

**Ensuring that Professors Who Enhance the University Earn Tenure and Promotion**

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## **Ensuring that Professors Who Enhance the University Earn Tenure and Promotion**

### **Abstract**

Tenure provides professors with a unique level of job security and utmost respect in the academy (Shea, 2002). Receiving tenure and progressing through the academic ranks are among the most visible and valued accomplishments for college and university faculty (Perna, 2001). Faculty who achieve excellence in teaching, research, and service readily receive these awards. However, disparities exist among gender, ethnicity, and types of performance in the evaluation of faculty. Women, minorities, and “university-enhancing” faculty are the underrepresented ones. The latter are professors at the university who really make wheels turn; they are always there to do what is needed to help fulfill the mission of the university. In some instances, the workload is overwhelming with committee work, planning and development of seminars and programs, supervising student activities, handling a heavy teaching load, and other duties to promote the institution. Unfortunately, many tasks needed to make the university function well on a daily basis do not enhance a professor’s portfolio for tenure, promotion, or salary increases. Any disconnect between what is good for a university to function well and what is good for the ultimate welfare of the faculty is a serious problem that needs resolution. This paper highlights what is typically required to earn university promotion and tenure and presents cases of faculty who provide tremendous work for the university but struggle in earning tenure and promotion. Scenarios and recommendations are offered for ensuring that university-enhancing faculty earn promotion and tenure and for bridging the gap between what is good for the university and what is helpful for faculty.

## Introduction

Tenure is an endorsement by the university that gives professors a unique level of job security and a high degree of respectability. It was established as an official policy by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) in 1940 (Shea, 2002). Receiving tenure and progressing through the academic ranks are among the most visible and valued accomplishments for college and university faculty (Perna, 2001).

There have been problems and issues associated with tenure from its inception. For example, tenure does not favor women, who constitute 41 percent of all professors. If they have at least one child, they are 24 percent less likely to get tenure in the sciences and 20 percent less likely in the humanities, than men who become fathers (Shea, 2002). However, Canadian women academics were reported earning tenure at a rate equal to men, but were disadvantaged in earning promotion to associate professor (Stewart, Ornstein, & Drakich, 2009). The AAUP recommended suspending new parents' tenure clocks for one year, but universities with such a provision have reported few are using it for fear that the extra time would lead to even higher scholarly expectations. Some even argue about the significance of tenure, but despite its waning relevance, in terms of numbers, nothing has replaced its stature in the academy (Shea, 2002).

There is the big contention that some faculty bear a disproportionately high service load at the university and the composition of their academic portfolio make them less likely to earn tenure and promotion. Such faculty often allege that they want to do what is good for their students and the university, but they also want tenure and promotion. Conceptually, promotion and tenure are mutually beneficial to the faculty and the institution of higher learning (Shea, 2002). Any miss conceptualizations have adverse consequences for the victimized party, which often is the faculty. The path to tenure and promotion must be fair and equitable.

Major components of this study include purpose, methodology, review of literature, presentation of three vignettes, suggestions on ensuring promotion and tenure for university-enhancing faculty, and summary.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this paper was to highlight the significance of tenure and promotion and examine some of the criteria for earning these awards that are challenging for many faculty as they pursue careers in higher education. The awards are highly valued by faculty and have great significance for the university. The common complaint in not receiving them seems to be more of the “right” productivity, than the amount of productivity. It is clear that tremendous time and energy go into obtaining tenure and promotion, and when they are not earned, it really is a loss for both the institution and the faculty. The institution gets no dividends on the five-seven years invested in the faculty, unless it boasts about having had “slave” labor. The faculty member must start anew looking for employment, or in not getting promoted, go without true respect in the academy and loss of salary increments. Research questions for this study are (1) Is there evidence that faculty exist in the academy that may be classified as university-serving, who perform a disproportionate-high amount of service at the institution? and if so, (2) Do the university-serving faculty tend to experience difficulty in obtaining tenure and promotion?

### **Method**

The literature was reviewed to establish afresh the rationale for tenure and promotion in higher education, the criteria for earning them, and problems and issues centered around the two that have major implications for both the university and the faculty. To add authenticity to the study, three vignettes are presented which show issues and concerns that faculty face in earning tenure and promotion. Suggestions and recommendations are provided for making tenure and

promotion more compatible for both the faculty and the university. The objective is to provide a framework to help ensure that faculty who work diligently to enhance the university will earn tenure and promotion.

