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Promotion Tips and Strategies for Assistant and Associate Professors

During 2009 the UA's ADVANCE Program* conducted focus groups with junior faculty, Associate professors, department heads, and University Promotion and Tenure Committee members. Findings from these meetings have been synthesized into the following areas of advice.

TIPS FOR ASSISTANT PROFESSORS

YOU'VE GOT THE JOB, NOW WHAT? While you have several years before your tenure dossier is due, it's wise to start planning for the promotion and tenure process as soon as you join your academic department.

Tip 1: Think about how you want to make your mark. Do you want to be known as the Emma Goldman scholar? The decision making theorist? The melanoma specialist? The earlier you establish your academic niche, the sooner you can begin building your reputation in that area.

Tip 2: Collect evidence! Immediately establish physical and electronic files to keep track of your activities and work products. In the best of all possible worlds you would take some time each month to document your activities so that things are organized when it is time to prepare your promotion packet. That's not realistic for many people, so a section of a drawer with a few file folders and a "Tenure Documents" folder on your laptop may be the next best thing. Make a note about or keep a copy of each talk you give, paper you review, committee you join, etc. This will make the promotion packet preparation much easier than beginning without this documentation.

Tip 3: Figure out how promotion and tenure works at the University of Arizona. Attend a UA promotion and tenure workshop as soon as possible and review other people's promotion dossiers.

Tip 4: Regularly evaluate your accomplishments against [general University guidelines](#) for consideration.

RESEARCH AND PUBLISHING

A strong publication record signals that your work is well regarded by peers, enhances your reputation and that of your department, translates into possible funding opportunities, and demonstrates your active contribution of relevant scholarship to your field.

Tip 1: Once you have decided on your academic niche, pursue a coherent research agenda. When your promotion dossier is finally reviewed, committees will be looking for evidence that

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you have followed a rational research path. Rather than jumping from project to project or pursuing grant money just because it is available, stick to projects aligned with the image you want to convey. A coherent and cohesive research agenda helps guide decisions about how to invest your time and strengthens your reputation in the areas you have chosen to pursue.

Tip 2: Determine early on what your department views as an acceptable publication record. Start by asking senior faculty whom you trust what (i.e. articles, individually authored books, chapters, etc.) and where (i.e. peer reviewed journals, trade publications, on-line, etc.) they publish.

Tip 3: Quality research requires sustained concentration, so carve out blocks of uninterrupted time. Rather than scheduling research time around other commitments, try to schedule your other activities around your research time. Don't be hesitant to tell others, "Thursday is my research day." Grouping meetings, clustering classes, and being strategic about scheduling your office hours can provide you with chunks of time to focus on research.

Tip 4: Because both quality and quantity are important, be cautious about undertaking large-scale, long-term studies not likely to provide multiple publications while on the tenure track.

Tip 5: Strive for publication in top-tiered journals first.

Tip 6: Submit to several journals within your area of expertise.

Tip 7: Build a network of external (to UA) colleagues by attending conferences and giving invited talks. These contacts can lead to collaboration opportunities and may be called upon to serve as external reviewers during the promotion process.

Tip 8: Don't wait to be invited to talk about your research. Reach out to colleagues across the country and around the world to be part of a seminar series. Contact conference organizers and ask to deliver a session.

Tip 9: Don't assume that your department needs to pay your way to professional meetings. In the event your department is unable to cover costs, explore institutional travel awards or ask conference organizers about grants for attendees or speakers. Consider asking your department to cover just travel dollars or hotel costs and consider paying other costs on your own. Exposure at professional meetings is an investment in your career, so sometimes it's worth spending a bit of your own money.

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Tip 10: Be vocal about your research accomplishments. In a low key, but informative way, let your colleagues know about your grants, awards and publications. When appropriate, offer to present your research to others on campus.

TEACHING

While excellent teaching won't be enough to win you tenure or a promotion, inferior teaching can definitely thwart your success. Quality teaching requires a combination of attitude, knowledge, skill and practice.

Tip 1: Find out which faculty members are considered excellent teachers and ask for the opportunity to observe their technique. Invite those individuals to sit in on your classes to offer informal feedback.

