

# **PROMOTION, TENURE, AND THE ENGAGED SCHOLAR: Keeping the Scholarship of Engagement in the Review Process**

By Sherril Gelmon and Susan Agre-Kippenhan

The tenure and promotion process may be the most challenging and frightening time in a faculty member's life. For those committed to the scholarship of engagement, the process can be even more challenging.

Many faculty members are fearful that the commitment to be engaged scholars could jeopardize their chances for tenure and promotion, particularly related to how their peers will evaluate their work. At some institutions, faculty members are specifically told that engaged scholarship will not get them tenured or promoted- yet at the same time these faculty members are encouraged to have community involvements and develop pedagogies such as service-learning.

We both have successfully completed the tenure and promotion process at Portland State University, where the criteria explicitly follow the model Ernest Boyer described in *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1997) and promote the scholarship of engagement (the criteria may be found at [www.oaa.pdx.edu/oaadoc/ptguide/](http://www.oaa.pdx.edu/oaadoc/ptguide/)). Nonetheless, our experience with our individual reviews was still fraught with anxiety, tension, and concerns.

Now that the process is complete, we both have been approached by faculty members who themselves are anticipating tenure and promotion and need advice and suggestions on how to prepare for and navigate the process. This article summarizes that advice. While many of our suggestions are specific to those seeking advancement in the context of the scholarship of engagement, most are relevant to all who seek tenure and promotion.

1. **Be Mission Driven.** Frame all of your work (but especially your community involvement) and your dossier around the mission of your department or division, your school or college, and the university. This should not wait until you are preparing your dossier, but should be part of the developmental process of shaping your scholarly agenda during the years leading up to your first review. When it comes time to write your narrative (or equivalent description of your work), be very explicit about these connections and the framing. If possible, think about how your work can be organized using a generally framework, such as the Boyer model mentioned above.
2. **Anticipate Review Committee Composition.** Early on (six months prior to your review) talk with your department or division chair about the composition of your review committee. Find out who is supposed to be on the committee, especially if you have a split appointment across programs or academic units. Also verify what freedom there is in the committee composition. Some guidelines allow for representation from multiple units within the university, as well as community and student representatives. Advocate for what would be most advantageous for your particular case.
3. **Know the Guidelines.** Read your institutional promotion and tenure guidelines closely, and prepare your dossier to be responsive to the guidelines. Follow the format prescribed both for any narrative and for your curriculum vitae. Be sure you know if your department or unit has its own guidelines in addition to the university guidelines. Think carefully about how to interpret the guidelines to show how your community work responds to the criteria. Do not ignore the fine print and addenda!

Understand what is required for tenure at the associate professor level, and what the additional criteria are for promotion to full professor.

4. Prepare in Advance. Do not wait until two weeks before the due date to begin preparing your dossier. Take advantage of faculty development opportunities on your campus and at professional meetings. Inquire on your campus to find out if there are any mentoring opportunities with senior faculty members or administrators who work in academic affairs. This is a wonderful opportunity to approach senior faculty members whom you respect (and whose support you would like) to seek their advice and counsel. Review other people's dossiers (preferable those who have been successful in their review!) to get ideas about how to creatively and comprehensively present your work within a reasonable length. Think about how you will organize your narrative statement, about who your external reviewers might be, and the contents and layout of your dossier. Find out if your department or school provides any kind of clerical or financial support for dossier preparation.

5. Create Linkages. Make clear links in your narrative between traditional scholarship in your discipline and your work. Demonstrate how your community engagement is relevant to your discipline, and how this work contributes to scholarship in your field. This is an opportunity to develop a scholarly presentation or publication to demonstrate, for example, how a classroom-focused service experience builds knowledge about pedagogy in your discipline and can become scholarly work by virtue of dissemination through professional journals and meetings.

6. Brag Like Your Mother Would. You need to tell your own story. Tell how wonderful and significant your work is. If you don't say it, no one will hear it, so don't be afraid to brag. This is not the time to be humble or shy.