## **Literature review**

### **Rationale for tenure and promotion**

The initial appointment of qualified junior faculty at the university is assistant professor. Promotion to associate professor and tenure are the normal prerequisites for keeping one's job (Stewart, Ornstein, & Drakich, 2009). The reasonable goals for most university faculty are to earn tenure and become full professor, which denotes a professional reputation in one's discipline or domain (McGowan, 2010). In each case, it typically requires successful evaluation on three components: teaching, research, and service.

Originally, tenure was to provide security if and when a professor wished to practice academic freedom that may or may not be controversial. But along the way it became equivalent with job security and a guarantee of continued employment. The concept of tenure is a major part of the employment relationship between the individual faculty and the institution of higher learning (Diamantes, 2002).

According to Chait (2002), tenure is the abortion issue of the academy, igniting arguments and inflaming near-religious passions and no academic reward carries the cachet that it does. To some, tenure is essential to academic freedom and a magnet to recruit and retain top-flight faculty. To others it is an impediment to professorial accountability and a constraint on institutional flexibility and finances (Chait, 2002).

## **Criteria for tenure and promotion**

A professor is someone who has become an expert in a certain domain (McGowan, 2010) at an institution of higher learning. The challenge is meeting the criteria to earn the awards of tenure and promotion. The review process that faculty undergo prior to tenure differs in length and rigor from one institution to the next but the elements reviewed often include teaching effectiveness, research productivity, and service (Shifflett & Patterson, 1995; Woods, 2006). Chait (2002) stated that context counts so much that no single tenure system exists.

For faculty seeking tenure, the mission can seem very heavily weighted toward research. The phrase “publish or perish” is widely understood both inside and outside the academy as the primary path to a successful career in higher education. Over the years, various scholars have wondered whether this intense focus on research, often to the detriment of both teaching and service, is in the best interest of junior faculty, the institution, or the students (Woods, 2006).

Scholarship expectations for tenure and promotion to associate professor vary much more greatly across rank, discipline, and institution than do those for teaching or service (Price & Cotton, 2006). Though the requirements in each area vary, depending on the type of institution (graduate, comprehensive, or undergraduate) and even within types of institution. The time limit is usually six years to apply for tenure and associate professor, but the individual often sets the time to apply for promotion to professor. The applicant compiles and submits a dossier of accomplishments for review in the university evaluation process and will ultimately be informed of the results and recommendation (Mabrouk, 2007). The percentage of women and their time to promotion often lag behind that for men (Stewart, Ornstein, & Drakich, 2009).

## **Problems in earning promotion and tenure**

Striking a balance between teaching effectiveness, research productivity, and service can be a considerable challenge. While assistance to faculty varies, most institutions provide only a cursory picture of the tenure process, and expectations for the professorial role are often poorly delineated (Shifflett & Patterson, 1995).

Performance towards tenure, such as teaching, research, and service, are not clearly defined, openly discussed, nor are they evaluated adequately. Graduate schools fail to prepare students adequately to assume the role of professor (Price & Cotton, 2006).

Canadian women academics are tenured at essentially the same rate as their male colleagues. Women are disadvantaged in promotion from associate to full professor. In Canada and the United States, promotion to the rank of associate professor has a time limit of six years and almost always involves simultaneous granting of tenure and often some pay increase. The folklore of academic career advancement is highlighted with cases of unsuccessful tenure and promotion decisions. There is little systematic research on tenure and promotion. Many studies deal with just one discipline or consider only limited factors that may influence career advancement, such as research productivity. A quantitative analysis of a unique longitudinal data set of Canadian faculty reveals the trends in promotion and tenure from 1984 to 1999. A consistent finding is that the percentage of women and their time to promotion lag behind men (Stewart, Ornstein, & Drakich, 2009).

As things stand, promotion, tenure, and retention are driven by research and publication (and, increasingly, bringing in external funding). Promotion and tenure committees will give pats on the head for community service but, for the most part, this service is not considered

significant when it comes to tenure. This means there is little incentive to do actual outreach and service (Woods, 2006).

