Navigating the Pre-Tenure Process Questions & Answers

A general thought from a panelist - At the majority of institutions, it is in their best interest that you get tenure. So they should support you and do what they can to help you be successful. By the time you go up for tenure, they have already invested a lot in you, so they want you to get tenure as much as you do!! If they aren't supportive, go somewhere else!

1. What advice do panelists have about how to best form and maintain mentoring relationships through venues (i.e., conferences, etc.) other than one's department, particularly if you feel like you are not receiving adequate mentoring within your department? For example, how often is too often to ask questions? What kinds of questions are okay to ask?

- **My sense is that most senior colleagues are open to providing informal mentoring to junior colleagues. Most will entertain pretty much any question about the early career/tenure process, but there are naturally some they won't be as well equipped to answer (i.e., department specific questions). That said, I'd be judicious with your emails to them, remember, senior colleagues are likely to get an incessant stream of emails. But on the whole I think you will find that senior colleagues are eager to give advice, solicited or unsolicited.**

- **First, I think it is very important to have at least one mentoring relationship in your department. Departments vary in terms of how much effort senior faculty make to form these relationships, so you cannot expect others to reach out to you (although it's great if they do!). Instead, evaluate what your needs are and make an effort to connect with people whose opinions you respect. I find that people are generally very open to giving advice, so find more senior faculty with related research interests or lots of experience with department dynamics and expectations and ask to meet up for lunch or coffee. If you are having trouble finding a mentor in your department, talk to your chair and ask for help.**

  It is also helpful to have mentors in other departments at your university and related fields at other universities. I have had success with just emailing other researchers outside of my department and asking to meet for lunch, but it is important to do your research beforehand. If you are asking to meet, you should have background on the person and be able to articulate the connections you see and what made you interested in meeting (e.g., discussing a potential collaboration or specific methodology, advice on working with a funding agency that you know this person has experience with, etc.). For mentorship outside of the department, I find that it is helpful to maintain contact with prior mentors and colleagues and make an effort to continue to connect with them at conferences. For example, I maintain a close relationship with my supervisor from my first research assistant position 13 years ago. I always try to reach out to her to meet up at conferences, and I know that she is

available if I need advice about whether to resubmit a grant application or how to deal with challenges in one of my collaborations. Because I tend to be introverted, maintaining these existing relationships and making an effort to connect at conferences is also a way for me to meet new people in the field.

Rather than whether it is okay to ask a question, I think it is important to identify *who* to ask. Maintain connections with a range of tenured faculty who are willing to provide advice in different area and be aware of their unique experiences and areas of expertise. That way, when you need some guidance, you can run through the list and identify who to go to for help. I find that people tend to be very open to providing mentorship if it is clear that you are impressed by what they are doing and see ways in which their experience can be helpful for you as you work towards your goals (e.g., "I saw that you just got XX grant. Congratulations! I am thinking about applying next year – do you have a sense of what they are looking for?"). Finally, be a good colleague and recognize that mentors are also balancing many demands on their time. So, ask what they are working on as well. Be willing to listen and provide your thoughts if they need help thinking through an idea, and avoid asking them to complete time-consuming tasks when they have grades to submit or grant deadlines approaching.

- I set up several mentoring relationships pre-tenure, taking different forms. I reached out to several clinical psychologists at other small liberal arts colleges (similar to where I work), so that I could have a chance to talk with others who would understand the unique challenges of my position. Some of these were tenured professors with a good sense of what success would look like at an institution like mine; others were assistant professors like me who were currently grappling with the same issues that I was. Many of these conversations started with a coffee or lunch and then I would follow-up with these individuals, maybe once a year to check in. I also sought out mentorship from people in my area of research. I emailed one person I'd met at a conference and had a few skype conversations about some research related questions, I also eventually invited this person to give a talk at my institution, and tried to meet them for coffee annually at a conference. Another person I established a more formal once per month mentoring relationship with, using some funds that my institution supplied (to pay that mentor and to support travel to see them). I also reached out to other people I'd never met if I had a question that I thought they could answer. I was always nervous to send these emails but found that most people were incredibly generous in being willing to answer my questions.

