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# Succeeding at a Research Intensive Institution (R1 or R2)

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## Introduction

So, you're interested in working at a Research-Intensive institution? What do you put in the application? And how can you succeed once you're hired? This essay will provide some advice from two faculty members who work at institutions that are either R1 (Doctoral Universities, very high research activity) or R2 (Doctoral universities, high research activity) (Carnegie Classification).

## Getting Started: the Application Process

### Presenting Your Research Agenda in an Application

As one might surmise from the name, the major emphasis at *R1 and R2 universities* is research. This should be reflected in your application letter. The search committees will want to know all about your dissertation: your topic, your methods, your contributions, and equally important, your future research agenda. Your application letter should explain your project in some detail and emphasize in particular the contribution your research will make. Assuming a two-page application letter, the research statement should consume about one page. Describe your dissertation in one paragraph; note the contributions it makes in a second paragraph; and discuss your future research trajectory in a third.

The subject of your dissertation should be squarely in the advertised field. So, an Americanist who studies political behavior should not apply for a position that focuses on the Presidency, for example. A secondary interest or an "I can do that" statement will not be sufficient to land an interview—much less a job—especially in a competitive job market.

The search committee also seeks to assess the likelihood that you will succeed—in publishing, in securing research grants, and in bringing positive exposure to the department. Therefore, your vitae should include some publications. At this point, co-authored peer-reviewed publications are expected. However, the search committee will probably expect to see that you've presented some portion of your dissertation at a professional conference.

If your dissertation is complete, discuss your plans to publish it. If your dissertation is not complete, include your projected defense date. In either case, talk about what you intend to do after the dissertation. What is your next research topic? How does it build on your current work? The committee wants to see coherence in your research agenda, so the next big project should be related to the dissertation. This can be tough for individuals who have eclectic interests. However, our advice is to focus.

Also worth noting: do not go on the market prematurely. You should have your dissertation largely

written with a firm defense date in hand. Do not waste time applying for jobs before that stage, even if you think you've found the perfect job.

### **What Else Should be in an Application?**

The search committee is looking for other evidence of the quality of your work. External research grants, especially NSF, are the gold standard. However, any external grant is a measure of quality and external validation for your work. You can certainly mention internal grants and awards; however, they are less prestigious than external grants and awards. If you have any information about the competitiveness of the grants and awards—internal or external—include them on your vitae.

Remember that instruction occurs at research-intensive institutions as well. Discuss what courses you have taught or are willing to teach, and any experience you have as a teaching assistant or instructor. If you have the opportunity to instruct a course (or lead recitations), make sure that you have a faculty member sit in during one of your class meetings and observe your instruction. Many applications require evidence of teaching excellence, and a letter of review from that faculty member speaking to your teaching style and effectiveness is very beneficial. If you have already taught the course and/or this is not possible, another alternative is to have one of your letter writers speak to your teaching prowess and potential.

### **Building a Professional Network**

Attending conferences is a great way to build a professional network (see chapter 21 on how to conference). Not only do you meet people on your panel, who are likely to share your research interests, you should join sections (when possible) and attend their business meetings. When you apply to a conference, very often there is a section which asks you to indicate if you are willing to serve as a discussant or chair. Do not shy away from this opportunity, as these positions afford you the possibility of connecting with people in your research area and engaging with them in conversation and developing connections beyond the panel. Further, your advisor(s) and committee members should also be able to introduce you to their friends and colleagues as well. Being acquainted with people will be helpful when you're applying, and your name is familiar.

