Program for Excellence in Teaching & Learning

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Strategies & Tips for Success

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1. **Teaching**
   1. Have you taught before? If not, find someone that can provide some syllabus templates, course material examples, and advice on “how” to run a classroom effectively. Learn TRACS!
   2. Be careful of the “perfect teacher” syndrome! It often takes 2-3 semesters of teaching a class before you will be satisfied with your lectures/class.
   3. Don’t teach new classes with new preps each semester; develop a small set of classes you can prefect and stick to that set until you get tenure. Talk to your chair. New classes reduce scholarship productivity and often have lower student evaluations. Be smart.
   4. Be a mentor/leader/inspiration to your students, but keep the line between professor and student clear and appropriate (Syllabus = Contract!)
   5. After your first or second time through a course, try to avoid changing textbooks, making major changes in assignments, etc. until *after tenure.* Focus on perfecting your lectures, improving your student evaluations.
   6. Where possible, try to link your teaching to a research/creative scholarly productivity result (e.g. do your professional journals have an education issue that would allow you to publish something interesting or unique about your courses; use your course preparations to provide an avenue for new publishable interpretations/analyses).
   7. Learn what your department and college requirements are for peer evaluations and adhere to it (*Be sure to obtain the # needed for peer evaluations prior to tenure application*).
2. **Scholarship/Creative Productivity**
   1. If you recently completed your dissertation/thesis, PUBLISH it as a book manuscript or multiple journal articles under your authorship and with a Texas State affiliation so it clearly counts towards tenure here; continue to mine your dissertation for publishable materials.
   2. If you continue to work in the area of your doctoral research, maintain collaborative projects with your dissertation chair, but also begin to do your own collaborative research and expand your network.
   3. **Maintain the *PIPELINE*!!** Research is a journey not a single destination. Always have projects you are “working on,” submitted, in review, in press, and coming to completion. Look for new projects and collaborators on and off campus. Talk to other professors about their research-you never know how new collaborations can develop. [*SUSTAINABILITY*]
   4. **Squeeze all the research products possible out of each project and each grant proposal!** Often the background sections of proposals can be used for summary articles in peer reviewed publications. Don’t waste these efforts. One of my most highly cited articles was a proposal background section.
   5. Don’t overlook data mining with federal or state agencies, including the military! There is often tons of data that need to be analyzed and published in these agencies…establish a working relationship and offer your help to publish things because they are typically understaffed and publishing is not often a priority for them.
   6. Research Enhancement Program is an excellent source of $$$ for pilot projects (i.e., seed grant funds). Ask to see a successful proposal from your college! Think in terms of “how can I build on this project to look for external $$$.” (MIRG program in spring semester for collaborative proposals).
   7. Large grants are outstanding, BUT *do not overlook* state contracts, professional organization grants, SBIR /STTR, corporate equipment offers (laboratory equipment, etc.), foundations, etc.
   8. If you are new and trying to establish a research record, you will have more success if you start small and build on your successes by slowly escalating the size of your awards. Many young professors have failed to get the mega-grants and spiraled down to a failed tenure bid because they refused to start small. Establish your reputation and build on it with publications and successful grant awards. Don’t overestimate your status in your academic community.
   9. Ask to see successful grant applications from colleagues. Get colleagues to review your proposal drafts and learn from them…writing a grant is not like writing a publication!
   10. Involve your students (undergrads and graduate students) in research. There are $$$ for incorporating this into your research agenda, often student involvement increases the probability of getting an award and, it’s a great way to build a network of future collaboration with successful students.
   11. When rejected for publications or grants, sulk for a bit, have a cold adult beverage, and then get over it…don’t take it personal! Read the reviewers comments carefully and **learn from the reviewers comments**. Always treat reviewers (directly or indirectly) like they have done you a big favor-because they have. The more critical and detailed the review, the bigger the favor. Glowing reviews on a failed proposal are useless.
   12. Rewrite and resubmit failed proposals by directly addressing the criticisms of the reviewers. Successful proposals are often submitted 2-3 times before they are awarded. Do not give up.
3. **Service**
   1. In the first few years, most will tell you to keep it minimal….my experience, however, has been to not overlook the value of being collegial ASAP.
   2. Look for committees that actually interest you…it’s OK to “volunteer” for something that you might find helpful and fun, versus being assigned**. Especially if it intersects with research interests or puts you into collaborative research relationships!**
   3. Talk to others that can help you with regards to committees that will not dominate your time the first several years. AND, be careful of trying to “Chair” a committee the first few years-it’s a lot of work and it will decrease your scholarship productivity; a very bad idea if you don’t have tenure. However a good idea when you begin thinking about Full Professor.
   4. Keep an eye on how the University and your College view Service…there is a movement to place more value on service. This is especially true of those considering Full Professor.
   5. During your first year read the University’s and Academic Affairs Policies and Procedures (UPPS and PPS) as well as those from your college and department. Learn how the University works. At some point (or at many points) this knowledge will work to your advantage.
4. **Some Random thoughts about my journey to tenure and promotion**
   1. Networking is crucial *immediately*….service should be at a minimum the first year or two, but do not overlook the value of serving on a college and/or a university committee, especially those related to research.
   2. Find a Mentor or several….in your department, in your college, university, and other colleagues that KNOW how to navigate academic tenure and promotion.
   3. Promote yourself where applicable (e.g. don’t be afraid to apply for Presidential Excellence awards in teaching, research, service; awards in your professional organizations, special student mentoring, etc.). This is awkward I know, but, if you don’t tell your story, who will?
   4. Write THANK YOU NOTES…your mom was right! People that mentor you, or provide you with assistance always appreciate a thank you and, they are quicker to keep up that help when appreciated.
   5. PERSEVERANCE….keep on keeping on….the timeline for tenure will happen very quickly. Continuity of research excellence is important to document.
   6. ORGANIZATION is half the battle. Ask to see your colleague’s tenure and promotion folders ASAP and begin to “think like a tenure track professor!” This means you should not be afraid to ask for letters documenting your research, saving emails, certificates, etc. in a manner that makes sense to you and your college.
   7. Surround yourself with Positive Colleagues who know how to navigate academia, don’t fall into the trap of cynics, whiners, or rumor-mongers.
   8. Realize that TX State is an emerging research institution and tenure/promotion is a *moving target*. Just because a full professor in your department has barely published, does not mean that is their standard. Again, get over it and go to work! Talk to your departmental chair in detail and tenured colleagues generally about what he/she expects for tenure-do this informally and individually; don’t ask for an on-the-spot evaluation of your record. Talk in generalities to your departmental colleagues. Remember each tenured professor in the Personnel Committee can vote independently, anonymously and without a need to justify their vote; if they are not willing to talk about this then don’t push it.
   9. It’s normal to feel pressure during the T&P process. Don’t let it paralyze you, set goals, write them down, and work towards them every day. If you take care of the little things each day, the big things will work out.
   10. Strive for Excellence everyday…remember, each day you change…you either get a little better or a little worse.
   11. Don’t be afraid to talk to your Chair and Dean about the culture in your college including the personnel committee. *Keep the T&P policy nearby (Department, College, and University).*

I welcome each of you as a TX State colleague and Ambassador!

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