

**Report of the Tenure Clock Committee
to the Executive Faculty of the Main Campus
(April 12, 2004)**

On September 26, 2003, the Executive Faculty of the Main Campus established the Tenure Clock Committee, composed of Professors James Reardon-Anderson, chair, Robert Cumby, Ellen Henderson, Marcia Morris, and Associate Provost Marcia Mintz, ex officio, and directed this committee “to consider and make recommendations to the Executive Faculty and through this body to the Provost regarding all leaves of absence and the tenure clock.” The committee met with the Provost on two occasions, held additional meetings of the full committee, and conducted various inquiries. Marcia Mintz provided regular and close consultation with the Provost at all stages. The committee and the Provost reached agreement on the attached text entitled, “The Seven-Year Clock (Draft, 04/12/04),” which the committee recommends to the Executive Faculty as a substitute for the existing policy regarding the tenure clock and, as appropriate, for inclusion in the Faculty Handbook.

The committee wishes to underline the point that it excluded from its charge and has excluded from this report the impact, if any, on the tenure clock of leaves granted for medical, parental, family care or other personal reasons. The committee presumes that these issues will be covered in a separate section or sections of the Faculty Handbook.

Background

The current policy governing the tenure probationary period is described in the Faculty Handbook, IX. G. (p. 28). The Handbook states, “The appointment of a tenure-eligible faculty member not achieving tenure shall be automatically terminated no later than the end of his or her seventh year of full-time employment.” The Handbook also allows for the tenure probationary period to be interrupted and the tenure clock to be stopped. The sentence (quoted above) that describes the maximum term is immediately followed by this statement:

The tenure probationary period shall not include any year in which any member of the Ordinary Faculty is employed for less than two-thirds of the year. Summer sessions do not count toward the tenure probationary period, whether or not such sessions are included in the person's annual contract. For faculty on the Main Campus, research and/or teaching leaves stopping the tenure clock will be limited to a maximum of one year, or two semesters, not including summer; additional leaves beyond one year will be considered for approval but will not stop the tenure clock.

The committee has not had access to all faculty records and recognizes that

cases about which they have no knowledge may have been treated in different ways. However, based on the knowledge of committee members and of senior faculty they have consulted, since 1995 or earlier, successive Provosts (Cooper, Brown and O'Donnell) have stopped the tenure clock for one year, and one year only, of untenured ordinary faculty who have been granted leave to conduct research or to teach at another institution. To the committee's knowledge, the normal practice has been to treat the granting of leave and the stopping of the tenure clock as one decision.

The committee concludes that given this combination of language in the Handbook, the practice followed by Provosts since at least 1995, the fact that a significant number of untenured faculty members have taken leaves that have stopped their tenure clock, and that many faculty, both tenured and untenured, have understood this to be the normal practice, it follows that currently untenured tenure-track faculty on the Main Campus can reasonably conclude that they have had or will have the option of requesting a research and/or teaching leave and that, should that leave be approved, the tenure clock will be stopped for up to one year. The committee further concludes that any change in this practice must give careful attention to the transition from the current practice to a new stated policy.

Inequities and Anomalies

A number of anomalies and inequities arise from the current treatment of leaves during the tenure probationary period. One anomaly is that faculty members who are "on leave" to conduct research have had their tenure clocks stopped, whereas other faculty members, who have received grants through Georgetown to conduct research without teaching and other responsibilities, but who are not technically "on leave," have not had their clocks stopped. Inequities arise because even though all untenured faculty members have had the same options, not all are equally well situated to make use of these options. Opportunities for leave are greater in some disciplines than in others. Personal situations may make it more difficult for some faculty members to take leaves than it is for others. Departments and senior colleagues of untenured faculty may have greater or lesser knowledge of university practices and may or may not advise untenured faculty of their opportunities for leave and clock stoppage. As a result of these inequities, untenured faculty members have not all experienced the same de facto tenure probationary period.

The committee recognizes the problems with the current practice and concludes that it should be changed to remove these inequities and anomalies. With this in mind, the committee recommends that the Executive Faculty endorse the attached document, "The Seven-Year Clock (Draft, 04/12/04)", to be included as revisions in the Faculty Handbook.

Recommendations

The committee's unanimous recommendation has the following main features:

- The tenure probationary period is seven academic years.
- Untenured members of the ordinary faculty will normally apply for tenure in the sixth or seventh year of the tenure probationary period, but may apply at any time after the end of the third year.
- A faculty member who applies for tenure but does not receive tenure in the final year of the tenure probationary period will be granted a contract for a terminal eighth year. Individuals may not apply for tenure in the terminal year.
- No personal and family leave policies pertaining to the tenure probationary period are affected by the proposal.
- The tenure clock may be interrupted while a faculty member is on leave to perform public or professional service.
- The tenure probationary period should not be interrupted while a faculty member is on leave to conduct research or teach at another institution.
- Current non-tenured faculty members – that is those who tenure probationary period begin before July 1, 2004 – should be “grandfathered”. That is, they should be able to interrupt the tenure probationary period for one year, and one year only, while on leave to conduct research or teach at another institution provide the leave is completed by June 30, 2008.

Explanation

In its deliberations, the committee sought to remove the inequities created by the current policy of stopping the tenure clock for teaching and research leaves while retaining what it considered to be its primary benefit – the fact that it allows the tenure decision to be postponed for one year. The committee saw a clear advantage to allowing the decision to be postponed. In several disciplines the lag-time between the start of a research project and the publication of the results has grown. In some instances (for example the natural sciences), this is due to the additional time required to set up a lab and to secure approval for grants, which are one measure by which tenure applications are judged. It also allows more time for faculty members to obtain renewal of grants, which in some disciplines is seen as an important indicator of scholarly success. In other instances (for example in some of the social sciences), it is due to the increase in the time an article must spend in the review process and a greater number of revisions that are required before publication. The committee

concluded that simply eliminating the option for a faculty member to interrupt the tenure probationary period by taking a research or teaching leave would work to the disadvantage of both the assistant professors applying for tenure and the University more broadly because it would mean that tenure decisions would, in many instances, need to be made on the basis of less information than is currently the case.

The committee's recommendation that individuals normally apply in the sixth or seventh year allows an individual to wait until the seventh year to apply for tenure without concern for a stigma that might currently be associated with a "late" application. The committee's recommendation of a terminal year for those whose applications for tenure in the seventh year are unsuccessful reinforces this flexibility by reducing the complications that might arise for those who would otherwise need to apply for tenure and search for a job at the same time. It also has the advantage of allowing departments to plan better. By allowing for a terminal year, departments can avoid the need to search in August for someone to teach courses in September.