

TIPS FOR GETTING TENURE AT WMU*

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Few professional endeavors are as stressful as navigating the tenure process. When I look back on my life during this process, I realize that I made it more stressful than it needed to be. As a practicing psychologist, I am very familiar with anxiety disorders. However, when I was going through the tenure process at WMU, I could not find the diagnostic code that best described what I and many other non-tenured faculty were experiencing. We could call it “pre-tenure anxiety syndrome.” The symptoms include inability to get enough sleep, frequent checking of email and mailboxes in anticipation of journal editor manuscript decisions, neglect of proper nutrition and exercise, persistent feelings of not being good enough, and guilt when not working on weekends.

Now that I have served as the contract administrator for the WMU-AAUP for a year, I have had the privilege of assisting many faculty members who are going through the tenure process. Drawing on my own experience of going through the tenure review process, as well as my experience assisting others, I have some tips for successfully achieving tenure. Some of these suggestions result from the tenure and promotion workshops that we co-sponsor with the provost's office several times each year.

- Start a tenure file during your first year in academia and document & date everything you do.
- Sort this file into 3 categories corresponding with Article 17—Professional Competence, Recognition, & Service.
- Get a faculty mentor who understands your field, has tenure, and knows your departmental culture
- Develop a 5-year Professional Recognition Plan & Trajectory that will result in publications and/or creative artistic works & other scholarly projects
- Select several peer-reviewed journals in your field
- Begin writing—don't wait until all of your data is collected or analyzed. Write a review of the literature; an innovation in methodology; a clinical case study; review a creative work or book; etc.
- Write every week for several hours and block off writing/research time
- If appropriate, join a research or creative activities group of colleagues at WMU or elsewhere
- Have colleagues critique your ideas, research proposals & writing—don't work in a vacuum
- Be proactive-- submit papers for publication by the start of your 2nd year
- Choose to submit to refereed journals or juries & carefully follow their submission format & rules
- Don't be discouraged when you get rejections—the feedback is valuable!
- Rework your manuscript & resubmit to the same journal if encouraged or a different journal
- Keep your papers or creative works in the pipeline at all times—don't get discouraged or give up
- If your research is conducive to this, write “spin-offs” that focus on different aspects (e.g., methodology, lit review, pedagogy, highlighting different data sets, consulting strategies, etc)
- Try to have something published by your 2nd year tenure review
- Demonstrate your scholarly “trajectory” in your 2nd year professional narrative
- Adjust or change your scholarly program & plans as necessary—don't stick with a dead end direction
- Know that most professors get rejection slips before they are successful in publishing
- Getting published is about being tenacious (and having good ideas, doing solid research, etc)
- Keep your teaching fresh & innovative—good student evaluations are important
- Don't serve on many departmental or university committees before you get tenure—too time-consuming
- If you have personal tragedy or emergency that consumes your focus—request to stop tenure clock

- Don't make enemies in your department—be collegial
- Spend months, not weeks or days, preparing your tenure portfolio for each review
- Add to your resume frequently—using your file of activities
- Divide your resume into the 3 categories to be reviewed—recognition, competence & service
- Divide your publications into peer-reviewed, non peer-reviewed, book chapters, grant proposals, etc.
- Divide your conference presentations/papers into international, national, regional, state, etc.
- Carefully craft your professional narrative to weave together your scholarly program, trajectory, successes, relationship to your teaching
- Take the feedback from all levels of the tenure review process seriously & attempt to make mid-course corrections when necessary
- Follow the Provost checklist for tenure portfolios carefully—a well-organized portfolio pays off!
- Attempt to keep your life balanced with family, health, leisure—you will be more productive!

The handouts from our Tenure & Promotion Workshops are on our website, including the Provost Checklist for what to include in your tenure portfolio www.wmuaaup.net

I am available to assist you with questions and in preparation of your tenure materials. You can contact me at either the chapter office at 345-0151 or email me at contract@wmuaaup.net.

You can avoid “pre-tenure anxiety syndrome” by getting organized, doing what you love most professionally, and not getting easily discouraged.

*This article focuses on traditionally-ranked faculty. A second article will focus on faculty specialists.