

Tenure and Promotion at Carolina: A Quick Guide for New Faculty

What is tenure?

“A status granted after a trial period to a teacher that gives protection from summary dismissal.”
Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary. 10th ed.

“Academic tenure refers to the conditions and guarantees that apply to a faculty member’s employment. More specifically, it refers to the protection of a faculty member against involuntary suspension or discharge from, or termination of, the faculty member’s employment by the University except upon specified grounds and in accordance with specified procedures.”
Trustees Policies and Regulations Governing Academic Tenure in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (<http://goo.gl/IS96P>)

Why is tenure important?

Tenure is the primary mechanism by which universities support and protect academic freedom. Academic freedom consists of the faculty member’s freedom of inquiry and freedom of communication.

“Academic freedom is the right of a faculty member to be responsibly engaged in efforts to discover, speak and teach the truth....

...

“The purpose intended to be served by according the protections of academic tenure to faculty members are to secure their freedom and to aid this University in attracting and retaining faculty members of the high quality it seeks. While academic tenure may be withheld on any grounds other than those specifically stated to be impermissible under Section 4 hereof [exercise of First Amendment rights, discrimination or personal malice], its conferral requires an assessment of institutional needs and resources and evidence of service to the academic community, potential for future contribution, commitment to the welfare of the University, and demonstrated professional competence, including consideration of commitment to effective teaching, research, or public service.”

Trustees Policies and Regulations Governing Academic Tenure in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. (<http://goo.gl/IS96P>)

Tenure timeline

Now

If you do not already have a copy of your school’s or department’s promotion and tenure policies and procedures, obtain a copy now. Familiarize yourself with the policies and ask your department chair, division head, school dean, or the head of your unit’s promotion and tenure committee to explain anything you do not fully understand.

Each year

In the spring of each academic year, you should receive an annual review from your department chair, division director, school dean, or other appropriate supervisor. The documents that you must submit for this review and the procedures followed differ by academic unit. In general, however, you will be asked

to provide information about your activities and accomplishment during the past year, e.g., publications and papers, grants and grant applications, invited presentations, courses taught, course evaluations, service activities, honors, and awards, and your plans for the next academic year.

Annual reviews are very important for ensuring that you remain on track for reappointment and, ultimately, tenure and promotion. Be sure to take advantage of the opportunity to get specific, detailed feedback on your performance and advice on what you need to do during the coming year.

Third-year review and renewal

Your initial appointment as a tenure-track assistant professor is for a four-year probationary term. Therefore, before the end of your third year, generally June 30 of your third year, a decision must be made about offering you a second three-year probationary term as an untenured assistant professor. Decisions about renewal are made by your department chair or school dean in consultation with your unit's full professors or tenured associate and full professors. You must be informed in writing of the decision.

This third-year review most likely will be more formal and detailed than your annual reviews. It may be conducted by your unit's promotion and tenure committee or by a special committee appointed by your chair or dean. As with the annual reviews, materials you are required to submit and procedures followed differ by academic unit. Be sure to consult your unit's promotion and tenure policies for details. If you are unclear about any requirement or aspect of the process, consult with your chair, dean, or head of your unit's promotion and tenure committee. For more information about the renewal process, see <http://goo.gl/VURaf>.

Tenure review

At least one year before the expiration of your second term as an assistant professor — generally during your sixth year at UNC — a decision must be made about whether to promote you to associate professor with tenure. This is a very formal process, which ultimately requires approval by the UNC-Chapel Hill Board of Trustees.

Toward the end of your fifth year or beginning of your sixth year, you will be told to begin preparing your tenure and promotion dossier, which will be discussed in more detail below. You will also be asked to submit a list of potential external reviewers. The University requires letters from at least four external reviewers, two selected from the list you provide and the other two selected by your chair or dean. The external reviewers will be asked to evaluate your scholarly work and national and international reputation. All reviewers must be above you in rank, preferably full professors, and should be at peer institutions. Your external reviewers may not be people with whom you have worked directly, such as your dissertation chair, a co-author or co-PI, or former co-worker, but they may be people you know from professional interactions, such as academic organizations or committee work. Consult with your mentor and/or others before submitting your list to your dean or chair. For more information about external reviews and reviewers, see <http://goo.gl/SXRL2>.

After you have finished compiling your tenure and promotion dossier, you will submit it to your chair or dean. Your unit's promotion and tenure committee will conduct an initial review of your record and external letters and then take a vote. Next will come a vote by either all tenured faculty members or all full professors in your unit. Practices vary by academic unit, with some permitting only full professors to vote on tenure and promotion decisions and others permitting all tenured associate and full professors to participate. The votes of both the assembled tenured faculty or full professors and of the promotion and tenure committee will be part of the record that goes forward as the process continues.

