PENNSTATE

Faculty Tenure-Flow Rates: 2007-08 Annual Report

Vice Provost for Academic Affairs
and
Office of Planning and Institutional Assessment

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Introduction
For the past eleven years, Penn State has analyzed the rates at which its provisionally appointed faculty members achieve tenure. Tabulations are shared annually with Penn State's deans and with the University Faculty Senate.

Distribution of Penn State Faculty
Penn State employs over 5,000 full-time faculty members, including lecturers, librarians and research faculty. Of these, about 2,900 are either tenured or on the tenure track. The following data are University-wide counts for full-time faculty in fall 2007.

Tenured	2,104	(39.4%)
Provisional	767	(14.4%)
Other	2,464	(46.2%)
Total	5,335	(100.0%)

(Source: Penn State, 2008)

Tenure-Track Progression of Assistant Professors
As shown in Table 1, in any given year, about 150 faculty members enter provisional status at Penn State. For the last eleven entering cohorts -- that is, those beginning in 1990 through 2000 -- 57 percent of new entrants had received tenure by the end of their seventh year on the tenure track. Of course, this does not mean that 43 percent were denied tenure, since assistant professors leave the tenure track for many reasons.

Table 1 also shows tenure rates by gender and minority status. For the eleven cohorts combined, tenure rates for minority faculty have been lower than for non-minority faculty (52 percent and 57 percent). Tenure rates for females have been lower than for males (49 percent and 61 percent). The total number of

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entrants for each group is 275 minority faculty members, 1,256 non-minority faculty members, 550 females, and 981 males.

Apparent disparities in tenure rates probably reflect substantive differences across academic units more than differences by demographic groups, for two reasons: first, demographic groups are distributed differently across academic units, and second, tenure rates have been substantially different by discipline. The combined effect of those two factors is seen in data that the Office of Planning and Institutional Assessment compiled in April 2007 to support a grant proposal from Penn State to the National Science Foundation. That proposal is targeted to increasing the advancement of women in science and engineering; the compilation showed that for the cohort entering in 1999 into four science and engineering colleges (Agricultural Sciences, Earth and Mineral Sciences, Engineering, and the Eberly College of Science), tenure rates were 86 percent overall, and the rates were virtually identical for women at 85 percent (six of seven) and men at 87 percent (27 of 31). The flip side to that comparison is that tenure rates were correspondingly and consistently lower in other units, and again, fairly similar for men and women. For assistant professors in other University Park colleges (that is, not one of the four science and engineering colleges referred to above) in that 1999 entering cohort, the tenure rate was 62 percent overall, 64 percent (18 of 28) for women, and 60 percent (22 of 37) for men.

We are not sure of the reasons for these disciplinary patterns, and in any case the Penn State cell sizes are not large enough to strongly support broad generalizations. However, the Penn State data can be placed in some context through comparison with findings of a recent survey of over 1,300 modern language departments in 734 colleges and universities by the Modern Language Association. That report concluded that "in the aggregate, then, PhDs in the fields represented by the MLA appear to have about a 35 percent chance of getting tenure" (Modern Language Association, 2007, p. 4).

Table 2 summarizes information collected through a special one-off data exchange among ten peer universities that participate in the American Association of Universities Data Exchange (AAUDE). In keeping with the AAUDE agreement, individual institutions are not identified alongside their data in Table 2. However, it is permissible to note which institutions are included. They are Northwestern, Penn State, Rutgers, Michigan, and the universities of Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Pittsburgh, and Wisconsin. In all cases, except for Penn State, the data are for a single (main) campus.

As Table 2 shows, Penn State's tenure rate of 54 percent (N=160) for the AAUDE cohort study is about in the mid-range of this group of universities, for which the average rate is 53 percent (N=1,382). Also, the male-to-female and minority-to-non-minority patterns at Penn State are basically similar to the patterns reported by these peer institutions.

