

Academic Matters

OCUFA'S JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION
LA REVUE D'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR D'UAPUO

Oct-Nov 2009

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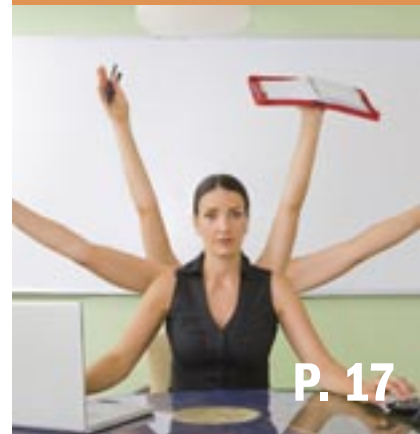
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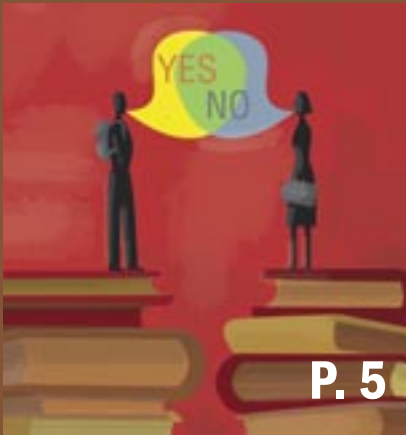
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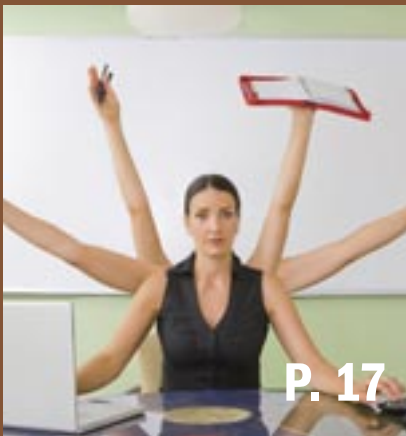
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Academic Matters

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Academic Matters accepte volontiers des articles écrits en anglais ou en français.

Publisher:

OCUFA; Hentry Mandelbaum, Executive Director

Editor-in-Chief:

Mark Rosenfeld, Associate Executive Director

Associate Editor:

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Art Direction:

Eva Kiss, Neglia Design Inc., www.NegliaDesign.com

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DOVETAIL COMMUNICATIONS
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ISSN 1719-010X

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Letters to the Editor

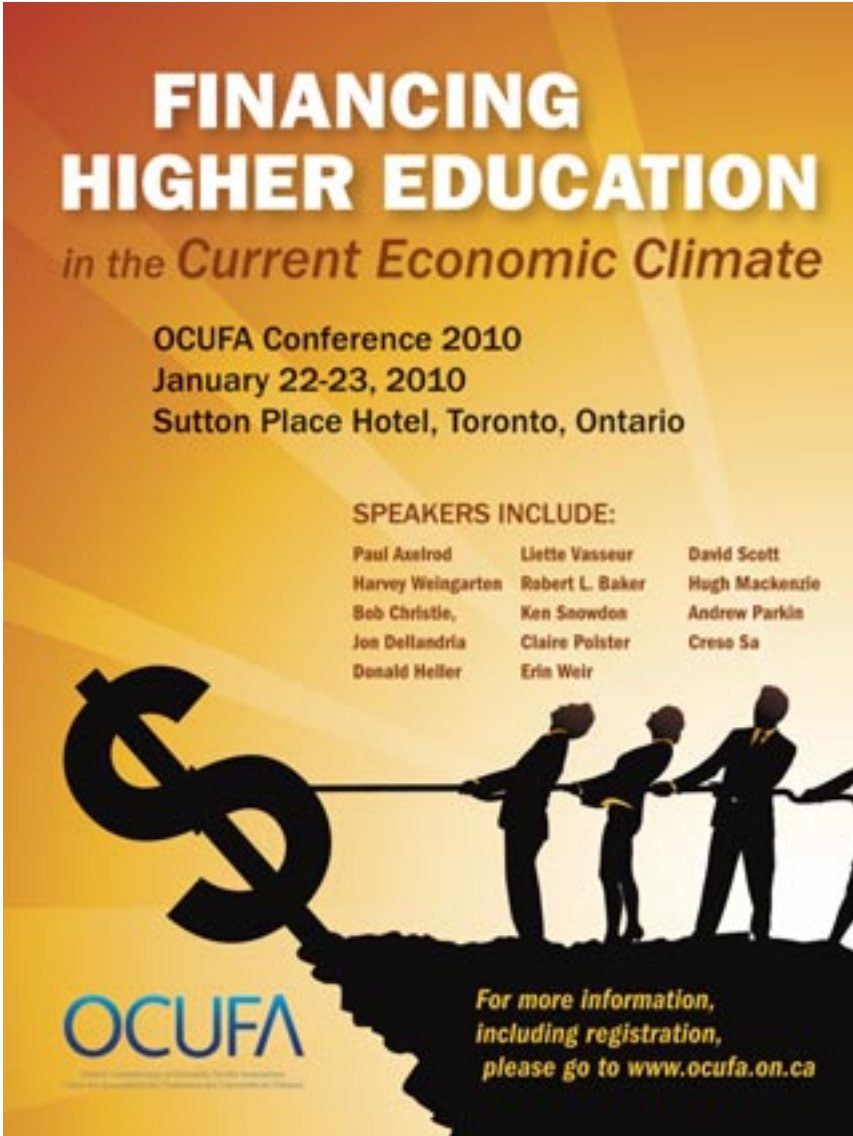
Dear Editor:

Karen Dubinsky's "Polytechnique: What we remember, what we invent, what we forget" (May 2009) is the best piece I have heard or read on the *Polytechnique*. When the movie first screened in Montreal, the French-speaking press was shockingly uncritical.

The general consensus seemed to be that the film was timely (after a suitable lapse of time) and thoughtful (because it was seen through the eyes of one of the male students). Avoiding any form of feminist critique was seen as a positive development. The tone was self-congratulatory: look how far we have come; we are now mature enough as a society/nation to look at this ugly event and move on. Except nobody is really examining what happened and its implications for Quebec in 2009. You have, however. A brilliant analysis. Chapeau!

KATHRYN HARVEY

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The university world needs more tenure, not less, argues Michiel Horn, imperfect as it may be.

The case for tenure

by Michiel Horn

What is it about tenure that gets some people so upset? That it grants certain employees a security not available to others? That it seems to mollycoddle ivory-tower intellectuals? That it gets in the way of pruning academic “deadwood,” however defined? That it makes it difficult for administrators to respond quickly to real or perceived changes in student demand, socio-economic need, or institutional “branding”? That it may constitute a PR problem for institutions dependent on public goodwill? All of the above?

Chances are that many of the critics are not completely sure what tenure is. But they do seem to be sure that they don’t like it and want it replaced. The substitute most frequently mentioned is a system of renewable contracts of five to ten years in length, with safeguards for academic freedom. This, it is argued, would permit a closer evaluation of performance and greater institutional flexibility, without endangering the freedom of teaching, research, and expression—central to the academic enterprise—that tenure presumably exists to protect.

The idea that tenure was invented so that academic freedom might be secure seems almost an article of faith in the academy. Yet it is mistaken. Tenure does protect academic freedom, but that was not its primary role in much of Canadian university history. Known as a continuing appointment or appointment without term, tenure conferred a high degree of security on people who would, if dismissed, have found it difficult if not impossible to obtain comparable alternate employment.

DEADWOOD

ivory tower

ELITE

The charters or statutes of most of the older universities in British North America did not refer to the terms of office enjoyed by their professors. This created the presumption, especially in those institutions in which the Scottish influence was strong, that tenured professors held their appointments during good behaviour until a governing board pensioned them off. Some died first. (Pension plans did not exist until they were gradually introduced during the first six decades of the twentieth century.) Professors could, however, be dismissed for cause, which then meant incompetence, neglect of duty, or moral turpitude.

Judicial interpretation from 1860 to 1923, however, did not support the idea of tenure during good behaviour. Wherever tested, the presumption yielded to the principle that professors, although enjoying appointments without term, nevertheless held their offices during pleasure, i.e., at the discretion of the governing boards of their institutions. Presidents and boards only rarely used their power to dismiss, however, so that professors could be excused for believing they held tenure during good behaviour. In *Smith v. Wesley College* in 1923, Mr. Justice A.K. Dysart stated in an *obiter dictum* that professors did not simply serve at will or during pleasure. They were specially trained for work of a special kind, Dysart wrote: "Their opportunities for suitable employment are rare, and if lost are not easily substituted by other congenial employment. Their special training unfits them for general service. In their chosen field, the material rewards are relatively small. In order that this noble profession may still attract recruits, it is wisely acknowledged both in theory and practice that the employment of professors by colleges should be characterized by stability approaching to permanence."

In this vein, the University of Alberta law professor G.L. Fridman wrote 50 years later: "University employment is rather like membership in some profession because dismissal is like loss of professional status: the dismissed party is deprived of the means of obtaining a livelihood by the exercise of that skill and expertise for which he [sic] has prepared himself by years of training." Dismissal, in his view, should be subject to the same standards of due process and demonstration of cause used in debarring lawyers or revoking licences to practice medicine.

By the time Fridman wrote, moreover, tenure during good behaviour was again becoming the rule in Canadian universities. This owed something to a high-profile incident in 1958 in which academic freedom seemed to be central. The dismissal of the United College historian Harry S. Crowe not only became the occasion of the first committee of inquiry launched by the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), it heightened awareness of the difference between tenure as custom and tenure in law. Normally behaving as though professors enjoyed tenure during good behaviour, on rare occasions governing boards acted on the legally accurate understanding that professors served during pleasure. The Crowe case was one example; the controversial dismissal of the University of Alberta biochemist George Hunter in 1949 was another.

The Crowe case hastened the CAUT's adoption of a statement on academic freedom and tenure. The document approved in 1960 described tenure as a means to the professor's "freedom as a teacher, as an investigator, and as a private citizen," and to the provision of "sufficient economic security to make the profession attractive to men and women of ability." In case of dismissal, cause must be demonstrated and that professors must be allowed to defend themselves.

Very important to such moves to strengthen tenure was the academic labour market. Faced by the mid-1960s with an unprecedented shortage of qualified personnel, administrations, academic senates, and governing boards were taking the steps necessary to formalize tenure during good behaviour, with dismissal permissible only for cause

Many departments in the humanities and social sciences have seen the number of their tenure-track positions decline, to the benefit of other parts of the university.

(later financial exigency was added to this). This was a response to requests by faculty associations; it also helped institutions attract scholars who were teaching elsewhere. At the same time, elaborate procedures for granting tenure were adopted. Decisions once made by department heads and deans came to be made by committees.

The objective was to ensure that only those who deserved tenure would get it. Critics argued that the process

was not tough enough, and that some professors slacked off after getting tenure. The historians David Bercuson, Robert Bothwell, and Jack Granatstein charged in two polemics, *The Great Brain Robbery* (1984) and *The Petrified Campus* (1997), that sloth triumphed too often. Asserting that significant scholarly activity was synonymous with excellence, and that those who did research at the frontiers of knowledge were, by definition, excellent teachers, they complained that many tenured professors did not make the grade.

It is true that some of those hired during the period of maximum expansion had no long-term commitment to research. But if one result was the inadequate scholarly output deplored by Bercuson, Bothwell, and Granatstein, this corrected itself over time. Those hired in the 1970s were generally more engaged in research than some of their elders. More recently the competition for tenure-track positions has become so fierce that many applicants already have publication records substantial enough to satisfy almost any tenure committee. Meanwhile, the appointees of the 1960s have retired.

The retirements of the last decade have resolved another alleged drawback of tenure, its role in hindering the reallocation of resources within the university. Many departments in the humanities and social sciences have seen the number of their tenure-track positions decline, to the benefit of other parts of the university.