I think that having multiple mentor relationships is critical so that you can direct questions to the person with the experience to answer them (and seek multiple opinions when needed). I found that having a person to bounce ideas off of once per month was extremely helpful (with others I could contact as needed). I think all questions are good and that to be successful and happy, you need mentorship in teaching, scholarship, and your personal life.

- I found success in forming and maintaining mentoring relationships by identifying researchers with particular expertise and making direct contact. I was able to form an important mentorship relationship by inviting a potential mentor to present at our department colloquium. During the visit I scheduled dedicated time for mentoring. I have also been successful at establishing mentorship relationships through email or by approaching researchers at conferences. When interacting via email, I am mindful to bundle my questions into one clearly articulated and concise email. This allows the researcher/mentor to quickly skim the email containing background and specific questions, and offer a quick response.
- Having a senior person in your department mentor you can be important, but it's not critical. What I found to be the most helpful was actually to have a group of people who were going through the same things together. When I was finishing up post doc, two other friends and I who were all starting in new faculty positions formed an informal support group. We met in person while we were still in the same location and then would email when things came up. This group was where I felt safe asking the "dumb" questions and generally freaking out or getting input on things that felt really important, like what I should name my lab. I was lucky that two other new faculty started the same year I did in my first faculty position, and we have been our own support group since then. I also to this day still reach out to my grad school mentor for advice and support when I need it.

2.   What advice do panelists have regarding how to choose which projects/collaborations to pursue and which ones to let go? (especially when one tends to say "yes" to too many projects out of an urgency to be productive/a good departmental member; etc).

- This is a hard question to answer in any generality; it depends so much on idiosyncrasies of the individual and their program of work. Here's one approach I've taken in my own work: I see my portfolio of work kind of like an investment portfolio. I have projects that are like bonds: low risk, close to guaranteed publications, but unlikely to have major transformative returns. I also have projects that are like high-risk stocks: they are much less certain to yield anything, but if they do it will potentially have a major impact. Other than that, my main rule would be to work with people that you like and respect as people, and don't work with jerks; it's not worth it.
- I think it is first essential to make sure that you have a clear and independent research program and that you have studies in the works that will result in publications without your mentors. When you are brand new to a faculty position and approached about new collaborations, I recommend holding off by saying something like "That sounds really interesting. I just need to get my lab up and running and start these studies. Maybe we can talk more in the spring?" Once you have trained your staff and started data collection in your lab, you can then start to evaluate what other collaborations are of interest to you. I select collaborations based on topics that I find interesting and the potential to work with people whose research I admire, but I also recognize that I don't have to start every possible collaboration right now. There are

several researchers at my current university that I hope to collaborate with in the future, but I recognize that my lab and I just don't have the time and resources to take on these projects right now. I try to be clear with collaborators about what I can and cannot offer, and to minimize time commitments for collaborations that I think might be less fruitful than others.

- I got the advice early on that I needed to establish an independent line of research- and I used that as a way to judge which projects I should take on, trying to always prioritize those that would be viewed as my work (as opposed to others). Because I have a relatively high teaching load, I also have limited time to work on papers. I knew that first author papers in strong journals would be the most highly valued, so I tried to spend most of my time on that, choosing very carefully any additional projects where I would not be the first author. I also schedule writing time every day (rather than having one day devoted to research that ultimately gets sucked up by other things). I'm pretty rigid about not giving up my writing time to other things, which also helped me know when I needed to say no to other requests. If I can't fit them in to other times in my schedule, they weren't going to get done.

- When considering which projects/collaborations to pursue and which ones to let go, it is helpful to think in terms of developing and maintaining a research portfolio. Ideally your portfolio will include a range of projects that vary across domains such as, complexity, effort, impact, authorship, etc. For example, your portfolio should include a project(s) that is straightforward and likely to lead to a quick publication. You should have a project that is more complex or riskier in the sense that it may allow you to learn a new methodology or extend your work to a new population with the goal of a high impact publication or pilot data for a grant application. You may decide to add another project to your portfolio because it allows you to develop a relationship with someone you deem an important potential mentor or collaborator. In contrast you may decline to collaborate on a project because after some thought you realize your portfolio will be unbalanced in some manner (e.g. you're already working on several co-authored chapters). To develop and maintain an effective portfolio, it is important to engage in regular critical review, seek consultation, and be prepared to reprioritize. Don't be afraid to let things go. It is common for projects that once had momentum to become stagnant. Be flexible and shift attention to another project or abandon the project altogether. The health of your research portfolio will depend on your ability to strategically shift focus as you routinely evaluate and update your research goals.

