters in October
- P&T meeting in late October
- recommendation to Dean in Nov.
- rubber stamping until May

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Asked ...

*What are the key questions you have as a new faculty member related to promotion?*

# The questions

Received a bunch of great questions

- priorities, funding, publications, students, collegiality, process, service

Will do my best, but won't be able to answer them all in this talk

Will try to collect and answer more questions (ICSE NFS 2019)

# Questions about priorities

Does my department actually care about my student evals of teaching being great, or just that they're not terrible?

How are peer teaching evaluations weighted against student evaluations?

Is it really true that teaching and research are \*equally\* important?

What are the criteria and what is the weight for each criterion?

How do you know you're spending time on the "right stuff", i.e., the stuff that leads to tenure?

# Questions about priorities

Does my department actually care about my student evals of teaching being great, or just that they're not terrible? No

How are peer teaching evaluations weighted against student evaluations?

Is it really true that teaching and research are \*equally\* important? No

What are the criteria and what is the weight for each criterion? research > teaching > service

How do you know you're spending time on the "right stuff", i.e., the stuff that leads to tenure? If it aligns with priorities

# Funding questions

I'd like to know how to get funded without selling my soul to the devil!

In terms of necessary and sufficient conditions for getting tenure, where does the CAREER award sit?



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I'd like to know how to get funded without selling my soul to the devil!

In terms of necessary and sufficient conditions for getting tenure, where does the CAREER award sit? neither, but it is important to have a substantial sole-PI award

# Publication questions

How much wood does a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck would get tenure?  
(where wood is papers, and chucking is publishing, and the woodchuck is a junior faculty)

Is it worth my time to publish in workshops?

All my ICSE/FSE/ASE papers got rejected. Should I send the work to lesser venues so I don't have a big hole in my CV?

Should I target the top 2 conferences or is building a reputation in less high-profile but tight-knit communities acceptable?

# Publication questions

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(where wood is papers, and chucking is publishing, and the woodchuck is a  
junior faculty) 10+

Is it worth my time to publish in workshops? No, perhaps indirectly

All my ICSE/FSE/ASE papers got rejected. Should I send the work to lesser  
venues so I don't have a big hole in my CV? No, focus on visibility of quality  
work not productivity

Should I target the top 2 conferences or is building a reputation in less  
high-profile but tight-knit communities acceptable? Yes, but connecting to a  
small community has value

# Student questions

I've been at the job for 5 years and still my most mature PhD student is 2 years from defending. Can I still get tenure?

how do you know when to call it on a student?

What are characteristics of productive students? of collaborations?

What are red flags for students? for collaborators?

How do you check if a student is a good fit for your group without having the luxury of knowing the student for a year, a semester, or even a week?

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If I'm on the organizing committee for a conference, does that help/hurt my tenure case?

What does "too little" vs. "too much" service look like?

# Service questions

If I'm on the organizing committee for a conference, does that help/hurt my tenure case? Neither, don't prioritize this

What does "too little" vs. "too much" service look like? "too little"  $\approx \emptyset$ , "too much"  $> 2$  substantial activities per year

# Collegiality questions

Besides research and teaching, **how important is socializing with colleagues in the department?** I know I must not piss people off, but do I need to attend the social events I don't enjoy or be with people I don't like?

**Is it okay to argue for something during the faculty meeting?**

When requesting resources from or expressing my opinions to the department chair, is there anything I should pay special attention to? **Does department chair play a more important role in tenure promotion?**

**How important are the unofficial aspects of the situation, such as inter-personal management?**



# Collegiality questions

Besides research and teaching, **how important is socializing with colleagues in the department?** I know I must not piss people off, but do I need to attend the social events I don't enjoy or be with people I don't like? **Be collegial, but not necessary outside of work**

**Is it okay to argue for something during the faculty meeting?** Yes, if not then something is wrong with the department

When requesting resources from or expressing my opinions to the department chair, is there anything I should pay special attention to? **Does department chair play a more important role in tenure promotion?** No, independent assessment that supplements faculty assessment

**How important are the unofficial aspects of the situation, such as inter-personal management?** Don't piss people off

# Process questions

How should “successes” be balanced before/after reappointment? For example, if I get 3 grants before 3rd year review, but 0 after, is this a bad sign for my tenure case?

What are the requirements for early tenure vs. tenure on the standard clock?  
Are they different?

Should I spend some time visiting Universities/Companies and giving talks before the tenure year? I know some people do this, but I'm not sure if it worth the money and effort.

What are the strategies of finding people to write tenure promotion letters?

# Process questions

How should “successes” be balanced before/after reappointment? For example, if I get 3 grants before 3rd year review, but 0 after, is this a bad sign for my tenure case? non-negative trend is important

What are the requirements for early tenure vs. tenure on the standard clock? Are they different? No, above the bar is above the bar

Should I spend some time visiting Universities/Companies and giving talks before the tenure year? I know some people do this, but I'm not sure if it worth the money and effort.

What are the strategies of finding people to write tenure promotion letters? Your job is to become known so that invitations to write letters are accepted.

# “Worst-case scenario” questions

What if I have a silent enemy in the research world, or someone who thinks I'm an imposter, and they end up writing a tenure letter?

What are “red flags” in letters from the community, and how do I avoid them?