This, however, has brought new challenges, among them a growing reliance on what used to be called part-timers and are now called contract faculty, whose services are widely used especially in the metropolitan areas. Where they are unionized, their academic freedom is usually protected by contract. But they, like full-time faculty appointed on eight-month or one-year contracts, lack a key benefit of tenure: employment security. A seniority system is of some help to them, but in those universities where one is in effect, academic administrators tend to dislike it because seniority may trump academic qualifications. Contract faculty see the matter differently: a key demand during the recent CUPE 3903 strike at York University was for five-year contracts to be awarded to long-service contract faculty.

All this raises at least three questions. Does the ready availability of contract faculty not show that the promise of security is no longer necessary to attract potential recruits to the academic profession? Why should some faculty enjoy security of tenure and not others? Why not give all faculty renewable term contracts of, say, five to 10 years?

The answer to the first question is surely “no”. Graduate students hoping for an

academic career are a bit like people buying lottery tickets. Objectively PhD students may know their chances of getting a tenure-track position are poor; subjectively they see themselves as future holders of such a position. This makes psychological sense: who wants to invest years of time and forego years of income in order to become a poorly-paid itinerant teacher?

This is one reason for retaining tenure even though it is not available to all faculty. If tenure were abolished in a province, its universities soon would have to offer higher salaries not only to retain “stars” who could go where tenure is still available, but also to ensure a continuing supply of able recruits. Increased insecurity would come with a sizable price tag.

But would not a system of term contracts allow for more effective monitoring of performance while mollifying critics to whom tenure serves as a red flag?

Superficially attractive, term contracts offer no real solution to those who regard tenure as a problem. Several contributors to a collection of essays and documents with the title *The Case for Tenure* (1996), edited by an American law professor, Matthew Finkin, argue that a system of renewable contracts has serious flaws from an organizational point of view while putting academic freedom at risk. Citing a study by Richard P. Chait and Andrew T. Ford (*Beyond Traditional Tenure*, 1982), the economists Michael S. McPherson and Gordon C. Winston write: “If the decision about contract renewal were more than nominal, it would prove very costly to universities committed to it. The resources required to evaluate everybody seriously every few years would be simply enormous. If such evaluations did not result in many dismissals, they would be largely wasted. If they did, the university would bear the cost of greater turnover.” (Anyone who has served on a hiring committee recently knows how costly in time and money the recruitment process is.)

“But in fact,” McPherson and Winston continue, “the more likely outcome is that contract renewals will become routine, and the system will resemble instant tenure.”

They identify two main reasons. After appointment there is no “moment of truth” such as is now provided by the tenure-granting process. Secondly, since the judges are also the judged, there is pressure not to judge one’s colleagues too harshly. Chait and Ford examined three institutions that used term contracts and found that turnover was low. They concluded that “contracts



EQUALITY
academic freedom
SECURITY
excellence

are neither a curse... nor a cure-all. As a practical matter, the traditions of tenure and the resistance to term contracts are too strong to be overwhelmed by an alternative with uncertain advantages, clear drawbacks, and an illegitimate aura."

The drawbacks became evident in 1994, when the president and board of trustees of Bennington College, Vermont, declared financial exigency and dismissed 27 faculty members, including almost all critics of the administration. Bennington faculty were deemed to hold "presumptive tenure" after two three-year contracts, with subsequent renewals (largely routine) taking place every five years. "Presumptive tenure" was ended for new faculty at the time of the dismissals; the dismissed faculty were told that it was necessary to end their contracts early. The American Association of University Professors censured Bennington, and in 2000 the college settled a wrongful-dismissal suit, paying close to \$2 million to 17 of the fired professors. However, Bennington remains on the AAUP blacklist to this day. It is worth noting that several of the dismissed faculty members were unable to find jobs in other institutions of higher learning.

The Bennington affair is a reminder that a contract has a term and can be terminated early at a price. But it is pointless to waste more ink on a proposal that is highly unlikely to be adopted. Let us turn instead to tenure review, urged by some as a means of saving tenure while ensuring that those who have it continue to deserve it. This will not satisfy the hard-core critics of tenure, however, and it has some of the same drawbacks as renewable contracts. If tenure review is thorough, it will be time-consuming; if it is perfunctory, why bother? It should be added that in 1990 the Supreme Court of Canada, in the case of *McKinney v. University of Guelph*, used an obiter dictum to identify tenure review as a threat to academic freedom.

Ten years ago I wrote in the pages of the *Journal of Canadian Studies* (Autumn 1999) that "it may be necessary to monitor tenure more carefully than in the past in order to demonstrate to observers that those who enjoy its privileges continue to deserve them." Since then, professorial "slackness" has largely ceased to be a matter of concern. Now the key issue, except for those who dislike tenure on principle, is the growing proportion of faculty who lack security. The appropriate response to this, in my view, is not to make all faculty insecure but to increase the proportion of faculty who have tenure.

Tenure is not without drawbacks. But these are the price that has to be paid to protect the innovative, the unconventional, and the unpopular, those whose fields of academic



LEADERSHIP

renewable
contracts

INNOVATION

specialization have fallen into disfavour and, most of all, those who do work, sometimes very important work, that takes a long time to complete and leads to no commercially useful results. Imperfect as it is, unfair as it may to some seem to be, tenure in its present form serves the long-term interests of universities and society better than any alternative that has been proposed. ■■

Michiel Horn is Professor Emeritus of History and University Historian at York University. He is the author of Academic Freedom in Canada: A History (1999).

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Why Tenure Has No Future

by Michael Bliss

Today, tenure's influence is mostly symbolic, writes Michael Bliss, but in the worst kind of way.



Academic tenure as we have known has become largely irrelevant but is so unpopular that it does serious harm to the professoriate and to our universities. Tenure has no future. We who care about academic life ought to welcome its death.

The irrelevance of tenure strikes me as I reflect on having been a full-time faculty member at the University of Toronto between 1968 and 2006. Tenure, which I had for about 32 of these 38 years, never affected me one way or another. I probably would have had exactly the same career had it never existed. Possibly I would have been better paid without it, possibly I would have played on academic teams less burdened with low-performers and on fields more enthusiastically funded by the community.

I always exercised my academic freedom to something close to a maximum. In the spring of 1974, during a free speech crisis on our campus, I was quoted on the front page of the *Toronto Star* as suggesting that our president, John Evans, should consider resigning. On many other occasions my remarks in newspaper articles and on radio and television

offended people, ranging from very high-placed politicians through war veterans, aboriginals, and locally-proud residents of every region of Canada. Suggestions that I was unsuitable for my job and should be dismissed were made directly to presidents of our university, deans, and department chairs.

Having tenure did not cause me to speak more freely, work less, be a less conscientious teacher, or be more adventuresome in research than I would have been anyway. As a research scholar, I followed my interests and curiosity into completely different realms of history than those I had been hired to teach. One of my unusual projects, researching the discovery of insulin, involved one of the most controversial events in the history of the University of Toronto and led to suggestions from locally-important scientists that my project be stopped and my conclusions suppressed. The last major book I published was set completely in the United States and bears no relationship to anything anyone would have predicted on the basis of my graduate training and early books. It was a good ride, during which I often felt extremely privileged.

Not once during this career did I ever have to face anything remotely like attempts to rein in my academic freedom. Not once did it occur to me that the protections my tenure gave me were needed, would be relevant to any of the controversies I was involved with, or should in any way be invoked. I don't remember whether or not I had yet been given tenure when I criticized President Evans in 1974. Ironically, the only time tenure came into play was an occasion when a later president of the University of Toronto, Rob Prichard, publicly berated me, during a receiving line at an event at his home, for having published an attack on the institution. He heatedly told me that he wished I had not written the offending article; I told him he ought to be bolder in reforming tenure.

The precondition of having a career rich in academic freedom was my good fortune in being at the University of Toronto, where a culture encouraging and celebrating academic freedom had become ingrained and instinctive. No one in our administration during my time would have considered trying to silence, let alone disciplining or dismissing me for controversial expressions of my views. I was conscious enough of my responsibility as a university professor to try (perhaps not always successfully) to express myself temperately and responsibly. There were, and are, lines that no professor, tenured or not, can cross—lines of libel, slander, defamation, and the parameters defined by our hate legislation and our human rights codes. If I had crossed these, I would not only have been liable before civil bodies, but the university would have had cause to dismiss me despite my tenure.

(It happened that I was an adjudicator of an important attempt by a university to do this to a tenured professor who was alleged to have made outrageously offensive comments about a certain group of his students. The university lost its case but only because it had not followed elementary fair procedure. Unfortunately, details of this case are still subject to confidentiality provisions of that time).

The university also knew it was satisfied with my teaching and research performance because, by the 1980s, it had put in place accountability mechanisms, including annual reports on both our scholarly and our outside activities. Our system of evaluations to assess teaching had been formalized much earlier. My merit, or lack of it, was reviewed every year at salary time. Had there been serious problems, I would have been denied raises and promotions; really serious problems and I could have been

dismissed for cause. Given these values and this framework, my tenure status hardly mattered.

This is not unusual or surprising. Most of my colleagues, at Toronto and most other universities, had similar careers with a similar balance of generous freedoms tempered by increasingly formalized accountability procedures (I have not had the space to factor in our increased accountability to granting agencies). As defenders of tenure are the first to point out, most professors with tenure, being hard-working and conscientious professional men and women, carry out their academic duties diligently and productively. They do not need any of the special privileges tenure ostensibly confers, and their tenured status does not reduce their performance or sense of responsibility. By the same token, most university administrators are fierce defenders of academic freedom and have no interest whatever in trying to stifle dissenting opinions or adventurous or controversial research.

Where tenure does come into play, however, is on the margins. There will always be a certain percentage of faculty appointments that go wrong and should be revoked. Currently the process of tenuring catches some of these mistakes. But not all. A few bad apples slip through the screen or become spoiled later. A few of these then cling fiercely to their jobs, no matter how many messages get sent from above. In some of these cases it's very hard for administrations to screw up the courage and expense to finesse their way through the various extra protections tenure affords. And so a very few

unproductive and non-performing faculty members become the girdle of "fat" encircling most academic institutions (I will not call them our love handles). There can also be situations where reasonably productive faculty members in disciplines that no longer attract students, interest, or outside funding, are seen as a burden of extra academic poundage and/or where administrators determine to reshape their institutions and sometimes settle old scores.

I stress the point that abuses of tenure, even problems of redundancy, are not at all the norm in institutions of higher education. What is normal, however, what absolutely must not be denied, is the intense unpopularity of the word and concept "tenure" outside the universities. In a long

*Having tenure did not
cause me to speak more
freely, work less, be a less
conscientious teacher,
or be more adventuresome
in research than I would
have been anyway.*

career, moving constantly between academia and other intellectual and social spheres, I do not remember ever hearing non-faculty members express admiration for or even approval of the concept of tenure. Whether or not tenure is abused, the very word connotes privilege and feather-bedding. When applied to highly-educated and relatively well-paid professionals, it becomes galling to everyone who is not, a red flag symbol of perks, power, and privilege. Insofar as those who resent tenure hold financial power over the universities—not only politicians, but also potential philanthropists—they retaliate by being less generous. Give a person iron-clad job security, the reasoning goes, and you can pay less.

Note the course of history here. When academic tenure was taking on its modern form at North American universities, in the 1960s and 1970s, it was still not uncommon for private-sector workers, both blue- and white-collar to have remarkable job security, often spending their whole working lives with one employer. In 1978 the then-head of the Southam newspaper chain in Canada, one of our university's governors, told me that they had just given all their employees a guarantee of job security, not unlike tenure.

How long ago that seems! Today's media workers, like virtually everyone else in the private sector, burn with insecurity, and they burn with resentment at the very mention of the idea of academic tenure. Even inside the university, untenured contract workers seem increasingly estranged from the privileged few, who are seen to have crossed a great divide.

Their estrangement is surely just. The claim that tenure is a necessary precondition of academic freedom is inherently and monstrously unjust to non-tenured academics. These are the scholars, often more adventurous and outspoken than the old and established, who most need academic freedom. To them the institution of tenure is as though society offered a guaranteed annual income to everyone but the poor. Words like "hypocrisy" and "dishonesty" come to mind.

