



Chapter 4

Faculty Socialization and Gaining Tenure: Ethical Concerns and Considerations

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ABSTRACT

In higher education, ethical principles should guide administrators to develop policies and procedures that are just and fair to faculty, administrators, staff, and students and, as well, consider the needs of the various stakeholders affected by them. One example of a process that should be planned and carried out in an ethical way is the tenure-track process for faculty members. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss ethical issues and challenges institutions of higher education face in the tenure process and in socializing new full-time tenure track faculty members into academe. The authors discuss the acculturation process into the academy, then focus on interpersonal interactions and relationships, including mentoring and other supportive relationships and gender and minority issues that may affect the tenure process and acculturation into the academy. They conclude with future concerns and discussion of the ethical considerations for socializing faculty members into academe.

INTRODUCTION

Merriam-Webster defines ethics as “the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation; a set of moral principles; theory or system of moral; the principles of conduct governing an individual or a group; professional ethics; guiding philosophy; a consciousness of moral importance”. In higher education, ethical principles should guide administrators to develop policies and procedures

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that are just and fair to faculty, administrators, staff, and students and consider the needs of the various stakeholders affected by them. One example of a process that should be planned and carried out in an ethical way is the tenure-track process for faculty members.

The ethical complexities of the tenure and promotion process stem from the historical development of academe. For example, the power differential involving governance between administration and the faculty took a divergent path with corporatization of the academy beginning in the late 20th century into the present. Administration and outside stakeholders (i.e. government, business, and industry) have assumed more power in order to rein in expenditures and balance fiscal responsibility with educational outcomes (Altbach, 2016b). Eckel and Kezar (2016) described institutions of higher learning as sources of dual authority, which further complicates the workplace for professionals navigating toward their futures, such as newly-hired tenure track faculty members. Tuchman (2009) made the point that administrators come and go in short time spans, and therefore, to senior faculty and junior faculty on tenure track, there is frequently little concern for the whims of one administrator to the next, as it is likely they (the faculty) will outstay any administrator. However, the transient nature of administrators may have a profound effect upon tenure guidelines and practices, and it may be nearly impossible for the professor, regardless of employment status, to meet the varying expectations of all administrators and/or stakeholders in their institution.

When new full-time, tenure-track faculty members are hired as assistant professors by universities, they typically must go through a discerning six-year tenure process to judge their worthiness to achieve a tenured position (and usually a promotion to associate professor at the same time as tenure is granted). Developed guidelines for earning tenure usually include recommendations for number of publications, acceptable teaching evaluations, and numbers and types of service commitments. However clearly these guidelines may seem to be written, nevertheless, putting the guidelines into practice for tenure review may be a confusing process for new professors, as different departments, colleges, administrators, and faculty members may have different interpretations of the guidelines. Newly appointed professors may assume that all they need to do is to follow the prescribed steps and tenure will be granted. However, as Olszewski (2019) found in her qualitative study of music therapy tenure-track professors, tenure qualification guidelines are not always clearly stated or communicated to tenure-track faculty. Furthermore, participants in her study received mixed signals from various persons and promotion review committees about the worth of their tenure dossiers despite their dossiers conforming to the written tenure requirements. In addition, participants in Olszewski's study described having little university organized support or mentoring to assist them during the tenure process, revealing another ethical issue concerning tenure reviews and socializing new faculty into academe.

Given the difficulties and misunderstandings about the tenure process new tenure-track junior faculty frequently face, the purpose of this chapter is to discuss the challenges junior faculty face during the tenure process and the ethical issues and challenges institutions of higher education face in socializing new full-time tenure track faculty members into academe. We begin with a discussion of the acculturation process into the academy, then focus on interpersonal interactions and relationships, including mentoring. Gender and minority issues that may affect the tenure process and acculturation into the academy will be explored. We conclude with future concerns and discussion of the ethical considerations for socializing faculty members into academe.

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