7. Packaging is Everything. Present your materials in an easy-to-review format/package. List everything you have done in your vitae in the format required by the university. However, be selective in what you include in the accompanying dossier and provide a sample of only the most relevant things. Do not include every paper you have written, every conference announcement in which you are listed, every email that praises your work, every souvenir napkin from each conference venue, and so on. Your reviewers will not read multiple massive binders of single-spaced, double-sided materials. Again, check to see if your institution has page limitations- and don't disregard those requirements.

8. Leave Nothing to Chance. You need to be sure not only that everything you document can be verified, but also every interpretation that your reviewers might make is based on documentable fact. This is not a time for intuition or hearsay. While the emphasis for you, the faculty member, is on your documentation, you want to ensure to the extent you can that all review deliberations are fact-driven. Do not assume that your reviewers have certain knowledge about you or your work. If you are eligible for review under more than one set of tenure and promotion guidelines (i.e., they have changed in the time you have been there), you need to be explicit about which set guides your review and be sure that all reviewers know this.

9. Cross-Reference Within Your Dossier. Prepare your dossier so that it is complete and easy to follow. A table of contents is particularly helpful. Most guidelines make a distinction between requirements and supporting materials, and your dossier should include both. In particular, for supporting materials, provide a brief introductory narrative and perhaps even copies of the relevant parts of your vitae. In our cases, the format for our curricula vitae required presentation of traditional and community scholarship together. We both chose to prepare supplementary materials illustrating

these two kinds of scholarship as distinct entities, and for each kind prepared a cover page listing selected items from our vitae (e.g., presentations and publications) that reflected this specific scholarly work.

10. **Seek Strong Letters of Support.** Carefully select professional colleagues (within and outside of your institution), community partners, and students and alumni (from all programs in which you teach and all the different projects on which you work) to write letters of support for your dossier. These are not the people who will be the formal external reviewers but rather people who know you and can provide informal support. Verify what is acceptable at your institution (both as described in the guidelines and generally accepted as common practice).

The individuals from whom you seek these letters of support will not necessarily know about all of your work but will be your advocates for specific activities- such as a community partner for a class, a representative of an organization where you contribute service, or a student for whom you served as an advisor and mentor. Tell these individuals what substantive things about your work you would like them to focus on. Select a representative sample of people to write such letters, and provide a list of these individuals in your dossier.

11. **Court Your Committee Chair.** Engage your review committee chair to the extent that he or she is willing to be engaged. Some chairs will want to maintain distance in order to protect the integrity and objectivity of the process. In some cases (as happened for one of us) the chair will want some assistance if his or her own professional background diverges from yours. This happens often in disciplines with multiple areas of expertise, where there may only be one or two faculty members in each area at your institution. Find out what you can do to help the review process along. Offer to assist the chair in any way you can that does not interfere with the process, such as preparing multiple sets of materials or doing the photocopying.

12. **Behave Well.** Be careful not to offend anyone who may be part of the review process. This is not the time to make that really controversial curriculum proposal that would eliminate the pet course of your review committee chair. While you should not compromise your own principles, the harsh truth is that you are going to be judged. If you want to be successful, it's better not to have or make any enemies. This is also a good time to monitor your behavior (and that of your spouse or partner) at work-related social events. A comment or action made in jest could later prove to be a liability.

13. **Recommend Strong External Reviewers.** Help your committee by identifying strong external reviewers whom you believe can give you a fair, unbiased, and well-informed review. Be sure these reviewers understand your community involvement and contribution. Some institutions have requirements for reviewers (e.g., must have a doctorate, must be a faculty member with a certain rank); make sure you know what these are. If allowable or required, provide a brief biographical statement for each potential reviewer to demonstrate why he or she would be appropriate. You can also categorize these reviewers to assist in the community's selection, for example, an expertise in teaching and learning, a background in community-based research, or extensive experience in disciplinary research.

While it is useful if these people know you or your work, most institutions will not allow co-authors, research collaborators, dissertation committee members, or others with a close association to serve as external reviewers (invite these people to write letters of support). Most institutions will also add other

external reviewers besides those you have recommended, and there are generally provisions for you to identify potential conflicts of interest and decline a reviewer (before he or she is appointed).