As an active and hard-working professor I resented the notion that my formal job security, which I didn't need, probably reduced my remuneration. I resented the very small handful of my colleagues who were non-productive, tenured drones, a burden the rest of us had to carry. I hoped they could be fired. Similarly, I felt our university was handicapped in its mission by some of our under-performing or obese departments and divisions and saw no reason why they should be carried by the rest of us. It seemed to me that any organization aiming for continuing excellence has to have the flexibility to deal with redundancy, equitably but decisively. If personally I had been told that my teaching field was no longer needed I would have either tried to re-tool or would have looked for another job.

As a matter of elementary public relations and common sense the professoriate ought to let tenure fade into the mists and controversies of history. In our time, the institution's main influence is mostly symbolic, but in the worst kind of way. The more review procedures we have put into place to counter the perceived abuses of tenure, the less we need the concept itself. Inside and outside the university there are now a myriad of protections against discriminatory dismissals, as well as provisions for severance in times of financial stringency. Indeed, faculty associations, sometimes as certified unions, are working at many universities to establish employment protection standards through collective bargaining, which also serve to make tenure superfluous. We will probably see more of this, driven by pressure from the increasing percentage of non-tenured academic employees.

Only the Arthur Scargills of this world cling blindly to the employment policies and guarantees of the past. Ideologically pure and unsullied, they remain as society tosses them into the dustbin of history. Under massive pressure from governments and the general public, disdained by university administrations desperate for flexibility, subtly undermined by the growth of collective bargaining, academic tenure is a dying institution.


We should let it rest in peace.

Any day now tenure's demise will be furthered when a Canadian provincial government or a major university, perhaps following events in the United States, bites the bullet and announces that it will no longer make appointments that carry what the community sees as the stigma of tenure. There will be extremely widespread public approval for the move, cries of anguish only from a few Scargills, and, one hopes, a sophisticated response from faculty associations interested in maximizing the well-being of our universities and we who have staffed them.

Of course the next problem might become what some of us call the York syndrome, a systemic failure of university labour relations that manages to harm virtually everyone. I almost moved to York University in the late 1980s and came to be very glad that I did not. I think I would have been very unhappy in that troubled institution. But those are considerations for another occasion.

My ideal university, which the University of Toronto has still to become, would have been something like an athletic organization aiming at year after year of maximum high performance. In the 21st century I cannot imagine sports teams, or any other high-achieving organizations, giving tenure to their employees. Like it or not, we will soon have universities that seriously aspire to test this model. Our system will become more diversified and internally competitive, and we will see how the market for professorial talent sorts itself out. ■■

Michael Bliss is University Professor Emeritus, University of Toronto.



The problem with tenure today, Mark Kingwell argues, is that it's a conservative force, discouraging the free speaking and innovation scholarship is supposed to serve.

The Tenure Blues

by Mark Kingwell

Is the institution of tenure supportable? No, but not for the reasons you may think. Routine complaints about iron-clad job security and lack of accountability miss the point. But so do pleas for academic freedom from outside (and largely notional) political forces. The real danger of tenure is that it threatens academic freedom instead of protecting it.

The issue is now more acute than ever because financial stresses on Canada's university system have created a situation in which normal academic job competition and jockeying for position have been raised to a fever pitch, a desperate scramble among scores of talented people for a slice of the shrinking academic pie. At the same time, public awareness of the costs of maintaining university professors has underlined a significant social change: taxpayers no longer believe anyone, however brilliant or productive, should get a lifetime guarantee of job security. And they suspect, rightly, that many of those enjoying that privilege may not be so brilliant or productive.

But, while some professors now privately admit an opposition to tenure, many more continue to view it as their rightful inheritance, equal parts compensation for the uncertainties of graduate school and mark of professional advancement in a system where incremental rises in status are as important as pips on the collar of a subaltern. No tenured professor has any reason to criticize his gravy-train. Nor does any tenure-track junior professor, sweating out the first few years of professional review. And no graduate student, criticizing academic privilege, could fend off an automatic sour-grapes reply. In any case, grad students, the academic world's drudges, are usually too fearful to speak out. Enjoying a status somewhat less than the departmental janitor, they live in daily terror that the poobahs in the department will decide they are troublemakers who don't really merit good letters of reference. Hence the cone of silence: all in all, tenure remains sacrosanct because nobody with any standing has a stake in criticizing it. There is another major factor in tenure's culture of belief and that is simple

psychology, exacerbated by the rampant professional envy of the academic world. The main reason people want tenure is because other people have it. Many academics do not admit this, maybe not even to themselves, because standard arguments about academic freedom are available to them, arguments that make tenure's critics look crass. Even young academics, previously the victims of exploitation, quickly become rabidly pro-tenure when they cross the bright line onto the tenure track. Though they may complain about the perfidy of their complacent elders, there is nothing that gets the goat of junior academics more than the thought that tenure might be denied them. But now try offering a few deeper objections. Who needs academic freedom in a constitutional democracy, where freedom of expression is already guaranteed? Or, more slyly, what possible objection could there be to speaking frankly about topics in which most people have utterly no interest? Most academic work, especially in the humanities, is published for an audience smaller than a successful cocktail party, and the rest falls still-born from the press, ignored by citizen and colleague alike.

So fears of outside persecution and job endangerment are, well, pretty academic. Campus scare-mongers like the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship would have you believe that tenure is the last ditch in a trench war against crusading left-wing ideologues, unfettered post-modernists, radical feminists, committed social constructionists, and similar forces of evil. But every academic knows that far more persecution comes from petty egomaniacs, advancement-seekers, and envious colleagues within departments than from public disapproval. Tenure has no business justifying itself by reference to that kind of internal threat, which is not really about academic freedom but intramural power struggles.

Moreover, tenure hasn't proved much protection against internal politicking, whether personal or cultural. Just ask the members of the University of British Columbia's political science department forced in the mid-1990s to undergo re-education programs by an internal political-correctness mafia. And when public disapproval of an academic's ideas does become an issue, on the other hand, as in the celebrated case of controversial eugenicist Philippe Rushton at the University of Western Ontario, university administrators and department heads are often lily-livered in the face of it. Tenure won't help you if your university president decides you're too embarrassing to keep around.

So much for the first-blush case. Are there good arguments for protecting academic freedom anyway?

Despite what bottom-line, tax-cutting ideologues say, there are. Work which appears useless may be extremely impor-

tant, indeed worthy of public support, even (or especially) if it's dedicated to questions beyond the ken of political calculation. Useless is not the same as valueless, at least in a world where use is measured largely in financial terms. But some goods, like truth and beauty, are literally priceless.

The times are not ripe for that kind of argument, of course. Nowadays people are growing increasingly impatient with appeals to higher (but invisible) goods and cultural benefits, and sure enough, some critics of tenure go so far as to argue that universities should behave like private businesses and survive in the free market or die, in which case tenure would become an inefficient human resource policy to be abandoned with alacrity. But if you argue against tenure by appealing to market pressures and productivity, you miss tenure's real shortcomings. Because the problem with tenure isn't that it lacks cost-effectiveness—defined reductively, universities on the whole lack that. The problem is that it doesn't do what it's supposed to do; namely, encourage the free speaking and innovation that scholarship allegedly is in service of.

Academic freedom becomes more important, not less, when the market dominates our calculations of worth, meaning there is *more* reason, perhaps, that there ought to be some kind of exemption for thinkers and writers from the crush of market imperatives and the crass utilitarianism that marks social spending.

That's assuming that we as a society want higher learning at all and are willing, at least in principle, to support research universities with our tax dollars. Let us say, for the sake of argument, that we do want these things. We could then argue that tenure was necessary to preserve the existence, and relevance, of the useless. Like a Chinese emperor's paid critic or Lear's fool, tenured professors could be viewed as a thorn in the side of the state, a prickle of critical awareness and originality whose sting is in everyone's interests. The emperor needs to know who his enemies are and what they are thinking; he also needs to know that he is limited in his knowledge and wisdom. Hence the most valuable kind of useless knowledge may be whatever is most antithetical to the desires and assumptions of the state.

Would the status quo's academic critics, thus domesticated, feel happy? My hunch, looking around at a few of what Roger Kimball called in his rabid, eponymous book "tenured radicals," is that they'd feel just dandy about it. Of course if academics become *too* domesticated they lose their relevance, which is precisely the ability to speak out harshly and tell the truth. And that undermines this entire delicate argument. Then academics are both useless *and* irrelevant, an unhappy but common duality in today's universities.

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The paradox of tenure as a means of protecting academic freedom is this: it is only justified by someone who despises it. Tenure cherished is tenure made indefensible. It is only by living up to the challenge of telling the truth, in other words, that artificial exemption from market forces and social utilitarianism can be justified.

So there is in fact an argument for protecting academic freedom, even in a tolerant democracy like ours, but it is one that would apply to precious few of today's academics. The point sharpens the question of whether tenuring individuals is the best way to secure academic freedom. The two issues are so intertwined now that separating them is almost impossible: attack tenure and you must be attacking academic freedom, by definition the act of a philistine.

But not so fast. There are grave dangers in investing individuals with too much significance here. The valuable *principle* is academic freedom, freedom for the courageous

and honest to tell the truth. It is not that this or that person should be forever immune from challenge about her or his job—a confusion made into policy by various faculty associations in this country, who rationalize defending the unworthy individual by referring to the “principles” behind tenure. This confusion has many deleterious effects, and anyone who has attended a university is familiar with them. The problem, as we all know, isn't really tenured radicals—would that there were more of them. The problem is tenured mediocrities, of which there are all too many.

Unfortunately, but to nobody's surprise, the institution of tenure tends to make academic departments conservative. Since tenure decisions are made by senior faculty, all of them tenured themselves, there is a natural tendency to reproduce the status quo. Academics deny this, but their acts betray them. Arguments about “the standards of the profession” and the “fixed criteria of good scholarship” look increasingly strained as those who narrowly conform are rewarded while those who deviate are punished.

The genuine threat to academic freedom, as every junior professor knows at heart, comes not from the world at large but from the senior faculty who hold the keys to job security and status. This threat is usually ignored because it concerns those clinging to the lowest rung of the academic ladder: graduate students and junior faculty. But there is a debilitating effect on young minds when conformity counts more highly than originality. Junior faculty emerge, shaken, from their three-year review meetings, coping with the assessment of their progress to tenure. Have they published enough journal articles? Are they the right kind of articles? In the right kind of journals? Have they served on enough committees? Have they, most of all, sufficiently impressed the departmental power-brokers with their malleability, deference, and ability to echo the opinions of their seniors?

It would be wrong to suggest that there is *no* element of objective quality assessment in this process, of course, or indeed that all judgments of success within a discipline are reducible to judgments of conformity. They are not, and originality without rigour is not scholarship but modishness. Yet if departments and disciplines, like all corporate structures, do have an in-built tendency to recreate themselves in their own image, truly original thought will frequently fail to fit the bill. It is a rare tenure committee that is willing to approve “non-standard” career paths.

This is especially so now that competition for academic jobs is at an all-time high. You can sample the fear created by this tight employment market by visiting the annual December meetings of the Modern Languages Association, the American Philosophical Association, or any of the other

big disciplinary professional groups. Here job candidates haunt the hallways like the academic undead, proffering their unwanted résumés to anyone with a heartbeat. Some tenure-committee members realize that they would not survive a nanosecond in the crucible of today's job market, and the resulting insecurity sometimes leads them, perversely, to be even harder on their juniors.

The resulting strain on junior academics is considerable. You will frequently hear them speak of their "vulnerability" or offer an impending tenure review as excuse for lacking a social life. You cannot blame them, indeed it is only rational, if they begin to retrench and try to pump out the sort of articles that will look good on their curriculum vitae. Give them credit: they will do their best to be original, to break some new intellectual ground. But it will not be—it *cannot* be—their chief concern.