- I'm not always good at this, but trying to do a cost-benefit analysis before saying yes is helpful. And not giving an immediate response (where you may feel pressured right to say yes), but taking time to think about it and take stock of your other responsibilities can be useful. Your priority is to do what you need to get tenure, while part of that may include being a good department citizen, most of the time it's best to say no to departmental requests unless it's a low time commitment or will be worth the effort in terms of what it can do for your CV. You don't get tenure based on whether or not people like you, you get tenure based on productivity, so prioritize

projects that are going to enhance your CV. Departments often get excited with new hires because that's another body to serve on a committee and makes their life easier, but that's not a reason to say yes. And the more you say yes, the more likely you are to get asked to do more things. Ask yourself if it's something that will benefit you, if it's something you want to do, or something you feel like you should do. If it's the latter, you might really consider saying no.

3. When universities say they want to see an independent line of research, what does this mean? How much should you include collaborators, old mentors, students, etc? At what point do you cut off old collaborations and publications with prior mentors?

- **I think it means that when colleagues in your field look at the body of your work they can tell what is unique or distinct about your track record and/or can point to what your contributions are relative to your mentor's/colleagues'. I mostly didn't worry about continuing to work with previous mentors and collaborators, but in my case I have a diverse enough portfolio of collaborations that even if I was publishing a lot with mentors past this was still a minority of my publications, so it was clear I was independent from them. I never explicitly cut off collaborations with mentors, but I may have not invited them to co-author a couple of papers that I otherwise might have if I had absolutely no concerns about this issue. But on the whole I think this concern can be a bit overblown if you maintain enough ongoing projects that are independent of prior mentors.**
- **This is a good question, and one that I still struggle with in my 3rd year in a faculty position. This is particularly relevant to me because much of my work in graduate school and postdoc involved large longitudinal research studies that are still ongoing. I often have opportunities to collaborate on papers that integrate multiple waves of data collection and extend some of my work from graduate school in very exciting and high impact ways. On the other hand, in my own lab, we have relatively small datasets and the papers that we are currently working on are likely to be less impactful. I have occasionally gotten advice from others in my department that publications with former mentors might be viewed negatively in my reviews. But others have made the point that it is fine to continue these collaborations, as long as I am also publishing independently. So, I do think it is important to first make sure your independent work is in a good place and moving along, and then decide how much time you have to continue work with your mentors or other collaborators. Also, talk with senior faculty in your department to get a sense of how this is viewed by the department, college and university. What counts as an "independent" research study really varies across fields, so it is helpful to meet with your chair or another mentor, describe what you are working on, and listen to what they advise.**
- **I think it's hard to know what is meant by this- at my institution I think part of this independence is demonstrated by going in a direction that is clearly distinct from your mentors. I think this also is demonstrated in growth over your time pre-tenure where you have moved your research into new directions/areas that it was not in**

when you started. I think this also means having a body of first author papers that are clearly your work from your lab. I stopped collaborating with my mentors from graduate school after about my second year and I was very selective in other collaborations, trying to do more with people at my same level rather than with senior researchers for which the end product might be interpreted at theirs because they are more well-established. I also think you need to think carefully about the working style of collaborators and choose people who will be on the same timeline as you, there's nothing worse than someone dragging their feet when you are feeling pressure from the tenure clock.

- From my experience at a medium size public university, an independent line of research means that the university wants you to demonstrate that you can identify a research gap, design a project with testable hypotheses, collect and analyze data, interpret results and disseminate. This work can complement or extend work with prior mentors and does not necessarily preclude collaborations with prior mentors. Your job is to demonstrate in your reappointment and promotion and tenure materials that you have developed independence in spite of the fact that you have may have maintained activity with prior mentors.