Your department chair or, if you are in a school without departments, your school dean will then make a recommendation based upon the committee and faculty votes. The chair's recommendation then moves

on to the appropriate dean. If you are in the College of Arts & Sciences, the Arts and Sciences Advisory Committee (ASAC), composed of the Dean of the College and the chairs of the College's four divisions (fine arts, humanities, social sciences, and basic and applied sciences), will also review your dossier. If you are in Health Affairs, a review will be conducted by the Health Affairs Advisory Committee, composed of two faculty members from the School of Medicine and one each from Dentistry, Pharmacy, Nursing, and Public Health, and chaired by the Executive Associate Provost.

The next step in the process is the University's elected Appointment, Promotion and Tenure Committee. That committee comprises twelve faculty members, four from the College of Arts & Sciences, four from the School of Medicine, and four from the other professional schools, elected to three-year terms. The APT Committee meets monthly to review promotion and tenure recommendations from the departments and schools. The committee makes recommendations to the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost, who makes the final decision subject to confirmation by the University Board of Trustees.

For more information about the steps and documents in the process, see <http://goo.gl/3RF40>.

Dossier contents (and what you should be doing now to prepare your dossier for the review and tenure processes)

Curriculum Vitae. If your CV does not already conform to the format suggested by the University, fix it now. See <http://goo.gl/7FdjA> for the appropriate order of items on your CV. Update your CV immediately as items occur. Be sure to always date your CV.

Research statement. If you haven't already, write one now. Use it to ensure you stay on track with your research agenda. Make sure it contains future research plans and goals. Update continually. Revisit your statement at least once a semester to see what changes, additions, or deletions should be made.

Teaching statement. If you haven't already, write one now. Use it to guide your development as a teacher. Make sure it contains future teaching plans and goals. Update continually. Revisit your statement at least once a semester to see what changes, additions, or deletions should be made.

Other materials. Some academic units require service statements and/or other materials. Check your unit's promotion and tenure materials to find out. Teaching effectiveness is one of the criteria on which you will be evaluated. Be sure to save all the summaries of your student course evaluations as well as copies of peer teaching observations and other materials relating to your teaching, such as award nominations. See <http://goo.gl/bhOli> for additional information on teaching and service records.

Parts of the dossier that you do not prepare.

Chair's letter endorsed by the Dean and/or Dean's letter. This is described as "the most important recommendation" in a tenure packet. See <http://goo.gl/7Bnvj>.

Department or school promotion and tenure committee report if one exists.

Letters from your external reviewers. See <http://goo.gl/zjoOX>.

Letter from your chair or dean soliciting the external reviews. See <http://goo.gl/QXMYR>.

Extensions of the tenure clock

If personal circumstances, such as illness or childbirth and/or childcare, make it impossible for you to

follow the standard tenure and promotion timeline, you may request an extension of the tenure clock. An extension request must be initiated at least 24 months before the end of the term to which it will be applied. For example, if you are in your second probationary term as an assistant professor and want to extend your tenure clock, you must initiate the request no later than the end of your fifth year of service at UNC, at which time you still have two years left on your second probationary term. If you request an extension in the third or fourth year of your initial four-year probationary appointment, you must first successfully undergo your third-year review and renewal before the extension will be granted.

An extension can be for up to 12 months, and a second extension for another 12 months is permitted for a maximum extension of 24 months. Requests for extensions are made to the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost and must include a letter from you explaining the circumstances requiring an extension and a letter of justification from your department chair approved by the dean or, if you are in a school without departments, your dean.

For more information, see <http://goo.gl/E7g3s>.

Time at another university before coming to UNC

Some academic units will consider your accomplishments as a faculty member at another university and, based on a combination of your record at UNC and your former institution, agree to put you forward for promotion and tenure before the usual six years of service at UNC. Before requesting early consideration, it is important you recognize that tenure is conferred by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill based on the standards and institutional needs of this University. Therefore, before seeking early consideration, you must establish an excellent record of performance at UNC in addition to the excellent record that enabled you to be hired here. Compiling a record of excellence, plus demonstrating the “potential for future contribution” and “commitment to the welfare of the University,” will most likely take several years. Under no circumstances can a request for tenure be initiated until you have been employed by UNC for at least 18 months. See <http://goo.gl/IS96P>.