The point of the institution of tenure, its only possible point, is intellectual innovation. The justification for

removing academics from the hurly-burly of market forces, the nearly insane imperatives of capital, is that it gives them the breathing room to be original without fear of economic reprisal. We as a society need that free speaking, for not all good thought is popular thought. We want our scholars to pursue the true and the interesting without having to calculate the results in terms of economic use-values. Even the fact that many fail to make the most of it should not reflect badly on the institution—as long, that is, as there exist a few who take the opportunity seriously, who use their freedom to challenge and to lead. As it stands, too few are doing that to justify the self-satisfied majority. ■■

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Are Tenured Faculty SLACKERS?

Contrary to popular wisdom, tenure does not create academic deadwood, **James Soto Antony** and **Ruby Hayden** show.

The word tenure, when used as a search term on ratemyprofessor.com, results in more than ratings for professors—it also showcases pervasive ideas regarding this historical method of ensuring academic freedom. As one student wrote:

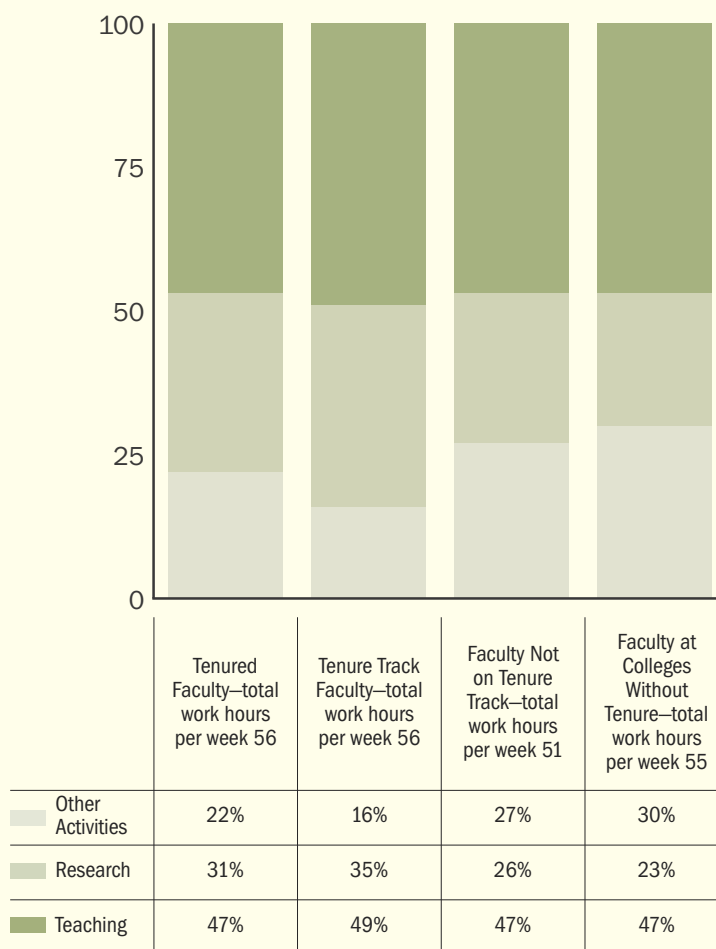
THE ONLY REASON THIS GUY HAS A JOB... MUST BE BECAUSE HE HAS TENURE. THIS IS WHY I DON'T BELIEVE IN TENURE... THE ONLY REASON HE TEACHES, IS CAUSE [SIC] HE CAN'T FIND ANOTHER JOB, AND THANKS TO TENURE, TEACHING IS A [SIC] EASY PERMANENT PAYCHECK FOR HIM.

This student comment encapsulates some of the most negative stereotypes about higher-education faculty: professors are easier to come by than “real” jobs; professors are

not productive; and tenure protects lazy, unfit-for-real-work people from unemployment. Even the more mainstream sources of information point to a rising concern over tenure. The *Chronicle of Higher Education's* 2005 article, “Presidents Favor Scrapping Tenure,” describes how the majority of college presidents in the U.S. support repealing tenure and using long-term contracts.

Concerns about tenure are not new. For decades, arguments for and against tenure have been raised both publicly and privately among scholars and administrators. Those in favour argue tenure must be protected in order to preserve academic freedom and quality; opponents argue tenure is an outmoded institution that encourages low productivity among faculty and is responsible for many of higher education's ills and inefficiencies. Regardless, the persistent

FIGURE 1: Percentage of time faculty spent on work activities by tenure status



accountability climate for education places tenure under a spotlight of suspicion and scrutiny that can affect how legislators, administrators, and faculty will define—and possibly refine—faculty roles and responsibilities and the institution of tenure itself, in the years to come.

One question at the heart of the debate is whether tenured faculty members are less productive than non-tenured peers, i.e., academic deadwood. If, in fact, tenured-faculty are systematically less productive than those without tenure, then—by this metric alone—tenure becomes more challenging to defend.

Tenure is important for many reasons, and simply examining the relationship between tenure and faculty productivity as a determinant of tenure’s value is rather shortsighted. But, alas, the common perception is that tenure, though not a *cause* of low productivity, is strongly associated with it. For this reason alone, the relationship between tenure and productivity is worth exploring.

What do we know about faculty and their productivity? To answer this question, we turn to the 2004 National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF). NSOPE, conducted in the U.S. every few years since the late 1980s, is a nationwide study of the characteristics, workload, and career paths of college faculty and instructional staff at public and private, not-for-profit, two- and four-year colleges. This survey asked many questions that may lead to a better understanding of the complex association between tenure and productivity. For simplicity’s sake, we focus our discussion on faculty within doctoral granting institutions (an admittedly broad group of institutions), but any given institutional type could be examined on its own.

WHAT DO FACULTY MEMBERS DO?

To examine faculty productivity effectively, one must first consider how faculty members report spending their time. The NSOPF data indicate that all full-time faculty at doctoral institutions report spending over 50 hours per week on job-related activities. Figure 1 depicts the time full-time

faculty report spending on teaching, research, and service activities. What’s notable is that teaching is where all faculty—regardless of tenure status—spend the majority of time. Also, tenured faculty report devoting the same percentage of time to teaching as do other faculty (i.e., the differences are not statistically significant).

These findings are important because, contrary to popular belief, there is no evidence suggesting that tenured faculty neglect teaching. In fact, relative to their other activities, tenured faculty report spending the largest percentage of time on teaching activities.

Figure 1 also shows that, although tenured faculty spend a slightly smaller percentage of time on research (31 percent) than do tenure-track faculty (35 percent), tenured faculty spend more of time on “other” activities (22 percent versus 16 percent), which will be discussed later in this article. Tenured and tenure-track faculty both devote more time to research than their non-tenure track and no-tenure-system

FIGURE 2:
Traditional forms of faculty productivity

peers (differences that are statistically significant). These data paint a picture of a highly engaged professoriate that works many hours and devotes a great deal of time to teaching. (Moreover, the survey also showed that tenured faculty do not report working fewer hours than their counterparts outside of academe.)

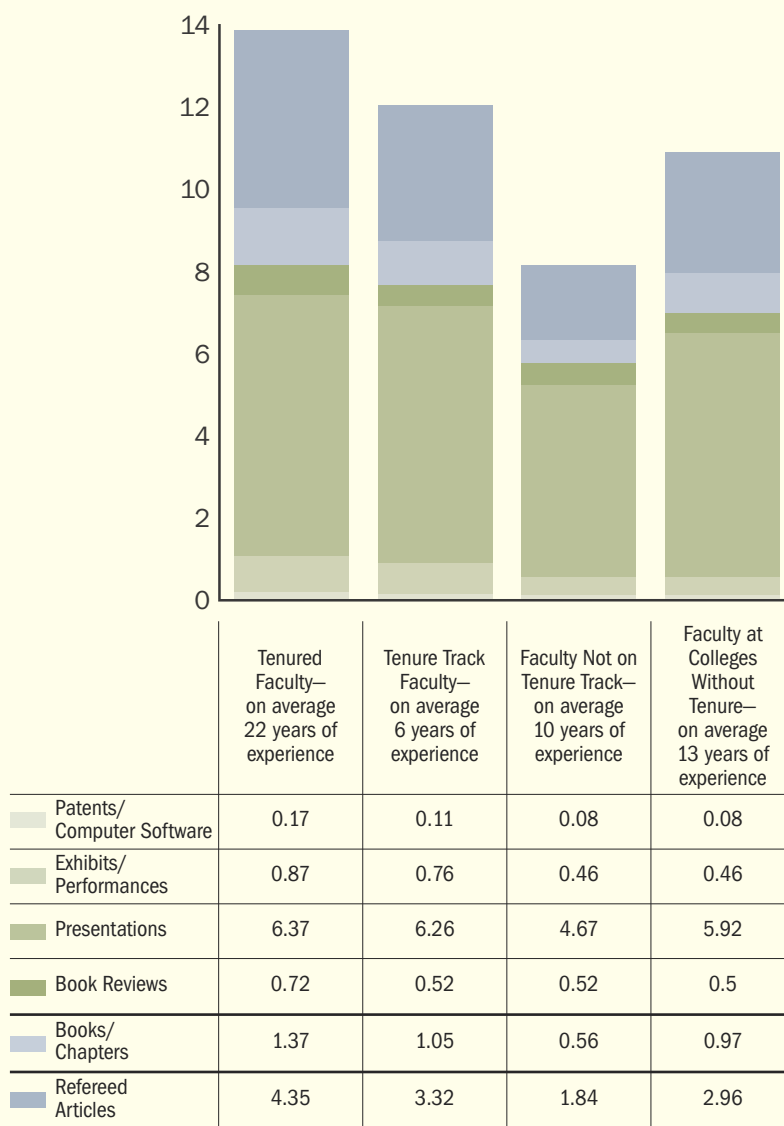
To judge faculty productivity solely by one aspect of the faculty role (e.g., research) negates the substantial work faculty devote to other meaningful tasks. The data presented here suggest that a multidimensional definition of faculty productivity is necessary to understand how faculty spend their time and is essential, if we are to make useful comparisons of productivity.

All types of full-time faculty work long hours at complex activities that extend beyond researching and teaching, yet often faculty in doctoral institutions are rewarded mostly for their research. It's no wonder that, even though most faculty fulfill many roles, arguments over their productivity often center only on the potential conflict between the demands of research and teaching.

Faculty productivity within doctoral institutions is typically defined and measured in much of the literature primarily in terms of research. This scholarly productivity, what we call in this article "traditional forms of productivity," is sometimes even equated with faculty vitality. On the surface, research appears to be an excellent way to compare pre-tenure and post-tenure faculty productivity, but the data in Figure 1 indicate that accounting for productivity, overall, is more complex. In particular, college faculty devote time to many activities that would not fall under the umbrella of traditional productivity—hence, the large devotion of time to "teaching" and to "other activities," i.e., nontraditional forms of productivity.

IS PRODUCTIVITY DIFFERENT BETWEEN TENURE GROUPS?