Table 3 shows that the large majority of college-level reviews at Penn State are consistent with the recommendations coming from departments and campuses. For example, in the 2006-07 academic year, 92 percent to 96 percent of the second-year, fourth-year, and sixth-year cases (N=78 to 133) reviewed at the college level resulted in recommendations for continuation or early tenure. The same pattern has been shown in earlier versions of this report (for example, Penn State 2006a; Penn State 2007a). The pattern of positive recommendations at the college level also holds whether in reference to decisions about candidates overall, to males and females, or to minorities and non-minorities.

Prior annual versions of this report (Penn State 2005; Penn State 2006a; Penn State 2007a) have also clearly shown that the approval percentage at the university level has almost always been over 90 percent. In other words, outcomes have historically been very consistent with the recommendations that the university committee and the president receive. That continues to be the case; for 2006-07, the president

approved 130 of 130 cases[1] (100 percent) that were forwarded to him with positive recommendations from the colleges.

Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3 only indicate whether faculty members received tenure; they do not explain why things happened. Many individuals leave voluntarily, not necessarily because they were denied tenure. Penn State has been exploring some of those matters via an annual faculty exit survey and interview process, conducted since 1997. That study shows that departing female faculty are younger (age 47 versus age 54) than their male counterparts, and that females are more likely than males (50 percent versus 31 percent) to leave because of a more attractive position elsewhere. Those gender differences have been evident every year over the past decade in which the exit interview process has been in place. A complete report on that project is available online (Penn State, 2007b).

Definitions. Each cohort in Table 1 includes new entrants into provisional status. So, for example, ABDs hired initially into a fixed-term position are included in a tenure cohort for the year in which they formally entered the tenure track. The cohorts also include library faculty of equivalent rank. Table 1 tracks cohorts *through* the seventh year – that is, one year past the normal tenure-decision point. This accounts for individuals who temporarily "stopped the clock" for one year (for example, for medical reasons). Typically there are 6 to 12 such individuals, University-wide, in any year's cohort.

The National Context

As we continue to build on past annual reports to the Senate on this topic, it is probably most helpful to briefly summarize main themes of reviews in the past and to point out new threads that seem to be emerging in the literature.

Table 2 presents the only such direct data exchange on faculty tenure rates that we know of, but a variety of individual studies have been conducted and published. Our 2005 report included a fairly extensive literature review along with a summary of the findings from institutional research reports from seven other research universities. The conclusion to that report stated the following (Penn State 2005, pp. 4-5):

> *Direct institutional comparisons for Penn State's tenure-flow profile have, for the most part, not been readily identifiable. Definitions and methodologies do vary somewhat among the peer institution studies that have been found, and conclusions can vary considerably based on parameters established for particular analyses.... Comparative tenure rates appear to be in the range of about 40 percent to about 70 percent. The picture is mixed on the effects of gender; in some cases, women are tenured at higher rates, and in others at lower rates. With one exception, the peer institution studies reviewed here did not relate differences in tenure rates to minority/non-minority status.*
>
> *Again, the comparisons are imprecise, but Penn State's overall tenure rates appear to fall about in the mid-range of available benchmarks.*

Emerging Threads. We highlight four ideas that appear to us to be especially relevant to conversations about tenure nationally and at Penn State.

First, nationally, questions and discussions on the topic of academic career progression are vital and current in relation to personal and family considerations. Articles in *Academe* on "Do Babies Matter?" (Mason & Goulden, 2002; Mason & Goulden, 2004) and the "Bias Against Caregiving" (Drago, Colbeck, Stauffer, Pirretti, Burkum, Fazioli, Lazarro & Habasevich, 2005) are among those that have brought attention to issues around the intersection of family decisions and academic careers. As already noted,

[1] Three candidates for tenure approval resigned after the Colleges had forwarded the recommendations but before the dossiers were transmitted to the Executive Vice President and the President. These three candidates were included in the count shown in Table 3 (N=133), but were not included in the Presidential count (N=130).

there is an absence of large, multi-institution datasets that researchers could, ideally, use to fully address research questions in these topics. Nonetheless, the emerging literature is raising challenging questions. The cogent and interesting analyses cited above point toward some troubling differences in average age at tenure for various groups, and suggest that having a family may slow the career progress of female faculty members.

