Promotion and Tenure Are Not Your Goals

Our aim is to provide advice on planning to achieve promotion and tenure (P&T) at an academic institution where research excellence is the most significant component and performance in teaching and service must be satisfactory. It is important to note that P&T processes vary and many places will expect impact in more than a single area. This article highlights our view of key elements of the P&T process and tips to increase your potential for success as an academic.

Understand the "Rules of the Game"

You should be familiar with the P&T expectations and culture of your department and your institution so that your dossier will present a strong case that is consistent with what is valued. How will you be judged in regard to research, teaching, and service? What are the most effective strategies for documenting your case as your career develops? For each area, what is valued in terms of the volume, quality, and impact of the scholarship of your independent work? What is the value of collaborative projects? What is the value of publications with past advisors, even if completed while in your new faculty position? We do not recommend spending time before tenure trying to change the P&T system at your institution. These systems have likely been in place for decades and are seen to adequately meet the needs of your institution.

Take advantage of career development opportunities available at your institution, at society meetings, and online. This year The Endocrine Society will offer at ENDO 2012 the all new "How to Secure Promotion and Tenure Workshop for Mid-Career Professionals." This half-day workshop, held the day before the start of ENDO, will offer in-depth skills training that will help you navigate the promotion and tenure process.

Seek regular feedback and mentorship. Pick your mentors with an eye toward candid and open lines of communication. Meet with them regularly to present your plans, your successes, and your failures. Be honest with them, listen carefully to their advice, but remember that it's your career and your responsibility. Again, the ENDO 2012 workshop will provide an invaluable opportunity for you to network with faculty who have been successful in securing tenure and/or are currently serving on P&T committees.

Research Productivity

Select the members of your lab carefully but realize that the responsibility for training and establishing a productive environment is yours. Try to get a first research paper out as quickly as possible. This demonstrates that your independent lab is operational and you can get a publication accepted on your own. This will also increase your competitiveness or grant proposals. Work to publish regularly: Don't allow gaps to develop.

In seeking funding for your research, be informed. Take grant-writing courses and get connected with your office of sponsored programs. Ask your colleagues and mentors to review proposals. Allow adequate time to respond to their suggestions so that your first submission truly is your best effort. Consult program officers at federal agencies to assess the fit of the science with their portfolio and to get help identifying the best review panel for your work. Be flexible and creative with your research ideas: Grant funding is like establishing credit, getting started is important. Consider funding opportunities through charities and foundations as well as the federal government. Work to understand the rules of the game: Can you submit similar proposals to different agencies? How can you take advantage of New Investigator status from some federal agencies? Understand the programmatic goals of agencies and define a niche so that your research questions and innovative approaches are viewed as unique.

Success in Teaching and Service

Take advantage of career development and peer-review opportunities to improve your teaching and service. Understand what is expected in teaching and what can be counted. Is individualized instruction of students in your research laboratory valued similarly to classroom teaching? Look for double value—can your teaching and service assignments inform your research efforts, and vice versa? Consider scholarship opportunities: If you develop a novel teaching
exercise that will be useful to faculty at other institutions, contemplate submitting an article to an education journal. Scholarship in an area outside of your research excellence may significantly enhance your P&T dossier. Seek some protection from excessive service activities from your chair. National service opportunities may be viewed favorably and improve your visibility as a scholar.

**Build a National Reputation**

Earn a national reputation for being productive, doing quality work, and being collegial in your field. Develop networks that help your research—national meetings are excellent environments for this. Understand that the best networks are based on mutually beneficial contacts. Invite faculty from other institutions to give seminars in your department. This develops collaborations, helps improve your reputation, and may lead to important evaluation letters for your P&T dossier from leaders in the field. Again, look for double value. Can you serve on a national committee that helps your research and your service record?

**Communicate Locally**

To achieve your goals, hard work, organization, and time management (including a healthy work/life balance) will be required. Remember that your department and school colleagues will judge you for P&T so be a visible and valuable part of the community. Share your efforts and get constructive feedback: Allow your colleagues to “buy in” to your career. Your department and institution have invested in your career and want to see you succeed. If things go wrong ... seek good advice and proceed with caution. Do not ignore problems—address them and make informed decisions. Good, honest communication helps to resolve many difficult issues.

With a clear understanding of the rules and the expectations, be sure to focus on what is required. Document your process as you go so that assembling your dossier will be efficient. Review examples of recent successful dossiers. Do not try to impose a new style onto the system.

Respect the fact that non-scientists are likely to review your dossier. Don’t pad or exaggerate, but be a strong advocate for yourself. Produce a dossier that is a clear record of your work to date, one that conveys your strong ongoing momentum and your thoughtful plans for continued success.

So why are P&T not your only goals? Your goal is to be a renowned, productive researcher; an effective teacher and mentor; and a remarkable citizen of your institution and The Endocrine Society. P&T will be your institution’s way of celebrating these achievements.

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**Your feedback is welcome!**

We want your questions and thoughts about this article and ideas for other articles you’d like to see.

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