As illustrated in Figure 2, over a two-year span, tenured



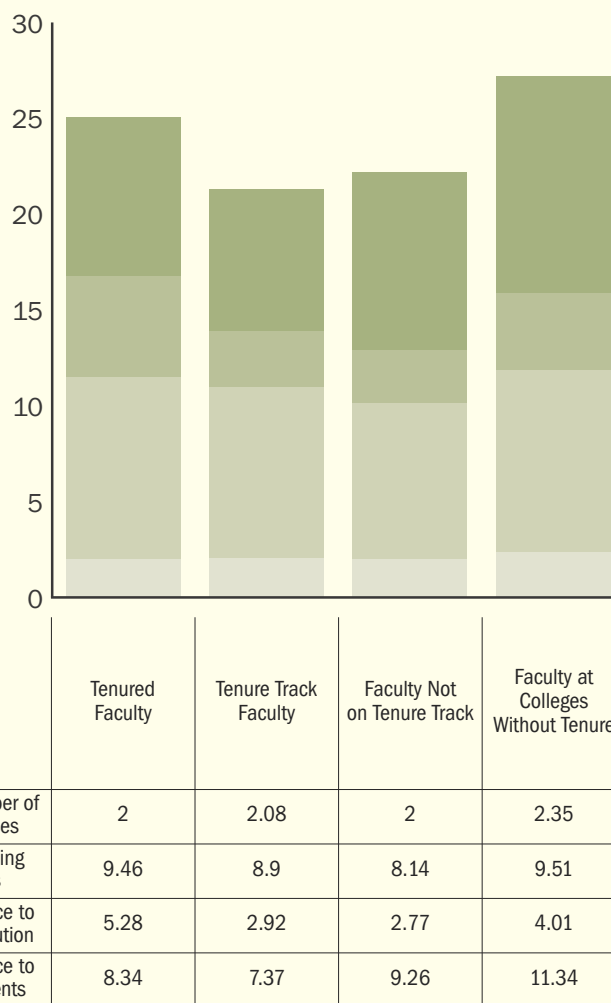
faculty produced significantly greater numbers of articles, books, chapters, and book reviews than the non-tenured. They also produced more presentations, exhibits/performances, and patents/software. Tenured faculty thus appear to be more productive in traditional forms of scholarship than the non-tenured. Interestingly, they also appear more productive in this regard than peers at colleges without a tenure system. Much of this difference is likely a function of experience, as tenured faculty in this data set had, on average, 22 years' experience compared to an average of six, 10, and 13 years' experience by tenure track, non-tenure track, and no-tenure-system faculty, respectively. Because of their experience, tenured faculty members can develop research

FIGURE 3:
Nontraditional forms of faculty productivity

agendas that lend themselves to the production of traditional scholarly materials, whereas non-tenured faculty are still developing those agendas or are not expected to. Nonetheless, there is no evidence suggesting that, over a given two-year period, tenured faculty are less productive, in terms of traditional forms of scholarship, than their non-tenured colleagues.

Figure 3 allows us to see that in terms of nontraditional scholarship (i.e., teaching and service activities), tenured faculty continue to display statistically greater or equivalent productivity than the non-tenured. There are some differences between tenured, non-tenure-track, and no-tenure-system faculty in that the two latter have slightly higher levels of productivity. But it seems that tenured faculty make up these hours in thesis/dissertation committee work and administrative work. Such work is the foundation of much of doctoral students' education, from general examinations to theses. Additionally, non-student committee work is the basis for governance and policy making at most institutions. These nontraditional forms of productivity are, arguably, as important to the educational mission of many institutions as more traditional forms of scholarship. What is clear from these data, once again, is that there is little empirical support for the idea that tenured faculty are significantly less productive, even in terms of nontraditional scholarship, than the non-tenured. Overall, whether faculty productivity be defined in terms of traditional or nontraditional forms of scholarship, tenured faculty show higher levels of productivity than their tenure-track and non-tenure-track counterparts. They also show higher levels of traditional productivity and only marginally lower levels of nontraditional productivity than peers working at institutions without tenure.

Regardless of tenure status, nontraditional forms of productivity occupy substantial time and effort, even



Service to students: measured by number of undergraduate/graduate thesis committees on which the faculty member served, number of hours spent with advisees, and number of office hours held in Fall term 2003.

Service to the institution: measured by administrative committee work in Fall term 2003.

Teaching-related service: measured by total Fall term 2003 number of classes taught for credit, non-credit, remedial, or via distance learning; total hours per week teaching; and number of hours per week of individualized instruction of students.

though, in many of institutions examined by the survey, these forms of productivity have little to do with the awarding of tenure.

IMPLICATIONS

The data ultimately indicate that faculty work is complex and multidimensional. What work activities faculty engage in is as much a function of institutional mission as it is of

One question at the heart of the debate is whether tenured faculty members are less productive than non-tenured peers, i.e., academic deadwood.

personal choices, inclinations, and abilities. Faculty at different types of institutions are mandated to perform different types of tasks and, in most cases, are rewarded only for productivity in those domains. Therefore, simple accountability measures must be re-conceptualized in order to avoid misinterpretations of the faculty role.

And yet the data show that, even when examining faculty within doctoral institutions—where often the expectations for research productivity trump those for any other type of activity—tenured faculty are not less productive (any way we define it) than their tenure-track counterparts or even peers at institutions without the tenure process. Where tenured faculty spend less time on research than the non-tenured, they make up for it by devoting more time to service or administrative activity. The bottom line is this: A given faculty member's work, like the work of any person in any career, evolves over time in ways that reflect the person's changing interests. At some points in time, a faculty member will be motivated to spend more time in one area of work (say, research) and—later on—will perhaps be motivated to spend more time in another area (say, teaching). Too many institutions assume that a decrease in a faculty member's productivity, defined strictly in traditional terms, is somehow a signal of low vitality. In such cases, the faculty member might be viewed as having become "deadwood." But, an institution should also examine the possibility that a downturn in traditional forms of productivity might be accompanied by an increase in nontraditional forms of productivity. Variations in productivity are natural and need to be examined on an individual basis, by considering the faculty member's work as a whole, in order to determine if there is cause for concern. Current movements towards the introduction of post-tenure review systems, though typically rooted in unfounded concerns about tenured faculty becoming unproductive over time, can be useful in stressing this last point.

Post-tenure review systems are most useful when they are sensitive to the multidimensionality of the faculty role and ensure that faculty time spent on all activities that contribute to institutional vitality—not just those traditionally regarded or rewarded by the institution—are taken into account. Such systems can allow institutions to acknowledge areas of productivity to which a faculty member's interests, passions, and skill have become oriented over time and—as such—may allow the institution to work with a faculty member to design their role in a way

that continues to be personally fulfilling and acknowledged and rewarded by the institution.

Many post-tenure review systems, rather than adopting a punitive approach, treat faculty careers developmentally. In these sorts of reviews, faculty who show lower levels of productivity (based on a given institution's accepted definitions of productivity) are assisted in order to increase productivity. Often, during these reviews, it is uncovered that faculty with lower productivity are dealing with the inevitable changes in interest and expertise often associated with being a scholar. Many scholars find that what once made them intellectually alive no longer drives them. What these scholars need is support to begin new research agendas. Other scholars report that their interests in activities traditionally rewarded by the institution have decreased but that their interests in other important activities have increased. In the case of some research universities, scholars such as these have been found particularly well suited for demanding teaching, student mentoring, or program development work. With the provision of proper levels of support, many of these senior scholars can have a profound impact on students' lives and, once again, feel like a viable part of the institution.

Such non-punitive approaches to reviewing the productivity of faculty resonate with the findings of this study because, rather than force faculty to remain productive in the same ways over the span of an entire career, they recognize that faculty work can be multidimensional and valuable in many forms. The future of tenure policy should borrow from the findings of this study and from present post-tenure review policy, by rewarding all types of faculty work. In the future, if nontraditional post-tenure faculty productivity is encouraged and supported to maintain the vitality of tenured faculty, it may open the door for alternative ways of rewarding (and awarding) tenure. Specifically, pre-tenure faculty work that extends beyond the scope of traditional scholarship may also be recognized as important—and rewarded in kind. A broader conceptualization and recognition of faculty work will have a profound impact on reshaping not only how faculty engage themselves over the span of a career, but also who becomes successful in the faculty role. ■■

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The Real Case Against Tenure

by Pat Finn



A lot of nonsense is paraded as truth in arguments favouring getting rid of tenure. They are of the sort that show up in such movies as *Educating Rita* and center on the proposition that tenure is a guarantee of a job for life. I, like most of us in the academy, have little patience for such myth-making.

On the opposite side of the debate, however, most people who argue in favour of tenure assert that tenure and academic freedom are inextricably linked—and that's another view I don't happen to share. While I agree that tenure is presently the vehicle that allows the practice of academic freedom, I believe that such practice nonetheless depends on job security, not tenure, and that, therefore, job security can be provided by something other than tenure—and should be.

Academic freedom is special, prized, and to be defended at all costs. Tenure is not.

Academic freedom is already recognized and protected in a number of ways. Collective agreements across the country contain articles that enshrine the absolute necessity of

recognizing and maintaining academic freedom as essential to teaching, research, and scholarship. Canada was a sponsor of, and is signatory to, the UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel, which states:

THE MAINTAINING OF THE ABOVE INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS SHOULD BE UPHELD IN THE INTEREST OF HIGHER EDUCATION INTERNATIONALLY AND WITHIN THE COUNTRY. TO DO SO, THE PRINCIPLE OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM SHOULD BE SCRUPULOUSLY OBSERVED. HIGHER-EDUCATION TEACHING PERSONNEL ARE ENTITLED TO THE MAINTAINING OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM, THAT IS TO SAY, THE RIGHT, WITHOUT CONSTRUCTION BY PRESCRIBED DOCTRINE, TO FREEDOM OF TEACHING AND DISCUSSION, FREEDOM IN CARRYING OUT RESEARCH AND DISSEMINATING AND PUBLISHING THE RESULTS THEREOF, FREEDOM TO EXPRESS FREELY THEIR OPINION ABOUT THE INSTITUTION OR SYSTEM IN WHICH THEY WORK, FREEDOM FROM INSTITUTIONAL CENSORSHIP AND FREEDOM TO PARTICIPATE IN PROFESSIONAL OR REPRESENTATIVE

ACADEMIC BODIES. ALL HIGHER-EDUCATION TEACHING PERSONNEL SHOULD HAVE THE RIGHT TO FULFIL THEIR FUNCTIONS WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION OF ANY KIND AND WITHOUT FEAR OF REPRESSION BY THE STATE OR ANY OTHER SOURCE. HIGHER-EDUCATION TEACHING PERSONNEL CAN EFFECTIVELY DO JUSTICE TO THIS PRINCIPLE IF THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH THEY OPERATE IS CONDUCTIVE, WHICH REQUIRES A DEMOCRATIC ATMOSPHERE; HENCE THE CHALLENGE FOR ALL OF DEVELOPING A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY.

Academics lead highly scrutinized professional lives. Every time they walk into a classroom, their students evaluate them (and, if the academic is teaching on TV, for example, non-registered students also evaluate the academic). Every time an academic sends a manuscript out for publication, editors review the submission. Every time an academic presents or publishes, colleagues in the discipline, at a minimum, review the work (and publish their reviews). Indexes listing peer citations of an academic's published work are becoming more important. Every research grant or other grant application is reviewed by a peer or group of peers before a decision is made. Every time a research proposal is subjected to ethics scrutiny, a review is conducted. In fact, academic work is highly visible, even extending to academics' offering expert testimony or expert opinion in print, on TV, via the web, etc. Pay raises are, in part, based on a review of an academic's performance. Academics are expected to compete for awards that recognize and celebrate academic achievements, and so awards are also venues for intense scrutiny.

Along with this constant and unrelenting review, an academic can expect to "enjoy" a minimum of 4-5 years on a

colleague tenure. Hours and hours of productive time could be freed up. Enormous amounts of stress and anxiety over lengthy probationary periods would be wiped out, allowing academics to get on with the real tasks of passing knowledge along to a new generation and increasing humankind's knowledge base.

Academics would still be liable to dismissal for just cause and could be laid off for reasons of financial stringency or program redundancy, just as they currently are under the tenure system. Those job security contingencies would not change.

Employers would have to manage differently, of course, as they would not have the luxury of deferring for years the decision whether or not to give a junior academic some semblance of job security via tenure.

The value-laden and incorrect notion of tenure being a job for life would be completely erased, and academics would no longer have to deflect demands that tenure be removed because it provides job security for life. That untruth tenured academics are saddled with would become a thing of the past, if the academy adopted a standard similar to other workers of attaining job security.

I don't expect that my minority opinion will be embraced by anyone anytime soon because I've argued it before, with no success whatsoever. Management at my university was not interested, despite a former chair of Carleton's board of governors written declaration to the government of Ontario that everything would be fine at the university if tenure were removed (and if the union disappeared). The Broadhurst Commission, set up by the Ontario government to investigate university financial

Academic freedom is special, prized, and to be defended at all costs. Tenure is not.

probationary appointment before being granted tenure. The tenure process is complex, consisting of several additional levels of scrutiny by the tenure seeker's immediate colleagues and, in some cases, referees from elsewhere (and, possibly, academic management) to ensure that the reviews described above (teaching evaluations, publications, scholarship reviews, awards, citation indexes, etc.) meet the standards deemed sufficient to join the club.

