Information Item

Tenure

EQFA-3

Background Information

Tenure is critically important to higher education, and it is also a subject of significant controversy. This presentation will examine its history, purpose, process, and impact on the individual and institution, and identify some common misconceptions.

History: Tenure was created with the intention of protecting academic freedom and providing economic security for faculty who carry out scholarly activities.

Process: To be eligible for tenure, a faculty member (typically an assistant professor) must demonstrate a continuous record of scholarly achievement, including teaching, research, service, both within the university and the larger professional community.

Impact: Gaining tenure benefits the individual, the institution, and the academic discipline. The individual is devoted to their subject for several years, earns secure employment, and enjoys the opportunity to pursue controversial subjects and new ideas. The institution gains a committed, productive employee at a salary often lower than the market rate for the same skill set in the private sector, as the economic security of tenure is highly valued. And, the academic discipline gains new ideas, fresh perspectives, and consistent faculty motivation for ongoing research.

Myths: Common misconceptions can detract from tenure support. For example, some believe that tenure is a lifetime job guarantee; that research required to earn tenure does not benefit teaching; that tenure is a perfect institution which needs no change; and that tenure in K-12 is identical to tenure in colleges and universities. These myths result from oversimplification and overgeneralization, and are debunked through factual analysis of the concept of tenure.

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