Tip 2: Invite students to provide you with mid-semester feedback about the things that are working and the things that are not.

Tip 3: When possible and appropriate, employ a variety of teaching techniques, e.g., lecture, small group conversations, project work, multi-media, etc.

Tip 4: Consider student evaluations seriously and look for opportunities to respond to concerns raised within them. Keep records about how you have modified your approach to response to feedback.

Tip 5: Clearly articulate your grading standards and expectations about classroom behavior by incorporating them into your syllabus and reviewing them in class.

Tip 6: Treat students in a respectful manner.

Tip 7: Take requests for accommodation seriously. The [Disability Resource Center](#) can help you evaluate what is reasonable.

Tip 8: Attend to classroom dynamics to ensure that all students have an opportunity participate and present their opinions

Tip 9: Seek advice on teaching techniques from the Office of Instruction and Assessment.

Tip 10: Understand your department's expectations related to mentoring and graduating students.

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Tip 11: Maintain an up-to-date list of independent study students and thesis and dissertation committees on which you serve. Stay in touch with former graduate students so you that you can report on their career success.

Tip 12: Ensure that your department head requests a formal peer evaluation of your teaching to be included in your promotion dossier.

SERVICE

Service to one's department, college, discipline, or community is an essential component of the promotion process and a way to establish that you are a good University "citizen." Savvy faculty members pursue activities that have value and are personally meaningful or enjoyable.

Tip 1: Smart and highly responsible people are coveted by service committees, so if you do a good job on one committee, you will surely be invited to serve on many more. Service does not lead to promotions, so be judicious about accepting requests.

Tip 2: Choose or accept service assignments that "make sense" given your field and interests and that build upon the image you are trying to create. Be discriminating when accepting service assignments and choose those that offer the greatest return on investment. Working on the logistics of a professional conference is important, but it is time consuming and brings little glory. Serving as program chair typically brings you in contact with national or international authorities and looks impressive on a CV.

Tip 3: Pursue or accept activities and assignments that you will enjoy or at least increase your knowledge, expertise, or contacts.

Tip 4: Take advantage of ad hoc opportunities to review grants. This is considered a form of professional service that offers you an opportunity to learn how other people construct their research proposals. Because some grant review committees require a significant time commitment, find out how much time will be required before agreeing to serve.

Tip 5: Recognize that college and university service may carry more weight than department service, depending upon your local department norms. Particularly for Associate Professors seeking promotion to Full Professor, intramural service is very important.

Tip 6: Rightly or wrongly, national/international service often "counts" more than university service or community outreach. National and international service also increases your visibility, making it easier to pursue new opportunities and secure support of outside reviewers who can comment on your promotion dossier.

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Tip 7: While it is tempting to invest significant energy in organizations and associations aligned with our personal causes or beliefs, these service commitments may not be valued as much as others. Consider how to be involved in ways that don't consume time needed to reach your professional goals.

Tip 8: Service expectations vary throughout the university, so determine the local norms within your department and college.

Tip 9: Sometimes you have to say "no." In departments with few women or underrepresented members, these individuals are often called upon to serve as advisors, club leaders, search committee members, etc. If it feels like your service load is heavier than that of your colleagues, speak with your department head.

COLLABORATION

Collaboration provides you with the opportunity to extend your productivity and the scope and impact of your work. Possible pitfalls to collaboration can be by careful planning. While the University of Arizona prides itself on its interdisciplinary research and collaborative partnerships, collaboration is not a requirement.

Tip 1: Choose collaborators whose skills and expertise allow you to extend your own research.

Tip 2: When launching a collaborative project, make sure that each collaborator's role is defined so that each can be perceived to be an independent contributor.

Tip 3: Develop written agreements that establish rules about such things as publications, equipment use, and access to large data sets. This can prevent problems later. For example, agree ahead of time the order in which names will appear on publications and presentations.

Tip 4: Be cautious about collaborating with senior colleagues as others may perceive them to be the primary contributors.