This is where I part company with the majority of those who defend tenure. Having agreed that the exercise of academic freedom is dependent upon having job security (who would conduct controversial research if their job was at stake?), I advocate that academics should enjoy the same job security as other workers and achieve it in a similar fashion and in a similar time frame. Job security should be awarded, as it is for other groups, following six months of satisfactory performance on a probationary appointment. Moving to a simpler and faster system would decrease the workload of the many colleagues (and it is many) who now spend considerable time weighing the pros and cons of awarding a junior

accountability, also raised the special nature of tenure and how it should be abolished. During its visit to our campus, when I told the commissioners I had been trying, unsuccessfully, to replace tenure with a straightforward job security system similar to other workers on campus and then asked them to help me convince the employer to agree, they visibly paled at the notion and quickly moved on to their real mandate.

So tenure will likely remain unchanged. And academics will continue to defend it when challenged by critics who believe in the myth of "a job for life". And I am resigned to that fact. And I am also resigned to the fact that when such critics are provided with the alternative job security method suggested, they will usually start believing that tenure is not such a bad system after all. ■■

Patricia A. Finn, LL.M., now retired, had thirty-three years' experience with the Carleton University Academic Staff Association (CUASA), including many years as its Executive Director. The opinions in this article are her own and are not shared by CUASA.

GENDER EQUITY *and the* TENSIONS OF TENURE

by Sandra Acker

In North America, the tenure review holds a special place in academic work, one that is approached with both fear and pride. Should we also be concerned about equity issues? Sandra Acker reports on a new study of tenure processes in Ontario.



Is academic tenure a gender issue? In the mid-1990s, a study of academic work¹ produced responses like the following from women faculty members:

I'M A PRETTY STRONG PERSON AND I'M QUITE ATHLETIC. BUT I WOULD SAY THAT THIS LEVEL OF STRESS AND FATIGUE REALLY WEARS ON ME. AND MY HEALTH IS PRETTY GOOD BUT I THINK EMOTIONALLY IT WEARS YOU DOWN AND... IT'S AGING ME ACTUALLY... I THINK CURRENT, UNTENURED ACADEMIC LIFE IS QUITE STRESSFUL AND DRAINING AND DEMANDING. AND THAT IT FILLS ALL OF YOUR WAKING HOURS. IT WOULD FILL EVERY MINUTE OF MY WEEK IF I DIDN'T WALK FROM IT. (Assistant professor)

AM I GOOD ENOUGH? I'M NOT GOOD ENOUGH. CONSTANTLY, NOT GOOD ENOUGH. I CONSTANTLY FEEL NOT GOOD ENOUGH... THIS JOB MAKES ONE FEEL NOT GOOD. (Associate professor)

THE WOMEN SEEM TO WORK HARDER AND THEY'RE MORE ANGUISHED THAN THE MEN. I WAS SO CAREFUL TO COVER ALL MY BASES FOR TENURE: PUBLICATIONS, RESEARCH

GRANTS, SUPERVISING AND TEACHING. I SAID TO MYSELF I CAN'T DO MORE. BUT I WAS FULL OF ANXIETY. I REWROTE MY TENURE DOSSIER TEN TIMES; THE MEN ONLY DO IT ONCE! WE [WOMEN] HAVE A SORORITY OF ANXIETY. (Full professor)

While recognizing that evaluations inevitably create stress, especially when a job is at stake, I wondered what was going on here that raised anxieties to these heights. After all, tenure is usually associated with the protection of academic freedom, surely a good thing and strenuously defended by academic unions and commentators over the years. Tenure means job security without fear of reprisals for unpopular beliefs or research topics. In rationalizing the existence of tenure, writers (mostly from the United States) sometimes reach for rhetorical heights: tenure has been defended as a guarantee of excellence, a gold standard, a force to preserve knowledge and democracy. Opposition tends to come from right-wing or neo-liberal critics who regard tenure as an outmoded inconvenience in the way of corporatizing academe. Yet, a search of literature also turns up concerns from those worried about fairness and social justice, especially for women.

First, there is the charge that women are less likely or slower to achieve tenure—substantiated in some American studies but, according to Ornstein, Stewart and Drakich,² not in Canada. These researchers found that women and men achieve promotion to associate professor (close to or simultaneously with tenure) at almost the same time; but after controlling for disciplinary and institutional effects, the gender difference in the time it takes to achieve promotion to full professor remains, with men being promoted about a year faster than women.

Second, the timing of the tenure review is a problem. After years spent attaining a doctorate, the novice faculty member needs another five years or more to arrive at this point of evaluation. To the extent women still carry greater responsibilities for children, the subsequent coincidence of tenure and biological “clocks” is a disturbing obstacle. Women faculty with young children speak of high levels of stress, exhaustion, and sleeplessness, while driving themselves (or being driven) to demonstrate high and continuous levels of productivity.

Third, critics identify flaws in the process of tenure review. Junior faculty are overworked as they aim for these ever-rising standards; untenured women and minority faculty are often reviewed by older white males; criteria are unclear and mystified; conformity and pretense are (thought to be) required so as not to offend anyone powerful and to make sure students provide positive evaluations. The distress integral to the process may lead to fear and anger and feelings of powerlessness.³ As more women and other nontraditional faculty enter the academy, there are questions about whether the typical assessment process needs overhauling, for example to incorporate less traditional research topics and activities such as community service.

Fourth, the corpus of largely feminist research on academe points to the subtleties of differential treatment and expectations in a gendered academy. The various forms of appraisal and evaluation may incorporate unacknowledged gendered norms. Most of the assessors (senior faculty) are men, and the reward system is biased toward research and publications rather than teaching and service. In one study, the “successful academic” was described in interviews as “someone whose first priority was research, who worked long hours, who defined themselves in terms of their work, who had experienced no break in career, and who had an uninterrupted forward movement in their career profile.”⁴ Feminists have also questioned whether the work women actually do in the university is sufficiently rewarded. Several studies, including my own, suggest that women academics end up with taken-for-granted and uncredited responsibilities for nurturing and mentoring women students. Similarly, faculty from minority ethno-cultural backgrounds encounter an extra layer of work in counselling and supporting minority students.

Are any of these concerns reflected in viewpoints of university administrators and other personnel involved with tenure reviews? A current study provides an opportunity to investigate this question. Over the past few years, together with Michelle Webber and Elizabeth Smyth, I have been conducting research into tenure processes in the social sciences in Ontario. We started with web searches, which provide access to whatever documents on tenure are in the public domain for each institution, followed up by visits to seven universities chosen to provide contrasts in type and region within the province. We interviewed three or four “key informants” in each university, including senior administrators and faculty union officials, who could give us deeper insights into the practices and issues in each site. These interviews were semi-structured and qualitative, usually lasting 60-90 minutes. Participants were deeply involved in the topic and committed to improving procedures in their institutions. Currently we are interviewing junior faculty about their experiences.

A number of interesting and frequently contradictory discourses surfaced in the key informant interviews, for example: “hiring well” (if we hire carefully, we should not need to turn anyone down); “standards” (how can we raise academic standards if everyone gets tenure?); “peer review” (only peers should be involved in assessment); “administrative oversight” (the university must have mechanisms in place to make sure peer review is not too soft); “stress” (the process is lengthy, detailed, labour-intensive, and puts too much pressure on the candidates, especially in view of near-universal success); “we’re not the United States” (the Canadian process is less harsh, more transparent and better regulated).

To take one of the common perspectives, virtually everyone agreed that the process is unduly stressful for junior faculty. “This generation of [tenure] candidates are so distraught, they can hardly function,” in the words of one union official. Yet they appeared to be caught within a process that became more elaborate by the minute, contested over the smallest details, yet ending up with “success” for almost everyone:

HOW MANY WAYS CAN YOU MEASURE PEOPLE?... THE WORK FOR JUNIOR PEOPLE TO PUT TOGETHER THEIR PORTFOLIO AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN [IS EXTREME]—LET THEM GET ON WITH THEIR LIVES. THE FACT OF THE MATTER IS THAT YOU HAVE A CERTAIN NUMBER OF HOURS EVERY DAY... AND SOME OF THOSE HOURS ARE COMING OUT FOR THE EVALUATIONS AND... BECAUSE THEY’RE SO HIGHLY [SELECTED], THERE ISN’T ANY DEADWOOD AROUND HERE. (Department chair)

IT GETS EVEN MORE INTERESTING WHEN WE LOOK AT RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS ABOUT EQUITY AND DIVERSITY.

HERE PARTICIPANTS OFTEN MADE REFERENCE TO THE FOUR DESIGNATED GROUPS THAT ARE PART OF CANADIAN EMPLOYMENT EQUITY LEGISLATION: "IN TERMS OF THE AVAILABILITY POOL FOR THE FOUR CATEGORIES WE ARE GOOD ON EVERYTHING BUT WOMEN, AND WE'RE ONLY NOT GOOD ON WOMEN IN A COUPLE OF DEPARTMENTS" (Union official).

WHILE LARGE-CITY INSTITUTIONS DISPLAYED A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF ETHNIC AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY, UNIVERSITIES LOCATED IN RURAL HINTERLANDS NOTED THEIR DIFFICULTY OF ATTRACTING AND RETAINING MINORITY FACULTY: "OTHER THAN THE GENDER BALANCE WE DON'T HAVE A WHOLE LOT OF DIVERSITY. I MEAN YOU PROBABLY NOTICE WALKING AROUND WE DON'T HAVE A WHOLE LOT OF DIVERSITY HERE." (Dean)

One institution was hiring largely from outside the country (rules about searching first for Canadians having been relaxed a few years ago). A senior administrator argued that this practice, when combined with a short tenure clock and high expectations, led to difficulties for some new faculty with language and sometimes with acculturation in general. In another institution, students were described as resistant to faculty whose English was accented or imperfect:

EVERYONE WITH AN ACCENT IS IN TROUBLE. WHEN [X] WENT TO TENURE... SOME STUDENTS WROTE WHAT I WOULD CONSIDER OPENLY RACIST STATEMENTS... AMONG OTHER THINGS THEY SAID WHY SHOULD I HAVE A TEACHER WHO DOESN'T KNOW ENGLISH? (Dean)

Some interviewees worried about knowledge being defined too narrowly, putting Aboriginal scholars or others with nontraditional approaches at a disadvantage. A surprising number of participants commented about disability issues, usually mental health concerns: "Cases of accommodations around mental illness—that really needs a different way of thinking, and we don't have that understanding...of what kind of stressful environment we work in" (Union official). Although not many people were actually turned down for tenure, some were, and others given extensions or other special arrangements, and a few participants believed that those individuals were more likely to be faculty who were for one reason or another outside the mainstream.

Although in a few cases, "women" were identified as a category facing difficulty, usually it was "women-plus," i.e. someone with an additional source of difference, for example a minority woman in a male-dominated field. Common was the "gender inequity [for women] is a thing of the past" response:

WE'RE AT THE POINT OF PEOPLE BEING WORRIED ABOUT HAVING TO HIRE MALES BECAUSE WE ARE SO GENDER BALANCED THE OTHER WAY. (Dean)

IN MY MIND GENDER SHOULD STILL BE AN ISSUE—IN SOME PLACES, STILL TO THIS DAY, ONLY ABOUT 30 PER CENT OF PHD GRADUATES ARE WOMEN. IT IS, IN FACT, MUCH LESS AN ISSUE THAN IT WAS 15 YEARS AGO; IT'S HARD TO STIR UP ANY PASSION ABOUT IT ANYMORE. (Senior administrator)

Several participants were aware of the issue of the timing of "clashing clocks" for young academics, particularly women (but note the reference to "women and men"):

I THINK ONE OF THE BIG PROBLEMS WITH THE WHOLE TENURE PROCESS IS THE TIMING OF IT. I MEAN WHEN ARE WOMEN AND MEN MOST LIKELY TO HAVE CHILDREN? EXACTLY AT THAT TIME. SO YOU'RE MEASURING THEIR WORK PERFORMANCE WHEN THEY'RE LEAST ABLE TO EXCEL AND THEY'RE ALSO JUNIOR WITH RELATIVELY LITTLE EXPERIENCE AND YOU'RE INCREASING THE PRESSURE LEVELS JUST EXTRAORDINARILY. (Department chair)

Only one respondent, a union official with a background in a social science subject, made a reference to patriarchy, adding "you know we still live in a world in which men are able to organize their lives in such a fashion that they could be more dedicated consistently to research and scholarship than a woman who's just had a baby." Most of the concerns about unfairness, harshness, unequal, or gendered expectations identified in the literature, however, just did not surface.