Also, without equating family considerations to female concerns, we note that a survey of full-time tenure-track faculty members at six research universities has revealed significant gender differences in workplace satisfaction. For example, female faculty members rated their institution as a workplace less favorably than males did, rated their global satisfaction with their department and institution lower than males did, and were less likely than males to recommend their department to a candidate for a tenure track position (Trower & Bleak, 2004).

Second, while more researchers are beginning to pay attention to these topics, it remains true that most institutions cannot answer this straightforward question: "What proportion of your new assistant professors achieves tenure?" As far as we know, there are no national-level mechanisms or reporting conventions for regularly sharing information on tenure flow (Dooris & Guidos, 2006). As noted, for the first time a subset of the American Association of Universities did, albeit on an *ad hoc* basis, exchange data about tenure success rates, and more scholars are addressing these matters.

Third, there is ongoing recognition of the need to address the stress, anxiety, and negative impacts of the tenure process, and possibly to seriously reconsider the institution itself. A recent research report from the Modern Language Association documented the belief, at least, that "the demands paced on candidates for tenure, especially demands for publication, have been expanding in kind and increasing in quality" (MLA, 2007, p.4) and found evidence of ever-increasing anxiety, dismay, and concern about the process. Importantly, these conclusions were reached based not on input from junior faculty members, but from surveys and interviews with department heads and deans.

In recent months, economist Steven Leavitt – co-author of *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything* – sparked attention by weighing in with his contention that the time for tenure has passed. He argued, in part, that a rationale for tenure based on the need to protect scholars doing politically unpopular work is mostly hypothetical ("The Freakonomics of Tenure," 2007). There is some limited research evidence consistent with Leavitt's assertion. A survey of 2,700 professors of all ranks from highly rated U.S. colleges and universities found little confirmation that, in practice, having tenure was associated with a willingness to confront departmental colleagues, to publish controversial findings, or the like (Williams & Ceci, 2007). The merits of Leavitt's or Williams and Ceci's positions can be debated; we are simply bringing attention to a theme in the higher education literature on the pros, cons, costs, benefits, and possible future of tenure.

Fourth, Penn State's faculty, staff, and administrators may be becoming more attuned to these issues. It is not practical to enumerate here the many instances involving bodies such as the Commission for Racial and Ethnic Diversity, the Forum on Black Affairs, the Office of the Vice Provost for Educational Equity, the Office of the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, the University Faculty Senate, and more. But two examples may be helpful. First, the Commission for Women, founded in 1981, has among its other objectives long worked to assess and publish information on tenure track progress for women faculty. In fact, in his comments celebrating the 25th anniversary of that Commission, President Graham Spanier spoke to this matter, stating that, "from 1981 to today, the percentage of women with tenure at Penn State has more than doubled, reaching 25 percent of all faculty, and the number of female faculty now stands at 35 percent of our faculty ranks" (Spanier, 2006). A second case in point is the 2006 report from a special subcommittee of Penn State's Senate Committee on Faculty Affairs. That subcommittee examined the nature of evaluative evidence and the process by which it is used in promotion and tenure decisions. The subcommittee concluded that, in general, "promotion and tenure procedures at Penn State are effective

and fair, and that they work well in most cases" (Penn State 2006b, Appendix J, p. 6). Nonetheless, the subcommittee also addressed concerns similar to those touched upon in the present report. For example, while recognizing good intentions, mechanisms for stopping the tenure clock for a year, and so on, the subcommittee wrote of "the difficulties for women, especially those who are in the tenure process during their child-bearing years" (Penn State 2006b, Appendix J, p. 7).

In short, both at Penn State and nationally, there seems to be growing recognition of the importance of addressing the mechanisms for and outcomes of promotion and tenure procedures. What we know about Penn State and what we see in the literature suggest that Penn State is not alone in facing these challenges.

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Table 1. Tracking Cohorts Entering the Tenure Track Thorough Seven Years at Penn State.