Faculty differ sharply in their notions of how scholarship should be evaluated. They agree on the importance of high-quality work, but they disagree on how to determine whether high quality has been achieved. Various models, e.g., procedural and judgmental, have been advanced for addressing this issue (Matusov & Hampel, 2008). The procedural model features a set of specific measures of the caliber of scholarship. Faculty need not decide on their own whether a candidate's work meets the official criteria and what these criteria mean for particular cases because well-crafted policies, if applied faithfully by a committee, will do that. The faculty avoids the need to decide for itself if the work is good enough to merit promotion. The judgment model, which the authors favor, obligates the faculty to discuss and evaluate the quality of the scholarship under review. Each colleague must devote the time and effort to decide whether a candidate's work is excellent and then be able to explain and defend that assessment in a faculty meeting. The latter model is heralded as the most democratic and the fairest approach to tenure decisions and gives departments the best chance of arriving at a real, rather than a default, decision. Models are not mutually exclusive. Procedures, rules, and standards can work very well to evaluate recursive, well-defined, and stable cases and events. However, evaluating out-of-the-ordinary, ill-defined, and nonrecursive cases and events requires judgment. The authors argue that scholarship demanding originality, creativity, and innovation is exactly this kind of case (Matusov & Hampel, 2008).

Despite years of attention to sex and racial/ethnic group differences in employment status, substantially smaller proportions of women than men, and Blacks and Hispanics than Whites, have received the rewards of promotion and tenure. Women faculty hold lower ranks



than men faculty even after taking into account differences in such variables as educational attainment, experience, productivity, institutional characteristics, and academic discipline. Women were less likely than men to hold the rank of associate or full professor. Different criteria are applied in promotion decisions for women than for men. Blacks were less likely than Whites and Hispanics to hold the rank of full professor, and Blacks and Hispanics were less likely than Whites to hold tenured positions (Perna, 2001).

There is concern about expectations for earning promotion and tenure. The perceptions are that some factors are overemphasized (student evaluation of instructor, student evaluation of the course, peer-reviewed publications, and production of an undergraduate textbook or book chapter) and that portfolio documenting personal assessment of teaching is underemphasized. These are considered gaps in the current system of evaluating teaching for the purpose of promotion and tenure. The faculty placed a higher value on criteria recognizing excellence in teaching based on intradepartmental dynamics (i.e., interactions with close-up peers and students) rather than recognition within a broader community of scholars as evidenced by authorship or success in generating funding for teaching. Proposed improvements in evaluation of teaching for promotion and tenure include 1) providing tenure-track faculty with written guidelines at the time of hiring; 2) ensuring that student ratings tools are reliable and valid; 3) carefully mentoring new faculty within the departmental and institutional culture; and 4) encouraging self-reflection and documentation of attempts to address pedagogical issues in one's own teaching. Educational leaders in doctoral/research universities should promote changes to enhance teaching performance of future faculty graduating from their institutions (Whittiaux, Moore, Rastani, & Crump, 2010).

## **University-Enhancing Services**

Professors' growing service obligations make advancement tougher for many of them, particularly women and minority-group members (Fogg, 2003). Women and minorities have a greater burden because institutions want diversity on committees. They do a disproportionate amount on service work and service does not get enough credit in academe. This may be because service is harder to quantify than teaching and research. If a person teaches too well or does too much service, he or she may be seen as neglecting their research. Faculty have to show they can do some service but teaching and research are really what they should work on. Their goal is to get tenure. Universities want people to be reasonable teachers, but if they are spending an inordinate amount of time on teaching are short-shifting research, then they are really hurting themselves. The number of committees are colleges is increasing, as universities become are more conscious of potential lawsuits involving sexual and racial discrimination. Yet, university service is rarely talked about and goes largely unrewarded. Research and teaching are key. What people do beyond that doesn't count for much in promotion and tenure decisions (Fogg, 2003).

Strategic professional service (e.g., collegial collaboration, conference involvement, and grant-review panels) can advance one's career. But when it comes to university assignments and committees, many supportive and cooperative faculty may be asked to do more than their fair share of the service load. Though service activities may make the faculty member feel good about themselves, service often does not contribute directly to the case for tenure and promotion (Mabrouk, 2007). Professors' growing service obligations make advancement tougher for many of them, particularly women and minority-group members (Fogg, 2003).