We could be optimists and conclude that those issues were rarely discussed because they are less prominent in Canada. Our traditions of multiculturalism and social justice do help here, and our tenure and other assessment systems seem less harsh than those found elsewhere, in part because of the involvement of faculty unions. Perhaps we do indeed "hire well." On the other hand, it may be that many of the participants are not steeped in literature that would alert them to the subtle ways in which gender divisions still operate in universities. A particularly egregious example in Canada is the story of Canada Research Chairs. Katherine Side and Wendy Robbins question how a program designed to reward "excellence"—federal government funding for Canada Research Chairs—ended up reinforcing gender divisions. As of 2006, women had been appointed to 16 per cent of the senior and 28 per cent of the junior chairs, in both cases well below their representation in appropriate faculty pools. The design of the program favoured large, research-intensive universities and the sciences and, furthermore, permitted positions to be filled without open competition, factors that Side and Robbins believe led to a preference for male candidates.⁵

Overall, I do not think we should be complacent about our take on tenure. Despite the gaps in participants' analyses when held up against the critical and feminist literature, there were still indications that interviewees often held an uneasy,

The various forms of appraisal and evaluation may incorporate unacknowledged gendered norms.

though vague, suspicion that something about the procedures is not working for particular categories of people. This interpretation makes sense if one reasons that contemporary faculty members are *more* diverse than those of 40 years ago. They may lack the expected cultural and social capital resources (or have different ones) with which to survive the system successfully. Typical tenure review systems may be creaking under challenges to forms of knowledge, ways of working, and life-style priorities taken for granted when faculty were mostly white, able-bodied men, often married with a spouse at home to pick up the domestic and support work.

Moreover, we have created a small monster in the sense that going through tenure leaves so many people “distracted.” It is a process steeped in irony, both because so many academics are now contingent faculty and thus not on the tenure track, and because the outcome for those going through review is near-universal success. As one associate dean in our study commented: “Ninety-nine point nine percent of people eventually are given promotion and tenure anyway, so one asks oneself, what is the point? It means nothing in terms of quality because everyone is promoted eventually anyway unless there’s something really grossly wrong that you ought to be fired for in any case.” Like the department chair quoted earlier, we could question whether the function of the review is something other than it appears—not simply a selection process, but a process that also underlines the insecurity of academics and the contemporary expectation of increased

regulation and endless “performativity”—not only doing well but being seen to do well.

My sense is that tenure does give North American academics (those who have it) a level of protection against job loss that cannot be taken for granted. Other countries such as the UK and Australia have a tenure-like system but one that leaves academics more vulnerable to pressures to take “voluntary redundancy” or early retirement when the financial going gets tough. We could paraphrase Winston Churchill and say that tenure is like democracy, a flawed system until one considers the alternatives. At the same time, we need to be vigilant to ensure that the flaws do not compromise our principles of equity and justice. ■■

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* For footnote citations, please go to the web version of this article at www.academicmatters.ca

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OBAMA AND THE CRASH: *reshaping the intellectual agenda in Canada*

by James Laxer



What's

Next?

Canadians, says James Laxer, need a frank debate about why the nation's academics have been AWOL about questions of economic strategy.

Major developments in American politics and society always provoke some combination of consternation, envy, imitation, rejection, or righteous indignation north of the border. This fact of Canadian life pre-dates Confederation; it even pre-dates the American Revolution.

When the American revolutionaries exported their cause to Quebec in the invasion of 1775, they met with overwhelming rejection. In later decades—during and following the War of 1812—American republicanism provoked a Loyalist response from Anglophones in British North America. But the Americans also inspired the liberal cause among the colonists to the north. American ideas played a key role in stimulating English and French-Canadian demands for responsible government that issued in the rebellions of 1837-38. Similarly, the American Civil War reinforced the drive of British North Americans toward the establishment of their own federal union and the trans-continental expansion of the Canadian state. Roosevelt's New Deal and the subsequent emergence of the United States as a global superpower transformed Canadian political and societal views and Canada's outlook on the world.

Although the long-term effects are, as yet, far from clear, two critical developments in the United States in 2008 are having, and will have, an enormous influence in Canada. The first, the election of Barack Obama as president of the United

significantly from Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal coalition. He won a crushing majority of African-American voters (95 per cent), a significant majority of Latinos (66 per cent), and the support of 43 per cent of whites, concentrated in the Northeast, Midwest, and the Pacific Coast. Among these, he did very well with better-educated and wealthy voters. He garnered the support of 55 per cent of female voters, an increase in the customary Democratic advantage among women. It is a potentially unstable coalition should Obama's economic strategy be unsuccessful.

But the lessons, or apparent lessons, of Obama's victory could not fail to excite political actors and political scientists in Canada.

Could a similar political campaign work here? Could the Liberal Party, the obvious potential imitator of the Obama approach, win a majority of working-class voters, immigrants and their children, Francophones, urban females, and a sizeable portion of the votes of the economic elites? This would be the modified Canadian equivalent of the Obama coalition.

It is not difficult to see that such a coalition is essentially the one that was cobbled together by the Liberal Party before and during the reign of Pierre Elliott Trudeau. Reconstructing the Trudeau, or we can call it the Obama coalition, is the glittering prize on which Michael Ignatieff and his advisors feast their eyes. Assessing whether the Liberals are likely to pull it off is what political analysts need to weigh. Some will want to



States, is closely linked with the second, the economic crash of 2008. Both will alter the preoccupations of Canadian scholars and public intellectuals.

Barack Obama's decisive electoral victory—his redrawing of the U.S. electoral map—was lent a great assist by the collapse of financial institutions and the crash of the stock market during the pivotal weeks of the 2008 election campaign. His Republican adversary's early insistence that the U.S. economy was fundamentally sound, followed by his uncertain, at times erratic behaviour when that position became untenable, convinced many independents that John McCain was a part of the problem not the solution.

Obama constructed an electoral coalition that differed

reduce this to an appraisal of the ability of the Liberal Party to use the new communications technology as effectively as the Obama team did to raise money and to bestow on their leader the glamour of a northern Obama. Perhaps mastering the arcane mysteries of Facebook and Twitter can point the way to the Holy Grail.

Other analysts will frame the question as one of leadership. A Barack Obama doesn't come along all that often; neither does a Pierre Trudeau.

Still others, perhaps more fruitfully, will analyze the deadlock of the Canadian political system with its four parties entrenched in specific regions and cities and among important segments of particular social classes. Others will examine

the underlying reasons for the inability of any single party to offer a vision and a program that can win the adherence of a large plurality of Canadian voters. It may even be remarked that what Obama hopes to achieve, particularly in the area of health care, was realized—and more—in Canada during the 1960s as a consequence of the strength of social democrats and liberals in this country. Could it be that Canada has already had its Obama moment?

What about the second great question of 2008, the economic crash? How will it reorder the Canadian intellectual agenda? How will Canadian scholars interpret the economic crisis, the nature of the global economic order that will follow it, and the choices for Canada over the next few decades?

The crash of 2008 has been widely recognized as the most severe global economic cataclysm since the crash of 1929 and the subsequent Great Depression. A compelling case can be made that the crash signifies the end of an economic epoch—the neo-liberal age of globalization and the American-centered global economy. What lends weight to this thesis is both the nature of the system of finance whose collapse is at the centre of the global crisis and the crushing problems that face the United States, making the re-assertion of an American-centred global economy exceedingly improbable.

The proximate cause of the crash of 2008 was the bursting of the sub-prime housing bubble in the United

The U.S. national debt is financed in part by securities held by U.S. government accounts; among the most important are the Federal Employees Retirement Funds and the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance Trust Fund. At the beginning of 2008, 55 per cent of the debt was held by the “public”, meaning those who purchased U.S. treasury bonds. Forty-five per cent of these “public” purchases were made by foreigners, two-thirds of that total by foreign central banks. By far the most important of the central banks in making these purchases were those of China and Japan. When to the central banks of China and Japan are added the other purchasers from these two countries, about 47 per cent of the purchases by foreigners is accounted for. In total, foreigners have been financing about 25 per cent of the gigantic U.S. national debt, a percentage that the Obama agenda could drive much higher.

Between them, the central banks of China and Japan hold over a trillion dollars worth of the U.S. securities used to finance the U.S. national debt. They don’t buy them because they regard them as a good investment. Quite the contrary. They buy them to save the United States from the crippling consequences of its own internal weakness. This they do, not as an act of generosity, but to safeguard their vitally important export markets in the U.S. and to prevent an even more calamitous global economic collapse.

In the dizzying run up to the crash, the debt mountain, swollen by the lax regulatory environment and the gluttonous

A Barack Obama doesn't come along all that often; neither does a Pierre Trudeau.

States whose immediate consequences were the collapse of major financial institutions and the freezing of credit. The crash brought into play the vast and multi-layered problem of American indebtedness. The three peaks of the American debt mountain are as follows: the national debt, owed by the federal government, which totaled about U.S. \$11 trillion and is set to climb much higher with the prospect of annual deficits in coming years of more than one trillion dollars; the swiftly increasing net indebtedness of Americans to the rest of the world, totaling trillions of dollars; and the indebtedness of individual Americans, amounting to about eleven trillion dollars, centered on the explosive use of credit cards.

appetite of financiers, meant that Americans were enabled to live beyond their means. Now the time has come to pay the piper.

In an article in the spring of 2009, *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman linked the crash of 2008 to the indebtedness that took off in the 1980s during the Reagan years: “...it was the explosion of debt over the previous quarter-century [prior to 2008] that made the U.S. economy so vulnerable. Overstretched borrowers were bound to start defaulting in large numbers once the housing bubble burst and unemployment began to rise.

“These defaults in turn wreaked havoc with a financial system that—also mainly thanks to Reagan-era deregulation—took on too much risk with too little capital.

“There’s plenty of blame to go around these days. But the prime villains behind the mess we’re in were Reagan and his circle of advisers—men who forgot the lessons of America’s last great financial crisis, and condemned the rest of us to repeat it.”

Not only does the crisis of American indebtedness herald a lengthy global economic malaise, it points to a new configuration of economic power in the world in coming decades. In place of the U.S.-centered economy, the future global economy is likely to be multi-polar in character.

Other states that will play enhanced roles as power centres in the global economy include: China, India, Japan, the European Union, Russia, Brazil, Mexico, and South Africa. The new global economy will certainly not be one in which national autarchy will prevail. While the era of globalization to which we have been accustomed will be at an end; what is coming will be an economy in which trade, commerce, and investments, will tie countries and regions to one another. National economies and their linkages, however, are highly unlikely to adhere to a single set of norms. The rule book the U.S. managed to impose on much of the world is bound to be replaced by a myriad of rule books and norms.

that contributed so much to public intellectual discourse has been largely abandoned. In their own way, social scientists have accepted the basic direction of the economy as a settled question, and they have dealt with other issues.