## **The Road to Tenure**

### **Once You're Hired**

Having emerged from a very competitive, months-long job search process, you are anxious to begin the long journey to tenure. At this early stage of your professional career, tenure may seem very far away, but the planning process should begin as soon as possible. The following checklist will help you stay on track and succeed:

- To get tenure, you'll need to know what goes into a successful tenure dossier and how it is evaluated. The very first thing you should do is to meet with your department chair to make sure you understand the criteria for tenure. This should include what is written in the faculty handbook and the governance documents. It should also include any unwritten expectations or norms that the department may have. "Publishing in top peer-reviewed journals," for instance may—or may not—include interdisciplinary journals or those in other fields. Or it might mean "JOP, AJPS, and APSR only."
- If you are not assigned a mentor other than your department chair, find one (typically a member of your department who has gone through the tenure process at your institution and is able to read and evaluate your research). Then ask the mentor the same questions you asked your department chair. Seek clarification for any discrepancies.
- Take advantage of all the pre-tenured faculty professional development opportunities offered by your institution.
- Schedule time in your week exclusively for writing. This might include joining a writing group

- for extra accountability (see chapter 17 on effective time management).
- Network within your university, department, and at conferences, and additionally, trade working papers with others in your field, to both develop your scholarly profile and solicit useful feedback to improve your research.
  - Perfect and polish one or two courses before taking on new course preps. Course preparation, major revisions, and changing delivery modes (i.e., face to face to online) takes more time than one might think. If you are teaching two new preps at the same time, you will have little time left in your schedule for writing and service responsibilities.
  - Be careful not to get lured into too many service opportunities. At the same time, you also need to be sure you engage in the requisite number and types of service activities required to earn tenure. Avoid any appointments that might lead you into controversies or those that take a lot of time. Do not overlook opportunities within professional associations. Ask your mentor and department chair for advice on what to pursue (see chapter 31 on university service and chapter 32 on service to the discipline).

## Establish Your Research Pipeline

Although the demands at R1 and R2 institutions will differ on the criteria for publications, both are expecting you to be a productive scholar. As such, the pathway to tenure flows through a busy research pipeline. Yet, what does this mean?

As a junior faculty member on the tenure track, your main goal is to build a body of respected research which situates you within a small community of scholars. However, as you typically only have five to six years to develop a strong research file (and the peer-review process takes time and is fraught with uncertainty), you will want to hit the ground running from the start of your first semester to develop and shepherd a large number of papers from their first stages to their publication in respected journals (see chapter 25 on turning term papers to articles).

We recommend adopting the advice of Lebo (2016) to successfully manage your research pipeline and efficiently move your research from ideas to journal editor acceptance letters. This system involves thinking about the process of publishing a paper as eight manageable stages:

1. You develop your subject area, literature that will be addressed, data sources, and potential coauthors.
2. Your paper is outlined, and you have secured the necessary data.
3. You have completed a draft of the paper which includes your preliminary results.
4. Your paper has been presented at a conference (or two).
5. Your paper is under review at a journal.
6. You have been offered a Revise and Resubmit (R&R).
7. Your paper is back under review after the R&R.
8. Your paper has been accepted.

Thinking about all of your research in stages will allow you to prioritize and realistically maintain a pipeline towards tenure. Naturally, your research will be composed of projects which exist at various stages of this process. Ideally you should always have at least one project under review (Stages five to seven), several projects in progress (Stages two to four), and a multitude of ideas (Stage one) ready to begin when an earlier project reaches publication (Stage eight).

We also recommend that you understand how co-authored works are counted in the portfolio. Are they weighted the same as a solo-authored publication, or are they considered as fractions (i.e., two authors equal 0.5; three authors equal 0.34)? This is especially important in departments where the tenure criteria are numerical.

In addition, Lebo's stages apply, with a little adaptation, to writing book manuscripts as well. You might wish to break down the process, with steps one to three, for each chapter. As soon as you have two chapters solid and polished, start looking for publishers. Be sure to talk with your mentor(s) and department chair about presses. Does the department look for university presses only? If not, how are commercial academic presses evaluated? Do textbooks count? What about edited books? If the depart-

ment uses numerical criteria, does a book translate to a fixed number of journal articles?