- They want to be sure that you have your own research identity separate from that of your mentor, that you can do your own research and aren't relying on someone else. That you are basically the PI of your own research. I tried really hard on post-doc to separate myself from my graduate mentor and probably went too far in the other extreme and stopped doing that when I started in my first faculty position. I still continue to collaborate with my mentor to this day. What I have tried to do is have several projects going, some with my mentor and other collaborators and some that I do just in my own lab. You will be more productive if you don't try to be a lone wolf and do it all yourself. Research is hard, the more people you collaborate with, the better. You just want to make sure that you are taking the lead on many of the projects rather than always being included on other people's projects. I don't think you ever need to cut people off if you continue to have productive collaborations where you are peers rather than mentor/mentee.

4. At what point in the pre-tenure process would you advise having a child(ren)? What advice do you have around "stopping your tenure clock" if you do have a child?

- I'd say have them when ready, although all things being equal in your life I would probably wait until after the first year or two if you could. But if that's when the best timing is for other aspects in your life I'd go ahead and do it. If you have the opportunity to stop you clock I'd take it. Why not? Most places will let you go up "early" then if you don't need it. I can see no downside (except for the delay in the salary increase that customarily comes with promotion).

- It is not always realistic to schedule having children around specific career milestones. I think it matters more where you (and your partner) are at in life and when it works for you. I had my first child towards the end of graduate school and

found that worked very well because I had some flexibility in my schedule with most of my coursework completed and was able to do a lot of work on my dissertation while home with her. My second child was born after my first year in a faculty position, so my schedule was much less flexible and I relied on my partner more to help with child care when I returned to work full time. Whether you are in graduate school, postdoc or a faculty position, there are unique challenges to work out including funding while on parental leave, schedules, child care, etc., but I think it's possible to make it work at any time. My understanding is that it is always a good idea to "stop the clock" if you can because you can always decide to go up for tenure early and not use the extra time, but it is helpful to have it in case you need it.

- Have children whenever you are ready for it in your personal life (and want them) and the rest will get figured out. I was so scared that I wouldn't be able to have both a family and my job (or that having kids would mean I would become totally unproductive). In reality, after my first child was born I actually became so much more productive because I got really clear about my priorities and used every minute I was at work to actually work. I ended up having two kids pre-tenure, one mid-way through my third year and one mid-way through my sixth year. My institution has a longer tenure clock (going up at end of the sixth year) and I ended up not needing to stop it. But I think there's no reason not to stop it if you need that time, it would be totally understandable. Looking back, I actually wished I'd not pushed myself quite so hard post-kids and had allowed myself the extra time by stopping the clock. I will also say that I am a much happier and more balanced person with kids- and I like my job more because I realize it's an important part of my identity and what makes me happy (but isn't my everything).

- There is no right or wrong time for having children. The decision to have a child(ren) is much more important than checking boxes for tenure. I would advise having a child(ren) as soon as you have the inkling that you feel personally ready. Being an academic is actually quite flexible and in many ways conducive to having a child(ren). Chances are if you are a tenure-track professor, you are advanced in child bearing years. Hopefully, having a child is something that you are easily able to accomplish. As someone who was pre-tenure and both had a child and then had difficulty trying to have another child, taking care of my actual child was less distracting than going through multiple and ultimately unsuccessful rounds of assisted reproductive technologies.

- I didn't have my son until after I received tenure, but that was not by any sort of conscious decision, that's just when it happened. Most women that I know who have had children pre-tenure did not stop the clock, but that doesn't necessarily make it right. Every woman's pregnancy, childbirth, and child is different, so you have to do what feels right for you. I will say though, that if you take significant time off from research, it's just hard to get things started up again and you lose your momentum. If you don't plan on taking a lot of time off of work other than any parental leave you might get, you really (sadly) don't lose that much time. Most women I know try to get as much submitted as possible before they have the baby. Productivity clearly slows

down after the baby comes, but it usually doesn't stop altogether (grad students and collaborators are still working). So there typically isn't a big drop in productivity that would necessitate a need to stop the clock. I think having conversations with your chair about the clock stopping issue would be helpful. Get their perspective and follow their advice. I don't think there is a perfect time to have children, do it when you feel ready to have the child and are able to conceive and the rest will work itself out.