Cohort Year	All Entrants			Female			Male			Minority			Non-Minority		
	Entrants	Tenured	Rate	Entrants	Tenured	Rate	Entrants	Tenured	Rate	Entrants	Tenured	Rate	Entrants	Tenured	Rate
1990	121	70	58%	40	19	48%	81	51	63%	18	9	50%	103	61	59%
1991	93	55	59%	30	15	50%	63	40	63%	8	5	63%	85	50	59%
1992	151	89	59%	55	28	51%	96	61	64%	29	15	52%	122	74	61%
1993	103	55	53%	31	12	39%	72	43	60%	17	8	47%	86	47	55%
1994	134	63	47%	50	17	34%	84	46	55%	21	6	29%	113	57	50%
1995	127	70	55%	53	30	57%	74	40	54%	23	17	74%	104	53	51%
1996	91	45	49%	29	12	41%	62	33	53%	22	12	55%	69	33	48%
1997	160	87	54%	52	25	48%	108	62	57%	28	15	54%	132	72	55%
1998	183	107	58%	75	38	51%	108	69	64%	44	21	49%	139	86	62%
1999	178	113	63%	63	38	60%	115	75	65%	34	19	56%	144	94	65%
2000	190	114	60%	72	36	50%	118	78	66%	31	16	52%	159	98	62%
1990-2000 Cohorts (11 cohorts)	1531	868	57%	550	270	49%	981	598	61%	275	143	52%	1256	725	58%

This analysis covers tenure decisions through the seventh year. Therefore, tenure rates include individuals who "stopped the clock" for one year. Typically, there are 6 to 12 such individuals, University-wide, in any year's cohort. This table summarizes data for Penn State including Hershey, but excluding PCT and DSL

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Table 2. Tenure Achievement Rates From Selected Association of American Universities Institutions
1997-98 Tenure Track Entrants Achievement of Tenure by 2004-05 (main campuses only[1], except PSU data)

	All Entrants			Female Entrants			Male Entrants			Minority			Non-Minority		
University	**Entrants**	**Tenured**	**Rate**	**Entrants**	**Tenured**	**Rate**	**Entrants**	**Tenured**	**Rate**	**Entrants**	**Tenured**	**Rate**	**Entrants**	**Tenured**	**Rate**
A	87	29	33%	34	9	26%	53	20	38%	7	4	57%	80	25	31%
B	62	29	47%	26	10	38%	34	19	56%	9	3	33%	53	26	49%
C	129	62	48%	41	18	44%	88	44	50%	26	14	54%	103	48	47%
D	89	43	48%	36	16	44%	53	27	51%	28	11	39%	61	32	52%
E	61	32	52%	29	13	45%	32	19	59%	17	8	47%	44	24	55%
F (Penn State)	160	87	54%	52	25	48%	108	62	57%	28	15	54%	132	72	55%
G	40	22	55%	18	10	56%	22	12	55%	7	5	71%	33	17	52%
H [2]	630	352	56%	236	123	52%	394	229	58%						
I	41	25	61%												
J	83	56	67%	38	23	61%	45	33	73%	16	7	44%	67	49	73%
All	1382	737	53%	510	247	48%	829	465	56%	138	67	49%	573	293	51%

1. Excludes medical school faculty. Gender and minority/non-minority figures do not add to total because some are unreported.
2. Includes tenure-track entrants between 1986-1991 and tenure achievement through 8 years.

Table 3. Second, Fourth, and Sixth-Year Tenure Decisions, 2006-07
College Level Reviews & Recommendations

	Total			Men			Women			Minority		
	2nd Year	**4th Year**	**6th Year**	**2nd Year**	**4th Year**	**6th Year**	**2nd Year**	**4th Year**	**6th Year**	**2nd Year**	**4th Year**	**6th Year**
a. # of cases reviewed	93	85	139	49	42	87	44	43	52	35	13	28
b. # of positive recommendations (continuation or early promotion & tenure)	89	78	133	46	36	83	43	42	50	34	13	26
% with "positive" recommendations	96%	92%	96%	94%	86%	95%	98%	98%	96%	97%	100%	93%

This table summarizes data for Penn State including Hershey, but excluding PCT and DSL.

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