



How to Succeed as Tenured and Non-Tenured Faculty

By Glenna S. Brewster, MS, RN, FNP-BC, and Donna Volpe, MSN, RN-BC

Upon completion of a graduate degree, many individuals choose to pursue a career in academia. After making this decision, they have to decide on the setting in which they want to work, i.e., research or teaching focused university or college, and whether they want to apply for a tenured or non-tenured position in that setting. This article will provide some information about what is expected of tenured and non-tenured faculty along with some suggestions about how to be successful in each role.

At the start of a tenure-track position, individuals are referred to as assistant professors. They often have up to seven years to fulfill the requirements set by the particular university to achieve tenure. They are considered to be junior faculty. Upon achieving tenure, individuals are promoted to associate professors. They are usually mid-level faculty with between 7 and 15 years of experience. Upon achieving tenure, individuals can choose to remain at the associate professor designation or fulfill the requirements for becoming a full professor.

The requirements for promotion may differ based on the academic setting, but the over-arching goals are similar in that the tenure-track faculty will participate in teaching, conducting research, and contributing to professional citizenship and service.

To fulfill the teaching requirement, faculty will be expected to teach one or more courses, advise and mentor students, and supervise and participate in doctoral dissertations and other theses. Additionally, tenure-track faculty are also expected to engage in research and contribute to new knowledge to the field through publications in peer-reviewed journals. They also should seek and receive external funding. To fulfill the professional citizenship and service requirements, tenure-track faculty should participate in personnel reviews, take leadership roles in departments and the university, review grants and manuscripts for organizations and journals pertinent to their field, and be active in their professional organizations.

As a new employee on a tenure-track line, if your focus is to establish your research, negotiate for protected research time during the first one or two years. Ensure that you find out what the requirements are to achieve tenure at your institution. Write a development plan with the time line for when each requirement will be completed. Identify mentors who can guide you through the process and with whom you can collaborate for projects that would fulfill the tenure requirements. In addition, identify persons who have just completed the process and are actively going through the process and ask for advice and guidance.

Non-tenured faculty usually have contract positions and hold ranks such as lecturer, instructor, or visiting assistant professor. Non-tenured faculty also contribute to teaching, research, and service, but the majority of non-tenured faculty focus on teaching. As non-tenured faculty, promotions and re-appointments are often based on course evaluations. Feedback provides the impetus to revise a course or offer different teaching strategies to promote an engaging classroom experience, and thus use the course evaluations to improve and enhance the course. It is important to understand the evaluation procedures for instructors and the courses, the procedures for re-appointment, and who will decide whether or not you renew your contract.

All faculty, whether tenured or non-tenured, should make it a priority to network with colleagues and attend campus functions and workshops so as to enhance both their teaching and professional development. In addition, seek out senior faculty who can advise you. Specifically, a mentor can help new faculty learn the organizational culture of the college.

Whether your role is one of an instructor or researcher, meet with the campus instructional designer and information technology departments since both can be integral in helping to create courses and develop posters and presentations.

In conclusion, when entering the field of academia, it is important to identify the goal of your academic career. After identifying these goals, you can decide if you want to be tenured or non-tenured faculty. While there are guidelines to meet as tenure-track faculty for promotion, such guidelines may not be available for non-tenured faculty. However in both roles, individuals actively teach, conduct research, and participate in professional citizenship.