Tip 5: Be cautious about collaborating all the time. As much as collaborative research is valued, review committees are looking for evidence that you can be an independent scholar.

Tip 6: Because collaborative work may take longer to come to fruition, do not count on collaborations granting you tenure.

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AWARDS

Awards enhance your professional reputation and strengthen your promotion packet.

Tip 1: Don't wait to be recognized; ask a colleague to nominate you. Savvy faculty members do this all the time. When your colleague agrees, offer to prepare the bulk of the nomination packet.

Tip 2: Make a list of awards for which you would like to be considered. These may be department/college/University awards or awards provided through professional organizations or within your academic discipline.

Tip 3: Pay attention to which awards seem to matter most.

RELATIONSHIPS

Your colleagues can be influential in determining your tenure outcome. Tenure is not a popularity contest, but individuals adept at forging relationships with others often find themselves invited to collaborate, give talks, or participate on high profile committees – all activities that support career success. Because they are easy to be around, these people tend to learn about new possibilities in hallway conversations and in social settings, and senior members tend to offer them helpful career advice. Never underestimate the power or relationships with others.

Tip 1: Be proactive in building relationships with colleagues, starting at the departmental level.

Tip 2: Support your colleagues' success and they will likely support yours.

Tip 3: Remember that even brilliant people can be pleasant

Tip 4: Consider the ways in which you disagree with colleagues. "Here is another way to think about this" is much more effective than "Are you SERIOUS?"

Tip 5: Seek opportunities to build relationships outside your department and college. Service assignments and giving talks in other departments are two ways to do this.

Tip 6: Ask for advice. This gives others an opportunity to get to know you and to help you.

Tip 7: In the event there are "camps" within your department, don't sign up for either side.

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Tip 8: Be proactive and ask your department head to assign you a mentor if one has not already been assigned to you.

Tip 9: Seek multiple mentors, and look for advice from people inside and outside your department. It's often easier to share concerns with a mentor who won't be involved in evaluating your performance later.

EXTERNAL EVALUATORS

When you submit your promotion dossier, you will be asked to provide a list of external reviewers who can assess the quality of your portfolio. Your department will choose a roster of reviewers as well.

Tip 1: Choose reviewers whom you know and who know your work.

Tip 2: Be careful when developing your list of suggested reviewers. Ask if a potential reviewer feels comfortable being on your list. Half-hearted recommendations from the people you have chosen can be particularly damning.

Tip 3: Don't provide a list of all experts with your dossier. Your department needs to select reviewers who can provide objective advice about your suitability for promotion. If you exhaust all the reasonable reviewers, your department will have no choice but to seek advice from reviewers less familiar with your research.

Tip 4: Make sure your suggested list of reviewers consists of well-known, highly-regarded scholars who are still productive.

Tip 5: Make sure letters come from individuals at the Associate or Full Professor rank and from academic programs of equal or better rank to your program/department at UA. Letters from Emeritus faculty can be problematic.

PREPARING YOUR DOSSIER

Tip 1 : When preparing your promotion dossier statement about your research, teaching, and service, describe your work in a way people outside your discipline can understand. Because your record will be reviewed by people outside of your discipline, minimize jargon and explain your work so that a lay person could understand it. Be sure to explain the impact of your research.

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Tip 2: Pay attention to your teaching philosophy. This is often the most challenging component of the promotion dossier, and tends to be highly scrutinized by review committees. You may find it helpful to review [teaching philosophies written by others](#) before crafting your own. Don't hesitate to use [outside resources](#) designed to get your thoughts in order.

Tip 3: Follow [dossier preparation guidelines](#) **exactly**.

Tip 4: Remember, [packaging matters](#).

Tip 5: After preparing your dossier, ask for feedback from trusted colleagues and others who are adept at spotting typos and concepts that might be difficult for those outside your discipline to understand.

Tip 6: Have a person unfamiliar with your work review your materials. Can they understand it? Have you described your activities and accomplishments in a logical and coherent manner?

Tip 7: If you received a tenure delay, be up front about it and mention this in several places in your dossier, including your opening statement. Make sure your department head mentions it in his/her statement as well.

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