

## Two paths to Tenure, both In and Out

*In these days of the increasing importation of business management techniques and managers into academia, other universities may also be interested in the lessons to be drawn from goings-on at Louisiana State University. This note addresses what tenure is and what it is not, how to get it, and how not to revoke it.*

“some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them”  
Shakespeare (1600)

faculty members have to earn tenure, administrators have it given from above as a perk they are entitled to

AND

it should be easier for the Provost to revoke tenure for a faculty member through annual and other reviews, but administrators who neither teach nor do research will hold faculty tenure indefinitely

LSU Administration (2004)

### What tenure is:

The logic behind tenure at US universities was that society values the generation and dissemination of knowledge, an activity that faculty members perform through their teaching and research. This activity has the potential to annoy, upset, and embarrass significant sectors, sometimes perhaps even the majority, of society. Yet, as with judges who similarly may make unpopular decisions, society sees enough value in the activity to justify granting the safeguard of tenure for such practitioners. And, as with medieval guilds from which tenure arose, it is peers in the profession who decide on who gets tenure and when, usually after a long apprenticeship and proof of competence and performance.

### What tenure is not:

Tenure is not just job security for the individual faculty member. That security is only a concomitant of the faculty's academic freedom and shared governance, and the reasons mentioned above that necessitate the safeguard of tenure. Tenure was never meant to be a goody, a perk for top

administrators and the Board of Supervisors to award from above, especially to their own kind.

- Following instances when hires to top administrative positions were also inappropriately given tenured professorships, the LSU Faculty Senate passed resolutions 99-04 and 99-05 in 1998. In response, a Faculty Senate Commission promulgated principles and procedures for such hires with tenure, which were accepted by the then Executive Vice-Chancellor Dan Fogel and the then Faculty Senate Executive Committee in November 1998. This is currently the policy at LSU. Yet, in its recent hiring of Chancellor, a tenured professorship was arranged as part of a pre-set package of perks even for someone without a terminal degree and an established scholarly record. The Faculty Senate Executive Committee, which is charged in the policy “to determine whether the required procedures for a tenure recommendation have been faithfully followed”, recommended against taking a hasty decision but was ignored by the Board whose action can only be described as pre-set, announcements having already been made in the national media.

#### How to get tenure:

Given its importance, tenure should not be awarded lightly but rather after a serious and rigorous process. Part of that consists of the years of research and scholarship to get the highest degree in the field (usually a doctorate), followed by a record of scholarly work and teaching in the probationary period of 5 or 6 years, which are evaluated by peers both locally and in the wider profession. These are the equivalent of the training and apprenticeships required for union cards in professional guilds. Most tenured faculty at LSU, as with their counterparts in other US universities, earned their tenure through this standard path. To place someone on the tenure track, even to advertise for the position, these requirements, including of the doctorate, are clearly spelled out.

#### How not to give tenure:

Tenure is not something to be “given” and it is not the prerogative of political and business leaders in the state to award tenure to the top administrators of their choosing. The careful vetting process of faculty peers and of the profession must be where the process starts, even if the final legal authority is the Board of Supervisors of a public university.

- A case can be made for hiring an administrator from outside the academic realm. These are special cases, but very rare, when a major university appoints such an individual, a famous example being Eisenhower at Columbia. When the Republican Party saw in him their future candidate after WW II, since he had had only military experience, a high-level civilian position was arranged, all along recognizing its temporary nature and no pretences made of giving him a tenured professorship.
- If today, LSU sees benefit in hiring the NASA administrator as Chancellor, fine, but the quick giving of tenure is not. When the advertisement for the position did not require a doctorate, along with the possibility that a non-academic may be chosen goes the corollary that a tenured professorship may not be attached in such a case. To do otherwise simply shows the Board's total incomprehension of what tenure means as well as a hypocritical double standard when it comes to any other tenure-track faculty hire. Similar ignorance and arrogance was exhibited in 1999 when the then Governor of Louisiana shut down a search and simply appointed as President of the University of Louisiana someone who had only a Bachelor's degree but was stepping down from a Washington office and needed a temporary holding place with a high salary. To her credit, the current Gov. Blanco acted quite differently, hers being the only public voice concerned about faculty sentiment when the President of the LSU System and others on the Search Committee were not just silent but led the band for the Board's parade.