When Sir John A. Macdonald unveiled his high-tariff National Policy in the late 1870s, he was frustrated by the fact that the accepted wisdom of the day among economic thinkers ran counter to the direction he believed Canada needed to take. Pro-free trade British economic orthodoxy, as Macdonald complained in a seminal speech in 1878, suited the globally dominant British but was of little value to Canadians. After they won the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, Sir John A. said, the British designed an economic order that reinforced their position of power, and they pulled up the ladder so that no one else could follow them. British-style free trade, Macdonald insisted, was designed to keep British industry on top and to prevent the emergence of competitors. For Canada’s infant industries to thrive, they needed protection, according to the great champion of 19th century Canadian conservatism. Whatever the limitations of the National Policy, and they were considerable, Macdonald was



Canadians will need to consider the choices they have in this volatile environment. It remains to be seen how much help they will receive from the nation’s scholars in making sense of those choices. There is not much reason for optimism on this score, but neither is the outlook entirely dark.

The large majority of Canadian academic economists, whether in departments of economics or in schools of business, have lashed themselves to the mast of neo-liberalism, whose nostrums did so much to precipitate the storm that is wracking the global economy. In the aftermath of the crash, they show little sign that they are not determined to go down with the neo-liberal ship.

Canadians are also not likely to receive much insight from the nation’s social scientists. While they have done useful work in other areas, for a couple of decades they have paid little attention to questions of Canadian economic strategy. The great tradition of Canadian political economy

giving voice to a home-grown conception of political economy, during a time when the global economy was in the midst of a great depression, and a basic economic transition.

Following the crash of 2008, Canadians find themselves on a voyage to a new global economy, just as they did in the closing decades of the 19th century.

I am hopeful that necessity will provoke new thinking, just as it has at critical moments in our past. Some of this thinking may even emerge from the cloisters of academe, although for that to happen there will have to be a very frank debate about why our academics have been AWOL for so long when it comes to considering questions of economic strategy. ■■

A professor of political science at York University, James Laxer is the author of Beyond the Bubble: Imagining a New Canadian Economy, to be published in November by Between-the-Lines Publishing.

JOHN S. SAUL: a passionate scholar

by Thomas Klassen



In a long career and life, there are ample opportunities to take sides, make judgements, and reach firm conclusions. This is perhaps even more the case for those who combine an academic career with passionate efforts to change the world around them.

John S. Saul is unique in many ways. At age 71 he remains an eminent Canadian, indeed international, scholar on the politics of Southern Africa, particularly on the liberation struggles in that region during the second half of the 20th century and, in a different form, into the current millennium. For more than four decades he has also been at the forefront of working towards social change in southern Africa, active both on that continent and in Canada.

His list of publications—including 18 academic books and more than 70 book chapters—runs to over 40 pages. Not surprisingly he is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and other learned societies. Since reaching 65, and forced to retire from full-time duties at York University under the then-

existing mandatory retirement provisions, he has published three important books. An autobiographical volume is in press, while three more books, including one with Cambridge University Press, are under contract.

Saul came of age in Toronto when newly-independent African colonies were nation-building, and others were still in the throes of fighting their European masters and, in the case of South Africa, the apartheid regime. During his career, he taught in southern Africa for a decade, training or influencing many of the current social science and humanities scholars and activists in Mozambique and Tanzania. In doing so, he co-authored and collaborated with numerous scholars in, and of, that region, often providing vital support for intellectuals in Africa. He married his editorial and his political talents and concerns for 15 years (1985 to 2000) as a central member of the editorial team that launched and sustained *Southern Africa Report*, a Toronto-based journal much cited in both the region itself and North America.

In 2004, when he reached age 65, the *Globe and Mail* wrote that given Saul's impact in southern Africa, often at the grass-roots level, he represents the "underground, alternate Canadian tradition to the internationalism of Lester Pearson [that] includes Dr. Norman Bethune, who worked in Spain and China in the 1930s, and Dr. Chris Giannou today."

His energy and passion could not be restricted to the African continent. Close to home, he was one of the initiators of the progressive Canadian periodical *This Magazine*, serving with it for more than a decade as a key writer and editor.

His colleagues at York University have seen him in action as departmental chair and in other administrative roles. However, his main love has always been for his students, whom he would mentor, but never teach. He has been especially prominent in the graduate program in political science where he remained an active member and sought-after teacher until reaching age 70 last year and forced to stop teaching altogether. To celebrate some of his roles at the university, the continuing academic seminar within the university-wide African Studies Program is now named, in his honour: the John Saul Seminar.

Those of us who are his colleagues sorely miss his presence at meetings and frequent visits to campus. He never failed to make the most junior faculty members feel as though they were old friends and comrades and saw little need for hierarchy, or even bureaucracy. We gratefully read his e-mails and his many writings while basking in the glow of his continuing accomplishments.

When asked to reflect on his decades of teaching, writing and activism, Saul likes to quote Bertold Brecht who, speaking for himself and others, wrote: "Our rulers would have slept more comfortably without us. Such was our hope." That mantra is one that has guided Saul's life and work and his vision of what social science scholarship entails, but he revised it to incorporate rigorous, honest, and open-minded analysis. It is Saul's ability to draw historical lessons, maintain a sober balance, ask the probing questions and, at the end, have confidence in a future with greater social justice that makes him so extraordinary. ■■

Thomas Klassen is an associate professor in the Department of Political Science at York University.

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Humour Matters

Steve Penfold

Tenure and the Frights of Passage

I ALWAYS THOUGHT I was good at dealing with gatekeepers. After all, my parents lived in a border town for 15 years, so anything the family needed—books, gas, cigarettes, shoes—we got across the line. In fact, “going shopping” was pretty much a synonym for “crossing the border,” and “America” was just another way of saying “shopping mall.” And we never paid duty on anything, thanks to my father’s Jedi-like ability to befuddle border guards by answering questions with non sequiturs like “I just put in the toast” or “I had a Coke at Denny’s.” Another strategy was appealing to the gatekeepers’ salt-of-the-earth masculinity, a good tactic in the days before affirmative action. This generally involved adding a six-pack of Budweiser to any purchase (beer and groceries, beer and shoes, beer and books, beer and eyeglasses...) while liberally deploying the word “the” in front of “wife.”

But even my father would have been defeated by the year-long gatekeeping ritual we call tenure. From assembling my file to receiving that coveted letter, I was a nervous wreck, notwithstanding the fact that my colleagues were awesomely supportive and my university’s process transparent and fair. Linguists report that assistant professors have 65 words for not getting tenure, and I can see why.

Nothing seemed to help. The more orientation sessions I attended, the less oriented I became. The more people told me, “There are no stupid questions,” the more I became convinced they really meant that my

questions were stupid. The more I organized my file, the more I thought I was forgetting something. “You fool,” I imagined some future letter reading, “tenure would have been granted if only you had included a copy of Assignment Two in HIS263 from Fall 2004.” Damn! Where did I put that copy!?!

And how can anyone with a trace of humility write a Research Statement? Every second sentence of my first draft was “stupid, stupid, stupid,” which I can’t imagine goes over well with international referees. And who are these people with “Teaching Philosophies”? When I’m in front of a classroom, filling 50 minutes without drooling is pretty much my primary goal, and anything north of full-out humiliation is pure gravy.

And oh, the seductive charms of tenure lore! It doesn’t take much more than a few in-the-hallway sessions with your colleagues—whose multiple boxes of colour-coded files, tabs affixed, seem to undergo mitosis before your eyes—to move from nervousness to absolute despair. “Just go with the flow,” a friendly senior colleague suggested—forgetting that, by definition, things flow down hill. “There is a light at the end of the tunnel,” my faculty mentor reminded me. Fine words, until I passed this bit of alleyway graffiti the very next day: “The light at the end of the tunnel has gone out.” Even this seemed an optimistic take on things after six months of waiting.

The more I worried, the crazier my delusions became. At one point, I began to suspect that my PhD alma

mater would realize that my B-level undergraduate marks actually disqualified me from graduate school. It got worse: since I have the good fortune of teaching in the department where I got my BA, I became convinced that some member of my tenure committee would realize I still owed them an essay from 1988. “Right! Out with him then!” (Not to mention that very supportive Full Professor who may not remember that I got a 42 on his mid-term exam).

Well, you don’t need to google “impostor syndrome” to see where this is going. Tenure is serious business and, unless you’re my dad, dealing with gatekeepers is nerve-racking and stressful. But perk up. Even if non sequiturs won’t work, you can always set your word processor to replace adjectives like “stupid” and “incoherent” with phrases like “prestigious international journal” and “flexible pedagogic strategy.” In the end, even I entered into a common law relationship with my university. And now for that six-pack of Budweiser...

Steve Penfold is Academic Matters’ humour columnist. He moonlights as an associate professor of history at the University of Toronto.





Whither tenure?

TENURE AS WE KNOW IT TODAY

is a relatively recently phenomenon, dating from the 1960s. Since then, it periodically has come under critical scrutiny, if not attack, from inside and outside the academy.

Highly controversial research, perceptions of professorial indolence, and the real or assumed inflexibilities of the academic labour market are but some of the triggers that prompt calls for tenure's demise.

Is tenure outdated, even superfluous? If so, what are the alternatives and how viable are they? What can ensure academic freedom if not tenure? Or, contrarily, does tenure foster conformity, undermining academic freedom rather than enhancing it? What about the fairness of the tenure process, especially for women and non-traditional faculty?

These are the questions and concerns addressed in this "Debating Tenure" issue of *Academic Matters*. "Debate", however, in some ways is a misnomer. The articles supporting tenure—such as those by Michiel Horn and Sandra Acker—cite both its shortcomings and accomplishments. The contributions of Mark Kingwell, Michael Bliss, and Pat Finn offer reasons for eliminating tenure, but their critiques are not simplistic attacks.

Discussing tenure can be very emotive for supporters and critics alike. Yet, a fair-minded debate on tenure can be healthy, if uncomfortable, as it challenges misconceptions and increases understanding about where tenure is headed.

In many ways, though, the tenure debate is being overtaken by other

developments. It was the large-scale shortage of qualified faculty in the 1960s that led universities to formalize the tenure process and the grounds for dismissal. Today the academic labour market and university employment policies are again having an impact on tenure.

The pressing issue now is that the proportion of tenured faculty in the academic workforce is becoming increasingly insignificant as universities hire contract staff to meet their needs. The U.S. situation is sobering. The American Federation of Teachers' recent analysis of academic hiring patterns between 1997 and 2007 found that while the number of faculty positions grew in that 10-year period, nearly two-thirds of that increase was in "contingent" hiring, off the tenure track. At public four-year universities and colleges, the proportion of tenure-track and tenured faculty fell, from 51 per cent to less than 40 per cent of faculty. The increase in contract positions, and the decline in tenure-track hiring, took place across all higher education sectors.

What about Canada? Comprehensive data has not been collected on contract faculty in Canada. But it appears that although, due to higher rates of faculty collective bargaining, this country has maintained a higher proportion of tenured faculty compared to the U.S., Canadian universities are also hiring increasing numbers of contract faculty.

Questions about tenure and generational equity are thus being raised. And if tenured faculty become

an ever-smaller proportion of academic staff, what are the implications for tenure—and the benefits it brings?

Contract academic staff don't have the job security of tenured faculty. This is a critical concern. In their research study report, James Antony and Ruby Hayden observe that tenure, and the job security it affords, has a positive impact on faculty productivity. They find that in terms of research, teaching, and service, tenured faculty have higher levels of productivity than their non-tenured, or even tenure-track, counterparts. No surprise: without job security, long-term research, developing teaching expertise, or participating in collegial service to the community is difficult.

The answer to the growing insecurity of faculty employment is, therefore, not to make insecurity universal, through the elimination of tenure, but to *extend* security. While offering short-term "flexibility" to university employers, a labour force based on contract staff has many drawbacks for faculty, students, and the university itself. As Horn concludes, "imperfect as it is... tenure in its present form serves the long-term interests of universities and society better than any alternative that has been proposed."

Were tenure to be eliminated, one can imagine it would have to be reinvented in some form. But that is little comfort to the growing numbers of contract academics with no prospect of security—or to the declining ranks of tenured faculty.

Mark Rosenfeld is Editor-in-Chief of Academic Matters and Associate Executive Director of OCUFA.

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