

Tenure in Question

by Hugh Johnston

At UPEI we have a system called tenure, where professors are confirmed within their appointment. According to the Faculty handbook, tenure is "appointment without term, the right of a faculty member not to be dismissed except for cause.. this includes the right during the appointment to fair consideration for increases in responsibility and salary, and promotion rank.

To examine tenure one must deal with the merit of tenure and the merit of the present system. The traditional approach of tenure was to safeguard the intellectual independence of professors (an objective through study). This gives the professor a base upon which he may further his work in making his contribution. Tenure also gives the professor some job security. He knows that he cannot be fired unless he is thoroughly incompetent or if he commits some gross delinquency of conduct. This is a positive force, for in every occupation employees seek this security. Tenure protects the professor from cyclical fluctuations in ideology that might jeopardize his position (even though this university is committed to the principle of academic freedom as defined by C.A.U.T. "see Faculty handbook pg 19")

It also protects the professor from small pressure groups of students who feel slighted without cause. One might consider tenure a protection of truth.

But as in every system there is room for abuse, and tenure allows lots of room. The professor may become soft, inefficient and unproductive. He or she may slacken off and lower the quality of teaching at UPEI. There is nothing worse than an ineffective professor. Tenure may set up a screen behind which the professor may hide. But a further reaching question might be: does tenure destroy the "survival of the fittest" approach? If indeed the quality of teaching is lowered by

such an approach, then tenure must be an unacceptable solution. When one examines what would happen if all hiring was on term appointments, one would see that it is an inefficient method. If all appointments were on term, there would be a tremendous turnover of professors. As is evidenced by the UNB Business Department, such a turnover can be a drastic detriment to the quality of the program. Tenure selects the best of the professors in order to set a high standard. The longer these professors teach productively, the more experienced they become. If the system is not abused, tenure can establish the highest quality of scholarship.

But what of the tenure system at UPEI? Here all hiring and firing is done by the Board of Directors. Any appointments must go through the departmental Chairman, the Dean, and the President, who makes a recommendation to the Board. Any aspiring professor must first be put through the royal wringer before receiving an appointment.

The criteria a professor must meet are:
 1. foremost, the candidate's competence and promise as evidenced by his teaching performance, and his research and publishing ventures.
 2. Appropriate participation in side duties involving his department or faculty.
 3. Cooperation and suitability to the departments long term plans. These are fine criteria, but the whole system might depend upon the interpretation of these conditions. There are rules governing this, but what happens in the case of a sellers market in the recruitment of pro-

fessors? If the university is desperate for people, they will lower their standards. When these people have tenure and it turns to a buyers market, how do you replace them with better people? There is also the possibility that the Senate tenure committee might be soft in their tenure appointments. It is the opinion of many students and some faculty that the tenure committee was not only soft, but 'soft in the head' with respect to some appointments.

A survey of thirty 3rd and 4th year students was taken by the Sun. The results were a little over 2:1 against tenure. The reasons stated on the survey convey a lack of knowledge by the student body with respect to tenure. Therefore, one might postulate that the adverse reaction is partially due to lack of knowledge, and more importantly, the students view of the professors in their own, as well as other departments. There is no question that there are some students dissatisfied with their professors (for there is some dissatisfaction with everything). The question is "How much of this dissatisfaction is due to the improper affirmation of some professors through tenure?" There is a long and detailed process that professors must go through to receive tenure. From the time a professor enters this university a file is kept on them. The professor is expected to meet the expectations of the Senate Tenure Committee with respect to their criteria. Consideration for tenure is mandatory for all professors not hired on term. Contrary to what some intellectual fly weights in this institution believe, tenure is not given to

professors after ten years (these people seem to base this inspiration on the simple fact that the letters used informing the word "ten" coincidentally appears on the anterior section of the word "tenure").

Application for tenure must be made before Feb. 1 of the candidate's fourth contract year. Consideration for tenure must be given in the fifth contract year. One could question this seemingly short period of time, but how much longer than four years does it take to evaluate a professor's performance?

The decision to give tenure is made by the Senate tenure committee based on the Chairman's recommendation, and a written submission by the candidate. The process of receiving tenure is long and drawn out, containing enough red tape to truly thrill the best of career bureaucrats. (see pgs. 20-27 of Faculty handbook). If a candidate is refused tenure, he is in effect told to try again next year, but the university reserves the right to not renew the candidate's contract (i.e. bye, bye, Charlie).

The tenure system upholds a standard of equality in the university only if the Selection Committee is able to uphold a high standard. Sceptical students' opinions at UPEI are well founded in their reservations towards tenure because of the quality of some of the professors. But, hopefully in the future, the purpose of the system will be upheld. (See the Sun after March break for controversy over term appointments and their effect on the tenure system)



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