5. How much service should one be involved in at the department, university, and national level pre-tenure?

- **Ideally, your department will be protecting you from much service before tenure. As a general rule, within your department I would volunteer for nothing but say yes to almost everything that is directly asked of you. There are exceptions of course, and if your impression is your department is taking advantage of you then you may need to adopt a different strategy. I would not volunteer for anything at the university level pre-tenure. However, I would seek out opportunities at the national level because these increase your visibility and influence your career in a number of positive ways.**
- **It probably varies by university. At my R1 institution, I am told that the priorities are research productivity followed by competence in teaching followed by completing some services. That is, a lot of service is not going to help that much with tenure but you do want to show that you are a good citizen. Of note, I have rarely been asked to complete service for my department, so most of my service so far has been at the university or national level.**
- **I think the norms vary widely. At the department level I think it's good to be a good citizen and also to have opportunities to get to know your colleagues (who will vote on your tenure case). So participating in department tasks, particularly if they allow you an opportunity to connect with others is useful. I think I'd be more careful about University service as I see it as having less benefit. I got the advice to check with a senior colleague in the department before saying yes to service requests- just to get a second opinion on whether you need to/should do it. Pre-tenure I also think it is important to be selfish in how you decide what service to do, service will not get you tenure. Also, I got the great advice that you should not act like you are "married" to your institution when you are really only "dating." They haven't made a full commitment to you so it is not your job to invest all your time and energy into making the institution better- leave that for the already tenured folks. As for national-level service, this can be a great way to meet others in the field so when the job brings opportunities to connect, I think it can be useful. Though heavy service in the field in not going to make up for a lack of research productivity, so you do need to be careful.**
- **The answer to this question will vary by size and type of institution. My response reflects my experience at a mid-size public institution with decreasing faculty numbers and resources. Everyone in my department is stretched thin and assumes multiple roles. In this context, it's important to advocate for reduced service**

expectations while being mindful that your colleagues were hoping a new hire would help relieve some of their workload burden. Volunteer for several less demanding department-level committees (i.e. a few meetings a year). Prior to going up for tenure ensure that you serve on at least one committee at the college (e.g. awards committee) and university level. At the national level, consider serving as an associate editor, grant -reviewer or program committee member.

● I think it depends on the institution. They should be able to tell you what they are looking for. But, in general, as little as possible. For the most part service is a time suck and that's not what you will be evaluated on when you go up for tenure. Of course, you can't do none, so focus on the things that would benefit your career. Be strategic. If you have an opportunity to be involved at the national level, that looks best and could help you develop collaborative relationships, etc. The university level is usually the worst one to do because it doesn't benefit you directly (unless it is something that you feel passionate about or you can see some direct benefit) and if full of meetings that are long and boring. Departmental committees allow you to get to know people in the department (and for them to get to know you) and, if you play your cards right, could benefit you (e.g., by being a member of the space committee). But look for things that are low time commitment.

6. Is supervising in a training clinic valued or should I focus more on teaching undergraduate and graduate core classes?

● **This is the kind of question one should ask of the senior members of their department, they will be the one's presenting your case to the college and dean of your school, and this is likely to vary by school.**
● **This depends on the program, as not all clinical psychology programs have a training clinic. It is usually important for faculty in psychology departments to demonstrate competence in teaching undergraduate and graduate courses, so you would typically not want most of your teaching to be clinical supervision. In academic medical centers, teaching might be much more focused on clinical supervision.**
● **I don't have supervision expectations because I'm at an undergraduate institution.**
● **In my program supervision is considered teaching and graduate students complete teaching evaluations of their supervisor. When preparing reappointment and promotion and tenure materials it can be helpful to have supervised and taught at the graduate and undergraduate level. This approach will generally allow you to talk about your ability to contribute both to the clinical program (graduate courses, supervision) and department (undergraduate mission) at-large.**
● **That will depend on the institution. The department will tell you what they need in terms of whether you serve as a supervisor or teach courses. If you are talking more about time commitment and effort, I would focus more on research and both supervision and teaching are likely going to be weighted equally.**

7. What are your recommendations regarding re-teaching the same course repeatedly or teaching new courses? Do you have any recommendations regarding the number of undergraduate and graduate courses to have in your portfolio before going up for tenure?