## Vignette reports

African-American faculty members must be master jugglers. For women, who most often shoulder domestic and child-rearing tasks, the ever-present need to multitask is especially dramatic. A typical day for a junior faculty member may include requests from the department chair, demands from senior faculty, the need to serve on college and university committees, pleas for time from desperate students, opportunities for faculty development, and in-service training on the latest technologies.

Everything takes time. Writing, preparing for class, completing human subjects documents, applying for grants, faculty meetings, taking that minute (that stretches into 30) to give the shaken student mentoring, encouragement, or correction. It may seem there is not enough time in the day to complete all that is required. Some faculty jealously guard every minute and work on their research and publication to the level of selfishness. Other faculty make choices with an eye toward achieving tenure while, at the same time, not drifting away from their values as a mother and African-American community member (Woods, 2006).

Vignettes are presented to show real faculty's concerns and efforts in earning tenure and promotion. The following three cases reveal an array of concerns.

Case 1PF: Wednesdays, day of no classes, are supposed to be writing days for assistant professor 1PF. She needs to finish her book before she comes up for tenure next fall. On this Wednesday the precious hours sped by as she performed a list of inescapable duties considered service to the university: helping a graduate student revise an article; listening to a lecture given by a visiting job candidate; committee meetings; and in the evening, entertaining the job candidate. The only writing she did was finishing letters of recommendation for some of the 15 students she advises. As the only Black female professor in the social sciences, 1PF is in high

demand; minority students need mentors, and committees want diverse memberships. Multiple service commitments take time away from her research and teaching. But when it comes time for decisions on tenure or promotion, it is not the number of students you advise, but the number of publication on your CV. Women seem more approachable than men and have a harder time saying no, they have to do more to prove themselves and they take on too many service commitments (Fogg, 2003). 1PF is a member of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, Committee on Pluralism, gives presentations to university groups, chairs the undergraduate-curriculum committee, teaches in a weeklong summer workshop, and is on the advisory board of a resource group for black students. She finds it hard to turn down requests for help. She gets a sense of being really needed (Fogg, 2003).

Case 2PF: John Doe, an assistant professor, learned the hard way that directing the Latino-studies program as a second-year faculty member was not his best career move. He ran into a lot of problems. Without tenure, he had no clout during the two years he led the program. The administrative job interrupted his research. He continued to teach a normal load, though his department head was against giving him extra time on the tenure clock. The chairman told him not to expect any special treatment if he didn't finish his book on time. He thinks he will have to ask for an extension (Fogg, 2003).

Case 3DRW: This pictures an African-American female on tenure track attempting to juggle the many challenges of university life with personal, professional, and community responsibilities. The objective is to expand the narrow cultural understanding of requirements for tenure and success and make suggestions for change. DRW has two children and an extended family. She taught five years, in which she helped develop the departmental program. She feels a special obligation to reach out to other people of color and the communities where

they live (Woods, 2006). She feels that there is not enough time in the day to complete all that she is required to do. She has developed a strategy for navigating her way through the university and the tenure process; commit one day each week to research and writing. She also offers techniques: Have someone in your department assess the viability of your position and mentor you; choose your committees judiciously; say “no” without offending others; refocus/reprioritize, looking at exactly what it is you want to accomplish; enter your office and close the door, establish an atmosphere of sacred time that cannot be interrupted; assert yourself when too much departmental work is assigned to you; focus on a small but significant outreach activity; and become involved in active student mentoring on campus (Woods, 2006). In her ideal world, research interests and the requirements for tenure would coincide with her joys (teaching, outreach, community service) (Woods, 2006).

Table 1 captures some basic problems in earning tenure and promotion as gathered from the review of literature and exploration of the university-enhancing faculty concept. The problems are listed according to teaching, research, service, “service over-load,” and other/general.

