Surviving the Tenure Track: Yes You Can!

Sponsored by the SPSSI Early Career Scholars Committee

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General Survival or “When I am Supposed to Sleep?”

Basic Survival Tips-
- ASAP- find out the details for what is expected in your discipline at your institution for P&T!!
- Make a point of getting along with colleagues. Being liked is a good way to get the scoop on departmental and university goings on and politics.
- Identify a potential mentor within your department (someone who knows the ropes; someone you can trust to tell you the truth about your work and standing in the dept), then ask s/he to be your mentor.
- Find an off-campus mentor who can help you network in your field.
- Meet with colleagues at your level with whom you can “vent.” Although you may feel isolated, there are certainly colleagues that have similar concerns. You may meet informally, but discuss important issues and get advice (e.g. setting up daycare, helping family members to understand your work schedule, dealing with stress).
- Discuss your plans for promotion and tenure with a colleague who is a few years ahead. A colleague may be happy to share their promotion portfolios, assessments by supervisors, and advice.
- Get to campus as early as you can before your first semester so that you can get organized, unpack your office, and plan your semester. There is a lot of value in settling in early.
- Create a word document for recording everything you do (teaching, research service). When it is time for annual review and P&T, you will not be able to remember all you did in the last 12 months or all you did during the last 5 years.
- Choose one drawer for your sacred P&T filing system. Save everything- flyers, conference programs, letters & emails from students, manuscripts you review for journals. I mean everything. You can sort through it all later to determine what goes in the P&T binders. But if you did not keep it, you can’t sort it.

Books & websites to peruse during boring meetings-
- Advice for New Faculty Members (2000) by Boice
- Life on the Tenure Track: Lessons from the First Year (2005) by Lang
- Getting Tenure (1993) by Whicker, Kronenfeld, & Strickland
- Tenure in the Sacred Grove: Issues & Strategies for Women & Minority Faculty (2002) by Cooper & Stevens
- Tomorrow’s Professor Blog at MIT- http://amps-tools.mit.edu/tomprofblog/
Teaching Survival Tips-

“Working It” in (& outside) the Classroom-
- Utilize your on-campus resources such as Centers for Teaching Excellence.
- Set up classroom observations to get feedback on your teaching.
- Ask excellent teachers if you can observe them in the classroom.
- If your institution has a peer-mentoring program, USE IT.
- If your institution does not have peer-mentoring, find your own mentors.
- Set up multiple ways to get student feedback. Course evaluations often give limited information and are at the end of the term. Get student feedback on assignments, lectures, class activities, quizzes & exams earlier in the semester. Make appropriate adjustments and let students know you take their ideas seriously.
- Balance types of assessments that give students a variety & that you can also manage to grade.
- If teaching assistants are available, train them well. Set up a contract for their responsibilities and hold them to it. Reduce the number of tasks that are tedious and time-consuming for you.
- Ask to view syllabi of colleagues for ideas. Ask them to review yours for possible improvements.
- Meet regularly with colleagues to talk about assignments, concerns about student performance, class activities, guest speakers, grading plans, etc.
- Don’t try to always re-invent the entire wheel when you can use parts of an old one. Ask trusted friends if you can use their PowerPoint slides or class activities as a starting point.
- Yes, there are a million ways to improve your courses, but try to avoid changing textbooks and reading lists every single semester.
- Once you get your set of courses going, avoid volunteering to prepare new courses until after tenure.
- Find essential resources, including syllabi, on professional organization websites such as the Society for Teaching of Psychology, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Don’t be shy! If you work with a student for a year on research or serve as faculty advisor to a club, ask students to write recommendation letters that can be used in your P&T materials.
- Watch out for excessive time drain that comes with supervising theses and other student independent research projects. Be sure to only take on a few so that you do not get overwhelmed.
- Double Dip Tip- In fact, whenever possible, offer students the opportunity to conduct thesis research on some aspect of your own work. That way, you are teaching them plus getting some of your research done!!

Books for when you are not grading papers-
- *Successful Beginnings for College Teaching* (2001) by McGlynn (great practical guide with tips, activities, and more)
- *What the Best College Teachers Do* (2004) by Bain
Research Survival Tips-

“Working It” as a Researcher-

- Hit the ground running and make the most of years 1-3. Given journal lag time from acceptance to publication, these years are extremely important.
- Design studies with a specific journal or two in mind. Aiming for a journal up front rather than after you write the manuscript makes for a better fit.
- Identify quality collaborators early (double the publications in half the time!), but choose wisely.
- Rejected? Okay, you can be sad for 2 days. Then use reviews to improve the paper & send it out!
- Revise & Resubmit? CONGRATS to you! Be sure to address each and every single detailed suggestion, comment, or question from reviewers & the editor before resubmitting. Make the editor’s job easier by providing a detailed & organized list of the updates with page numbers.
- Make writing a regular part of your day. Avoid believing the myth that you need at least a 3 hour chunk of time in order to write. This will keep you from getting that manuscript out for sure.
- Double Dip Tip- if you work at a teaching institution, conducting research on teaching & learning allows you to enhance both teaching and research!! There is an entire interdisciplinary field known as the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning (SOTL) awaiting your brilliance.
- Summer = RESEARCH! The extra money is tempting, but instead of teaching in the summer, you could be writing up articles, proposals for grants, & planning data collection for the next academic year.
- As you meet colleagues at conferences, think about who might be a good fit for serving as an external reviewer at P&T time.
- When attending conferences, keep notes on connections to your own research & teaching. You can reflect each evening or during your wait at the airport.
- If you’re only able to attend a few conferences per year, divide the conferences among your colleagues and then set up a time to share what you’ve learned, materials, and resources.
- Check online for conference materials. Look for papers/presentations posted online from your favorite conferences and save/print them out—conference materials may not be posted forever.
- Try your best to stay current on the research literature once you graduate. Scan periodicals, flag them for further reading, and have a teaching assistant summarize key articles for you.
- Find resources on professional org websites such as SPSSI, Social Psychology Network, APS, APA.

Books for when you are not in collecting data-


Service Survival Tips-

“Working It” on Committees-

- Repeat after us- “NO.” Seriously- just say “no.”
- Determine exactly how your department and institution view the service component. For some, you are NOT required to do service pre-tenure. For others, the junior faculty service load is tremendous.
- Remember- not all service is equal. Ask mentors what types of service are most valued by administrators. Ask those that have served on merit review committees or P&T committees before.
- Match your passions with what is most valued. You may have 3000 ideas about serving your students, program, university, community, and profession, but some will be more highly valued than others.
- Keep stellar records of any service activities you do such as flyers highlighting the talk you gave to a psychology class at the local high school. Service is one of the most difficult areas when it comes to providing evidence, so keeping good records is even more essential.
- Get involved with professional organizations like SPSSI to establish professional service.
- Double Dip Tip- community research, especially participatory action research, offers perfect opportunities for doing service while conducting research.
- Double Dip Tip- think of creative ways to combine teaching and service. For example, serving as a speaker for the teaching center or hosting a pedagogy discussion group should count for both.
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