- **I think it would be wise teaching more than one course, but I would also recommend teaching as few as possible and repeating preparations so reduce burden. At the end of the day new preps will take more time and reduce time that might be devoted towards other more valued areas of research. It would be better to show good (and possibly improving) evaluations in one course than more and greater diversity of courses. So, more courses isn't the only way, and may not even be the best way, to demonstrate excellence in teaching. Similarly, it is probably wise to teach at least one graduate and one undergraduate (although I didn't teach any undergraduate before tenure, but that this would be OK was an explicit discussion with intradepartmental mentoring committee and chair).**
- **Definitely re-teach courses whenever you can. Prepping a new course takes A LOT of time and will have effects on research productivity. Teaching a course that you have taught before is MUCH easier. In my program, we are expected to teach at least one core undergraduate course as a "service course" along with at least one graduate course.**
- **You need to be careful with new preps- they are a time suck. I'm at an institution that strongly values teaching (and requires exceptional teaching for tenure), yet even here I think that too many new preps is dangerous. The typical number of courses prior to tenure in my department is 5, 4 prepped prior to reappointment and then one more after that. I have to teach a course about three times to really get it to where I want it, and I think time is better spent revising existing courses and making them the best they can be rather than designing new ones. I also think that if you want to have a new prep, make sure you'll be able to teach it twice prior to tenure, so you have an opportunity to address any issues that came up the first time.**
- **While the answer will vary by institution, my experience at a mid-size public institution was that very little weight was placed on teaching. I was explicitly told that, "unless you have poor teaching evaluations, nobody cares about teaching." I would have preferred to teach the same course year to year; however, do to faculty turn over, I was saddled with several new courses (3 at the undergraduate level and 4 at the graduate level). Ideally, pre-tenure one would prep one or two new courses at the undergrad and graduate level.**
- **Don't teach new classes!!!!!!!!!!!! As someone who switched from a tenure track position to a teaching position and now teaches 4 classes a semester, don't do a lot of new preps pre-tenure. Teaching will take up as much time as you give it because you have to stand in front of the students each week, whereas there typically aren't deadlines for submitting manuscripts. Your department chair should have your best interests in mind when determining workload and not give you too many new preps. I don't think there is a certain number because it depends on what the department needs are. You do want to have taught some classes at the undergrad and grad level,**

but keep teaching the same ones year after year and every once in a while throw in a new one, but don't do it often. The focus is more on the quality of the teaching when it comes to tenure, not the number or diversity of courses taught. And let's be honest, for tenure they are focused more on your research.

8. How much are publications, teaching experience, etc. that were gained prior to starting your tenure-track position considered when you go up for tenure review?

- **My impression is that at my institution the dossier was judged as a comprehensive record. I do believe a positive trajectory is important, but earlier work certainly counts towards the overall record.**
- **I wish I knew the answer to this question! One thing that I have been told is that the faculty review committee relies heavily on the letters from external reviewers because they are the experts in the field. My understanding is that external reviewers will be evaluating your broader contribution to the field which would include work prior to your tenure-track position. So, I do think that your overall CV, experience and contributions matter, but it is also critical to show that you have developed a program of research that is independent from prior mentors.**
- **I don't really know because they never broke that down for me but my sense is that they did not count that much. They certainly served as the foundation that illustrated where I started but it was very important for there to be a "next chapter" in what I'd done while in my current position.**
- **Publications gained prior to starting tenure track position are considered when reviewers evaluate your overall reputation or general contribution to the field. Other experiences such as teaching prior to starting one's position did not appear to be given much weight towards promotion and tenure.**
- **Not at all. For me, they only looked at things that I did since starting in my faculty position, and I think that is pretty common.**