To keep track of your research agenda, it is recommended that you get yourself a whiteboard for your new office and organize your projects into a practicable timeline. Keep yourself accountable and prioritize the projects that have the greatest probability of landing in quality journals.

Of course, there are other publication options other than journal articles and books: research notes, peer reviewed letters (yes, that's a thing), and public-facing scholarship such as academic blogs. As you consider different types of outlets, find out whether and how they will count in your tenure and promotion portfolio.

## The Pre-Tenure Review

One of the most important milestones on the road to tenure at an R1 or R2 institution will be the pre-tenure review. For this process you typically will prepare many of the same documents as you would for tenure, and members of the promotion and tenure committees at various levels will review your package. The goal of this process is to provide tenure-track faculty with feedback on their progress towards tenure, identify areas needing improvement, and provide guidance in preparing the professional portfolio to support the review for tenure.

It is understandable that for many this process produces a certain degree of trepidation and anxiety. However, do not fear the pre-tenure review, as it provides several key benefits:

- You will be assembling many of the same documents necessary for the tenure review process, thus allowing you to start crafting your tenure file. In doing so, you can take appraisal of the totality of your progress (research, teaching, service), providing personal validation of the hard work you have accomplished up to this point.
- Members of your department will review your pre-tenure file, becoming familiarized with your work. This will allow you to engage them in much more direct conversations after the fact where they can provide you with more informed answers and advice.
- You will get a concrete indication from the various tenure process decision makers as to how your efforts towards tenure are progressing – both in terms of where you are meeting expectations and where there is specific need for attention.

Coming out of the pre-tenure review, this is your last opportunity for significant course correction before you will submit your file for the tenure review. It is important to take all feedback and act upon it. Even the smallest piece of criticism can be indicative of a future issue with your tenure file. As such, seek out your Department Chair and faculty mentor to review and interpret the results of your pre-tenure review, and answer any questions you might have.

After these meetings, you will want to develop a specific plan to address each point of feedback from the pre-tenure review. Set concrete goals, practical steps to meet these goals, and deadlines to keep you accountable. You might even want to discuss these plans with your faculty mentor to ensure that they are consistent with your prior conversation and solicit any further recommendations.

## Establish a Work-Life Balance

Irrespective of whether you are working at an R1 or R2 institution, the workload (research, teaching, and service) will be demanding and faculty burnout (e.g., the exhaustion, increased cynicism and negativity toward one's job, and reduced professional efficacy resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed (World Health Organization 2019)) presents a significant threat. From the beginning of your time in your new position, you will be inundated with meetings, grading, advising and other obligations which demand significant time and attention, in addition to the persistent specter of the tenure clock motivating a productive stream of research. There truly are not enough hours in the day, week, or semester to accomplish everything required of you both professionally and personally (see chapter 53 on the culture of overwork within the discipline and chapter 67 on rest and well-being).

As such, in order to truly succeed at your institution, you will need to find a way to balance the demands of your position with the demands of your life. To do this, you need to find a way to work

smarter, not harder.

What this means is to establish boundaries for your life and decide how much you want to give to your position. Either that's enough for you to have a career and achieve tenure, or it's not. When you are working, give it your all during this time. Thus, outside of this boundary you can without professional guilt limit/restrict that which you can further give and can focus your time and attention to the demands of life. However, there will always be times when you will have to re-negotiate the boundaries between job and life. Anticipate that there are certain points during the semester and your tenure stream which will be busier than others. To best plan for this, utilize a calendar or planner to help establish these boundaries, create milestones, and keep ahead of that which is most demanding.

There will always be more work left at the end of any day, as such, planning well, prioritizing, and making the most of the time you allocate towards the demands of your job will allow you to find the proper balance, avoid burnout, and be successful.

## Have a Nice Career

From applying to a position at an R1/R2 institution to successfully attaining tenure, it is a very long road with a steep learning curve. Yet, through proper planning, and a bit of luck along the way, you can have an enriching and successful career at some of the best research-intensive institutions in the country.

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