# “Worst-case scenario” questions

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What are “red flags” in letters from the community, and how do I avoid them?  
a summary coming later

# Who has the answers?

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Asked a set of open-ended questions, whose answers address many of the questions from above

# What are the necessary conditions for promotion?

You will be hard pressed to find statements of “sufficient conditions”

Institutions have to leave a paper trail that will hold up in court.

Unanimous agreement on the following conditions

# What are the necessary conditions for promotion?

## Excellent research record

- coherent narrative of how you are making a difference
- funding from national sources (supporting 2+ students per year)
- regular publication in top venues (2+ per year)

## Adequate teaching record

- reasonable teaching evaluations w/non-negative trend
- graduate 1+ MS; PhDs in the pipeline

## Some outside service (top conference PC)

## Excellent letters

- 95% of letter content is about research record
- we ask for 8 such letters

# Shifting standards in regard to promotion



Computing Research Association  
Best Practices Memo  
Adopted February 2015

## Incentivizing Quality and Impact: Evaluating Scholarship in Hiring, Tenure, and Promotion

*Batya Friedman and Fred B. Schneider*

### Toward Incentivizing Quality and Impact

**Hiring, Tenure, and Promotion.** Recommendations for hiring, tenure, and promotion practices follow, where some institutional variation may occur.

*Hiring Recommendation.* Evaluate candidates on the basis of the contributions in their top *one or two* publications, in concert with the research statement and the other standard material (e.g., letters of recommendation, full CV, teaching statement) generally read by hiring committees in determining whom to invite to campus for an interview and, ultimately, whom to hire. Candidates should identify publications where they have played a significant role.

*Tenure and Promotion Recommendation.* Evaluate candidates for tenure and promotion on the basis of the contributions in their most important *three to five* publications (where systems and other artifacts may be included).<sup>1</sup> Tenure and promotion committees should invite external reviewers to comment on impact, depth, and scholarship of these publications or artifacts as well as the standard material (e.g., full CV, research statement, teaching statement). Some institutions might ask a candidate to suggest which publications or artifacts be considered, other institutions might leave that determination to the external reviewers. Per standard practice, tenure and promotion committees should read the external letters and the standard material in determining tenure and promotion decisions.

# What is the relative importance of teaching and research?

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Unanimous in stating that research > teaching

- teaching has to be solid, but research has to be excellent
- without excellent research, no promotion
- letters matter a lot and they almost never mention teaching
- excellence in research is the rarer skill set and it is prized as such
- 70% research, 20% teaching, 10% service
- bad teaching can hurt your promotion case, but great teaching won't get you promoted

# With regard to service, how much is too much?

Answers varied more here

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Answers varied more here

- spending more than 10-15% of your time on service is problematic
- no need to chair multiple workshops or be on multiple PCs in a year
- be very selective in participating in OCs
- if your research is very good, do as much as you like
- low-tier service is not valuable
- try to serve on top PCs or grant eval committees
- subtle benefits to service, e.g., networking, working with undergrads
- prioritize service for visibility
- have a very good reason for accepting any service



# What advice would you give to your former self?

Lots of varied perspectives in these answers

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You should **assess whether the institution is right for you**

- figure out what you value
- finding a good match means 30+ years of productivity and happiness

Try to **figure out the local standards**

- most people think the bar is higher than it really is
- it is not a competition with the other junior faculty
- post-tenure burnout is a result of “sprinting”; find your “pace”

# What advice would you give to your former self?

Don't focus on getting tenure in your current position, focus on performing and producing research at a level that would get you tenure almost anywhere.

Only say "yes" if you know why you are saying yes

- I owe it to this colleague
- I can double-count this one
- I need it for my own sanity
- It will look good on my CV
- It will establish a relationship with important people in my field
- It will enhance my external reputation

"they asked me to" and "I might not get asked again" are bad reasons.

# What advice would you give to your former self?

Don't worry so much about publication volume (yearly review metrics  $\neq$  promotion criteria)

Don't underestimate small focused workshops (e.g., a Dagstuhl) for networking and building collaborations

Your students are your team. Don't split them into individual one-per-project work, have them work together on things. It makes for happier students, more productive students, more productive you.

Find your own research thread, nurture it daily, and stick to the basics (a few good pubs a year to disseminate your ideas and funds to support the nurturing)

# What advice would you give to your former self?

**Don't spread your work among lots of different conferences** that (1) you have to travel to, and (2) whose communities you have to infiltrate. You don't want your letter writers to know about one of the key papers in your tenure package, and be silent about the others.

**Develop the "story arc" of your research program.** It is better to become known for a body of work, and for letter writers to be able to say that you are one of the world's experts in your field, than for your letter writers to simply say that you know how to produce large numbers of papers.

**Advertise your work broadly.** Ask to give talks at other people's institutions. Invite people to give talks at your institution.

# Red flags

Lots of 2nd tier publication is a red flag

Too many publications is a red flag

- what is your story? (don't be a dabbler)

Spanning too many communities is a red flag

Excessive service is a red flag

# Closing Thoughts

## Summary of questions/answers

**priorities** research excellence is most important

**funding** is required to support your research team

**publications** a few top pubs per year that add to your “story”

**students** graduate one student, several in the pipeline

**collegiality** never mentioned by the “experts”

**process** non-negative trends at promotion time matter

**service** a small amount is enough and be very selective

# Thanks to ...

*Anonymous Junior Faculty*

Gail Murphy, UBC

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Neno Medvidovic, USC

Sam Malek, UC-Irvine



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