#### Revoking tenure:

The standard path for revoking tenure has been that, once it has been earned, it can be taken away only under extraordinary circumstances (at LSU, PS-104 governs this). Otherwise, its safeguards would have no meaning. Also, while in the pre-tenure period the onus is on the individuals to prove themselves, once earned, the onus shifts to the institution to prove the extraordinary failures that justify revocation. Renewable tenure, with the individual constantly having to justify retaining it, is a contradiction in terms. And again, it is only faculty peers in the profession who have the major role in a revocation, not administrative bosses as in other jobs that do not carry tenure.

- Here again, LSU's administration has shown a complete lack of appreciation of the basic tenets of tenure. In 1998-9, a Faculty Senate

Commission made a thorough study of (among other things such as the status of Instructors) post-tenure reviews across the US and made its recommendations for a variant as part of LSU's policy (PS-36) on tenure. While succeeding faculty groups and the Faculty Senate worked towards this purpose, the LSU System issued an ill-thought out policy (PM-35) that violated basic tenets of tenure. And again, when the Faculty Senate was almost converged on a workable policy, the then Chancellor issued unilaterally a policy (PS-109) to make the removal of tenure for regular faculty easier, and place it dominantly in the hands of the Provost. After the resultant furore, he himself recognized in a public Faculty Forum that PM-35 and PS-109, drafted dominantly by lawyers and administrators with little appreciation of tenure, were "unworkable". The Faculty Senate has continued its work and is in the final stages of a revised PS-36.

- Admittedly, a university and a Faculty Senate move slowly, and business-minded administrators may be impatient with that. But, a university is above all a place of ideas and issues, and discussion and deliberation about them. It is also questionable that businesses are necessarily more efficient and can turn on a dime. Witness famous instances, whether of the steel or the automobile industry, whether of an Enron or a major airline, which continued on dead end paths to end in disaster. Most importantly, if shared governance and thoughtfulness are to have meaning, administrators will have to learn some patience as a counterpart to their demand on faculty to become more efficient. It is disconcerting for a faculty when the administration disrupts a process by issuing unilateral policies as has been done time and again at LSU. These actions give no confidence that the administration either understands or respects shared governance, leave alone the specifics of any issue.
- One complicating element in establishing tenure policies, in part the reason for the slowness in the LSU Senate's action, is the handling of administrators who also hold faculty tenure. A parallel policy (PS-35) on evaluating them deals only with their administrative roles, and is largely silent on the academic roles of teaching and research. In part, this has been engineered by administrators. While retaining their tenured professorships, they do not want to be reviewed in the same way as the faculty. But, it is unacceptable to decouple the very reasons justifying tenure, namely involvement in generating and disseminating knowledge, from reviews. This means that administrators who hold faculty tenure are never called to account

even as they neither teach nor involve themselves in any scholarship for an indefinite number of years. Worse, a Chancellor who was himself or herself just “given” tenure with neither past nor current record justifying it will revoke tenure for those who earned it and served LSU and their profession for long years in teaching and research. Orwell’s eyebrows would have shot up!

Conclusion:

We have arrived then at the situation, more Orwellian than Shakespearean, of tenure given from above, and precisely those same people forever exempt from the policies they issue, while only those who actually earned it are held to account under those policies. Coupled with the business CEO-level salaries for top administrators, universities are inevitably opening themselves to managers from the business and other worlds who have no understanding or appreciation for the academy and for some of its underpinnings such as tenure and shared faculty governance which have given strength to the US university system. There is no logic to decoupling the salaries of chancellors from that of the most senior and distinguished faculty in the university. It is even more Orwellian for one of the poorest states which gives poverty-level wages for janitors and no health benefits for graduate students to make its (LSU’s) chancellor’s salary nearly double that of any other public university’s including the highest ranked UC-Berkeley.

In these decisions on out-of-proportion compensations and perks, even tenure being seen as something to throw in with a car, house and supplements from Athletic Foundations, Boards of Supervisors and Presidents of our public universities are so acting simply because they can get away with it. The same sense of entitlement of a Ken Lay or a Welch is evident. They display the arrogance of power and hubris that Shakespeare, and Orwell, knew well. *If academic freedom, tenure, and shared governance are to have meaning and survive, it is the obligation of faculty to speak up and the duty of our administrators to pay attention to principles and the integrity of our procedures.*

December 20, 2004 Dominique G. Homberger, Biological Sciences  
A. Ravi P. Rau, Physics & Astronomy, LSU