14. **Be Your Own Advocate and Champion.** Going through the tenure and promotion process is like writing your dissertation- no one else cares about it nearly as much as you do. Therefore you must advocate, encourage, cajole, and nag as needed to ensure that everything moves forward in a timely fashion (if it somehow gets bogged down). This includes understanding your rights and procedures for due process, whether through a faculty union, the American Association of University Professors, or other appropriate organizations. If you don't look out for yourself, no one else will.

15. **Match Your Work to Reviewers Expertise.** Most review committees will select particular materials to send to each external reviewer based on that reviewer's area of expertise. All reviewers will not necessarily receive the same materials. If possible, support your committee by identifying what aspects of your dossier should be reviewed by which reviewer, what each reviewer can speak to with the most expertise. For example, one reviewer may be most appropriate to look at your teaching-related scholarship, while another can assess your community-based work. Be proactive with your chair to see if he or she would like you to help with this.

16. **Do Extra Work to Support Your Committee.** As you assemble your dossier, think about tasks you can do that will save your committee time. For example, prepare summaries of course evaluations to support the sample syllabi you include, thereby saving your committee that step of the work. As stated above, make extra copies of materials for duplication.

17. **Be Honest, Candid, and Gracious.** Do not misrepresent your work or overstate your accomplishments (let your letters of support sing your praises). This is an opportunity to be reflective. In your narrative, be open about your mistakes; describe how you learned from them and subsequently made improvements. Be open in describing areas where your reviewers may perceive weaknesses (such as lack of university committee service).

You may have overlooked something in the preparation of your materials, and your committee may bring this to your attention. Graciously accept these comments and act on any suggestions that may strengthen your documentation for subsequent levels of review within your institution. The committee's suggestions for changes may be advanced warning of items that may appear in your review letter (such as multiple listings of a single presentation under several categories in your vitae, or presenting a brown-bag luncheon discussion as equal to a peer-reviewed presentation).

18. **Know the Timetable.** Learn the university deadlines and be attentive to the milestones where you should receive responses (from your department, your school or college, the provost, and the president). Know if and when you might be required to review or sign documents, and be sure you are available at those times (think twice before booking that lengthy vacation at a remote location). Find out if your guidelines allow for submission of updates to your documentation (such as receipt of a significant new grant). If you do not receive notification by the expected deadlines, follow up with the respective administrative official. While the entire institution may have set timelines, your unit may have earlier deadlines and you need to know these and adhere to them. Conversely, there may not be a specified date for announcement of final decisions (from the provost, president, or equivalent), and you should know what the final possible date is for notification.

19. Follow the Letter of the Law. If your guidelines ask for a certain number of copies, provide them. Don't provide more, but also don't provide less. If a certain format is prescribed, use it. Don't violate rules for the sake of being creative; use your creativity around the rules rather in place of them.

Review guidelines should provide clear processes for appeal and specify eligible situations and relevant levels of appeal. Timelines of appeal are usually very strict so be sure you know what your opportunities are.

20. Be Calm. This is a lengthy process that often takes an entire academic year. Despite multiple milestones along the way, it's not going to be over until you get the final letter. This is a good time to check in with others who have recently gone through the process at your institution; no doubt you will find them incredibly supportive.

These 20 items can be categorized into significant aspects of the tenure and promotion preparation and review- planning, documentation, behavior, and process. Some are particularly relevant for faculty members who are seeking to be recognized for the scholarship of engagement (items 1,2,3,5,9,10,13, and 15). These items address placing your work into the content of your university and your discipline, and also provide advice on how to interpret and examine your guidelines to allow for flexibility and adaptability within the review process. They also address outside supporters and reviewers, who may play a more significant role in such reviews than in those of faculty pursuing more traditional disciplinary scholarship.

While the tenure and promotion guidelines may seem tightly prescribed, each faculty member needs to take advantage of these structures to determine how to use them creatively to tell their own story. Despite all the stresses associated with review, the opportunity to engage in deep and meaningful reflection is often described by faculty as a particularly positive experience that helps them to set their own agenda for their future work.

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