Table 1

Problems Faculty encounter in Earning Tenure and promotion

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Teaching:	-Assessment of teaching is underemphasized (Whittiaux et al., 2010)
Research:	-“Publish or perish” intense research focus, favored over teaching and service (Woods, 2006). -Primary force in tenure, promotion, and retention (Woods, 2006) -Peer-reviewed publications overemphasized (Whittiaux et al., 2010)
Service:	-Often does not directly contribute for tenure and promotion (Mabrouk, 2007) -For most part, not considered significant for tenure (Woods, 2006)
(Service Over-Load):	-Supportive and cooperative faculty are asked to do more than fair share of service (Mabrouk, 2007) -Growing service obligations tougher, particularly for women and minorities

(Fogg, 2003)

Other/  
General:

- Smaller proportion of women and minorities receive tenure and promotion; different criteria applied to women (Perna, 2001)
  - Graduate schools fail to prepare students for role of professor (Price & Cotton, 2006)
  - Women disadvantaged in promotion from associate to full professor (Stewart, Ornstein, & Drakich, 2009)
  - Little systematic research on tenure and promotion (Stewart et al., 2009)
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### **Suggestions on ensuring promotion and tenure for university-enhancing faculty**

In any challenging situation, the objective should be to establish policies and procedures to make matters more friendly and accomplishable. Promotion and tenure decisions are often difficult and always have important long-term consequences for both the candidate and the institution. Preparing for them is one of the most difficult and challenging experiences a person can have. Suggestions for managing the tenure process include (1) make a substantive research contribution; (2) learn the craft of publishing in academe; (3) work with and benefit from one's colleagues; and (4) keep all of your materials updated, all of the time (Diamantes, 2002).

Chait (2002) posited that few institutions will initiate significant changes in tenure criteria without either powerful external pressures or persistent demands from new or disgruntled faculty. To improve the climate in higher education for women and faculty of color, universities should make a commitment to provide an academically rich, multicultural learning experience; emphasize learning in an academic environment that is inclusive, student-centered, and aware of the world it is part of; recruit and retain diverse high-quality faculty, staff, and students; and create a new slogan: "Service or Perish" (Woods, 2006). Chait, in *The questions of tenure*, suggested seven revisions to tenure policy: The candidate's dossier, as well as the portfolio of peers, should be open to inspection by the candidate; promotion and tenure committees should

reflect a commitment to diversity; scholarship of discovery and conventional research should not outweigh the scholarship of teaching and service; collaborative research should be valued as much as independent research; interdisciplinary research should be prized as much as disciplinary research; probationary periods should either be eliminated or tailored to the candidate's circumstances and discipline, and adaptable to family responsibilities; and tenure-track faculty should be provided clear expectations, unambiguous standards, and consistent counsel (Woods, 2006).

Junior and minority faculty members need to be assured that service efforts will be valued by the university and counted significantly in the promotion and tenure process. Such recognition will provide greater incentive for all faculty to take the academy's service requirement seriously (Woods, 2006).

Students want an education and an experience from their undergraduate years. Scholarship is a faculty concern, not theirs (McGowan, 2010). Professors claim that only free inquiry, rigorously evaluated by expert peers, can actually produce new knowledge. The world and the university need more than just scholars who make "original" scholarly contributions. Editing journals, creating and overseeing curricular reforms, creating programs that bring the university's expertise to wider audiences, working with external groups to address issues like dropout rates and environmental concerns, and serving as departmental chairs or directors of programs are among the many activities a university needs some of its professors to take on. When it comes to evaluation, either for promotion to full professor or for post-tenure review, the university would go to the community identified by the professor as the beneficiary of her contribution (McGowan, 2010).

Some say the answer to the service dilemma is simply to do more to reward good service; even put more emphasis on service in faculty job descriptions (Fogg, 2003). Other ideas are: Extend the tenure clock for professors who take on exceptional service loads; improve the climate in academe for female scientists and engineers; give female scientists a semester off from teaching and service to have more time for research; and universities should give awards, perhaps even money, for faulty service. In the absence of such changes, professors will continue to struggle to figure out how much service is enough (Fogg, 2003).

The tenure-and-promotion system needs radical reform. A proposal is modification of the method used by a large number of external funding agencies, such as the National Science Foundation, to evaluate research-grant proposals. The seven steps are 1) have the evaluation committee established outside the university, 2) submit college's tenure and promotion guidelines to the committee, 3) submit a Statement of Philosophy for Tenure and Promotion to the committee of evaluation, 4) candidate would submit application materials to chair of department's tenure-and-promotion committee to forward to chair of committee of evaluation, 5) committee of evaluation completes its evaluation, 6) president disseminates the dossier to the candidate, etc. of committee's recommendation, and 7) president would arrive at a recommendation. The author suggests that this system would be well received by everyone involved in the tenure-and-promotion process (Lewis, 2010).

