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Takeaways from *Best Practices for Making Tenure Decisions: Philosophy, Criteria, and Expectations* (available from the University of Wyoming Office of Academic Affairs)

1. A decision about tenure is a decision about the future.

*"...the hurdle metaphor is strikingly inept: after one clears a hurdle, one's trajectory is downward" (page 3)*

2. Teaching, research, and service are (*all*) essential, but there are intangible factors, too.

*The custom of getting its administrators from the ranks of academics "...helps preserve institutional respect for such core values as freedom of inquiry and expression and a preference for debate and persuasion over the raw exercise of command. But it works only if academics cultivate leadership skills within their ranks. The surest way to do so is to embed some consideration of managerial acumen and leadership ability in reappointment, tenure, and promotion decisions" (page 4).*

3. Documented, discipline-specific expectations may be useful, but there are pitfalls to avoid.

*"To hire highly accomplished, doctorally-qualified scholars into a community that cherishes academic freedom and an extraordinary degree of intellectual independence is simply incongruous with the notion that we owe our colleagues a step-by-step recipe for a successful tenure case" (page 4).*

New faculty members can take advantage of these principles:

- Become a versatile, engaging teacher
- Identify and cultivate a national or international audience for your scholarly activities
- If external funding is available in your field, develop and follow a plan for seeking it
- Find ways to connect your scholarly work with your teaching.
- Select a meaningful array of service activities
- Learn how to be a leader
- Maintain a love of your discipline (Ag econ is great stuff!)

Can these principles help us assess some possibly thorny tenure cases?

Case 1: Professor Aplus was a hot commodity. He had three “A” journal pubs (with his advisor) at the time of hire and on that basis successfully negotiated a year off his tenure clock. Since hire almost 3 years ago one more pub (with his advisor) is forthcoming. His abundant start up package, now coming to an end, has funded participation in 3 national and international conferences a year (fortunately coinciding with some department meetings). On the teaching side, he has taught two rigorous Phd courses a year since his second year and, wanting to keep them up to date, has passed on an opportunity to teach Principles (which never really changes and doesn’t require much skill). He serves on the Graduate Committee, which meets once a year when it reviews applications, and colleagues appreciate his insights at that meeting. Third year review comments from the Provost stress the need for Professor Aplus to increase his research productivity quickly in order to have a successful tenure decision in two years. The Provost would also like to see him demonstrate more versatility in teaching, especially at the undergraduate level. Professor Aplus is very unhappy with the review because he feels he’d already met the department’s minimum criteria for tenure at the time of hire, his pubs are better than those of some of the senior faculty members, and when he was hired he was told his state-of-the-art technical skills were needed to boost the currency of the department’s doctoral program.

Case 2: Professor Goodman is a good guy. He loves to teach—is really quite brilliant at teaching-- and his students love him, even recommending him for one of the university’s top teaching awards. He is also the kind of person who volunteers for and chips in on everything, even serving as (the dreaded) faculty senate representative and on the parking violations committee. He regularly submits organized symposia proposals for the AAEA meetings and regularly has them accepted, being very adept at reaching out to members of the profession, and showing his potential to be a leader in the profession. His department colleagues like him very much (he’s in high demand at happy hour) and are very encouraged to learn he has one pub out for review and another “in draft” at the time of his third year review. No one, however, has seen either one. The Provost, unfortunately, has a very dim view of Professor Goodman’s tenure prospects. Some of his colleagues share Professor G’s concern that the Administration only values research, and doesn’t care about teaching or service; others think Professor G isn’t “firing on all cylinders.” Professor G also feels that the department hasn’t been totally clear about its expectations for his performance and has led him to believe he was a valued member of the department.

Case 3: Professor Dadtoo has become the father of two children since starting his tenure track. The university has a tenure clock stop policy that applies to both parents, and Professor Dadtoo has had two clock stops. Consequently, he’s been on the faculty for five years at the time of his third year review. His colleagues are struggling at review time to figure out how to count his five publications and 15 courses taught since hire. Does he have one pub a year; or 1.67 per year? Three courses taught per year, or 5 per year? Some of his colleagues don’t think the publications that came out during his clock stop years should be counted at all (why did he need the clock stop if he was going to keep working?), and others think he should get extra points for having continued to be productive while caring for his children. There is also one person who can’t understand why Professor D should have been allowed to take the clock stop because his wife was also at home with the kids. Wasn’t he just milking the system to get extra time to tenure? Who’s right? The Provost’s review indicates no concerns with Professor D’s teaching, research, or service.