

University of Washington

ADVANCE Center for Institutional Change

Workshop with ADVANCE Professional Development Consultants, Professor Bruce Darling and Professor Lynn Riddiford

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Responses to anonymously submitted questions regarding promotion and tenure:

1. I heard somewhere that:

- **Around 50% of assistant professors who come to the UW do not end up going up for tenure (they leave, are counseled out, take a job at another university, industry, etc.)**
- **Of those that stay, around 95% end up getting tenure.**

Are there numbers right?? What are the actual number?

Bruce Darling:

I don't have figures for the overall UW, but the retention of new hire assistant professors within the College of Engineering is significantly higher than 50%. Within Electrical Engineering, of the group of faculty hired between 5 and 10 years ago (roughly), none left to go elsewhere, and all of them are now tenured Associate Professors. So for EE, the retention, promotion, and tenure statistics are all 100%, although the one caveat is that a very small percentage did not make the promotion on their first try. These were each cases that were put up very early, though, but which made it through on their second try.

Lynn Riddiford:

I don't have the figures for the Sciences in the College of Arts and Sciences but in my 4 years on the Council the denial of tenure in the Sciences was very rare. I don't know how many left before that juncture. In Zoology over the past 30 years, I think that we have only had one tenure denial and two people who left for other types of teaching opportunities before the tenure decision.

2. How does the P&T committee view collaborative research? There are rumors that if most of your research is conducted with other PIs in your department that the research will not be given equal weight to independent projects. Is that the case?

Bruce Darling

If a promotion case showed only collaborative research of a new hire with only a few select faculty of the same department, then that would raise the question of how independent the researcher is. Unfortunately, no matter which extreme one takes, there will always be someone who will question that choice of direction. If someone writes only single-author papers, someone will ask why they can't collaborate. If someone writes only multi-author papers, someone will ask why they can't do anything on their own. The best guidance I can give is to assistant

professors is to aim for balance - do some things on your own to show that you can, and also do some things in collaboration with others to show that you can. This addresses both concerns, and also has the nice advantage of building up both skill sets which is useful for longevity at a university.

3. **Another rumor that I have heard is that you need to be consistent in your publication record and that the committee does not like to see large (1 year or more) gaps in publications. Is that true? If it is, is it worthwhile to try to "justify" these gaps in your statement (e.g., maternity leave, began a new research program etc.).**

Bruce Darling:

Small gaps in publication output are not of great concern, since everyone realizes that the time from submission to print can vary widely. One could easily pick up a year separation between journal articles just by the order in which they were submitted to various journals. What is of concern is if a faculty member's output is flat zero for an extended period of say, several years. That indicates a real problem. Any really big, obvious gaps in output (publications, teaching, grants, whatever) *should* be addressed in the dossier to explain what was happening.

In some cases, a faculty member might be trying their hand in a new research direction that may be taking some time to get the proper foothold. The change in direction would be a very good thing to explain in the dossier. Venturing into new areas is generally seen as a good and productive thing, since it is a clear demonstration of someone going beyond their PhD or Post-Doc work. However, it ultimately needs to lead somewhere, and should not paralyze the remainder of one's on-going contributions.

There may also be some temptation to hold back a publication or two and save them for the promotion year. I personally do not recommend this, because holding back the publication of a research result has the effect of diminishing its impact. If you get to a result much earlier than the rest of the world, the impact of the research is much higher, since that result could then become the pioneering effort rather than risking its potential to be just another "me-too" publication.

Good advice that I have also heard is to develop a habit of doing some publication writing each day. Just make it into a routine. Instead of battling writer's block and waiting for the singular moment of inspiration, just start typing on whatever it is you are working on, and pretty soon a steady stream of output will naturally develop. It is much better to head off a potential problem early on with a corrective strategy than to rely upon excuses later on if things fall short.