Changes to Yale University's tenure process include a strengthened commitment to junior faculty members in the arts and sciences to better compete for talent with its peer institutions. The report also calls for mentoring junior faculty and providing opportunities for them to show and be rewarded for excellence (Millman, 2007).



Most of those dominating the political, economic, and social systems of the university buy into a traditional, Eurocentric view of achievement within the academy, which supports scientific and technological achievements above all else (Woods, 2006). Alternative views, such as Afrocentricity, are ignored or marginalized by academic power structures (Woods, 2006). Universities need to reach out to K-12 schools that service minority populations with greater consistency.

From an investigations of problems and concerns relative to tenure and promotion and reflecting on possible solutions, Table 2 was prepared to capture suggestions for ensuring that university-enhancing faculty earn tenure and promotion. The list stands to be further developed and refined. The suggestions are listed according to teaching, research, service, “service over-load, and other/general.

Table 2

Suggestions for Faculty At Risk for Earning Tenure and promotion

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Teaching:	-Spend an ordinate amount of time on teaching (Fogg, 2003)
Research:	-Research, and teaching, really count in tenure/ promotion decisions (Fogg, 2002)
Service:	-Do proportionate amount of service work (Fogg, 2003)
(Service Over-Load):	-Know expectations for tenure and promotion; Keep record of work in teaching, research, and service (Whittiaux et al., 2010); schedule time for research and writing, engage colleagues for support, find mentor, say “no” inoffensively to too much service, refocus/prioritize, close office door, focus on small significant outreach, make research hand-in-hand with other tasks (3DRW-
Other /General:	-Suspending new parents’ tenure clocks for one year (Shea, 2002) -Providing written guidelines at time of hire; ensuring student rating tools are reliable and valid; careful mentoring for new faculty; encourage self-reflection and documentation in one’s own teaching; doctoral/research universities should enhance teaching performance of future faculty graduating from their institutions (Whittiaux, Moore, Rastani, & Crump, 2010).

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## Summary and recommendations

Tenure does not assure lifetime employment, but it serves as assurance that faculty will receive due process in higher education (Diamantes, 2002). Principal criteria for tenure and promotion are effective teaching, research, and service. Women and minorities are often disadvantaged in earning tenure and promotion, while being cooperative, supportive faculty who give more than their fair share in service to enhance the institution.

There is concern about expectations for earning promotion and tenure. The perceptions are that some factors are overemphasized, for example, student evaluation of instructor, and that the portfolio documenting personal assessment of teaching is underemphasized (Whittiaux, Moore, Rastani, & Crump, 2010). Faculty differ sharply in their notions of how scholarship should be evaluated. They agree on the importance of high-quality work, but they disagree on how to determine whether high quality has been achieved. Various models, e.g., procedural and judgmental, have been advanced for addressing this issue (Matusov & Hampel, 2008).

Here, the original research questions are revisited. (1) Is there evidence that faculty exist in the academy that may be classified as university-serving, who perform a disproportionate-high amount of service at the institution? Evidence would suggest an affirmative response to this question. Women and minority faculty were cited numerous times as being persons who do more than a fair share of committee work and other service acts for the university. Of course, it is possible that any faculty could fall into this category. If so, (2) Do the university-serving faculty tend to experience difficulty in obtaining tenure and promotion? Evidence from the literature and the vignettes would suggest an affirmative response to this question. There are things in consideration to make university-serving or university-enhancing faculty more positioned for earning tenure and promotion, but they seem yet to be realized.

Problems and challenges do not automatically resolve themselves; they need to be addressed forthrightly. Some recommendations for ensuring that professors who enhance the university earn tenure and promotion are: more tenure-clock flexibility; more credit for enhancing service; faculty to refocus/realign duties, strategize - wear many hats but manage time; make teaching and service data bases for research; govern amount of service activity; and display a disposition of a winner for motivation and respect.

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