

Task Force on the Tenure Clock
Unanimous Report – November 10, 2005

The Committee (Tenure Task Force) has discussed at length the current tenure clock for Brandeis junior faculty. In the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences, it is increasingly difficult to accumulate an adequate scholarly portfolio within five years. This is due to many factors, prominent among which are changes in the publishing industry as well as national funding trends. Moreover, we have examined current practices at other research and teaching institutions comparable to Brandeis, many of which have a longer and/or more flexible tenure clock. The short and inflexible Brandeis clock is not only unpopular among current junior faculty but is also viewed as a recruiting liability, i.e., unpopular among prospective junior faculty.

For these reasons, the Committee unanimously recommends:

1. a one year extension of the current tenure clock. This means that faculty will be evaluated in their seventh year, i.e., a seven year maximum probationary period. This will come after six full years of research and teaching rather than the current five, an increase of 20%. The candidate will then have one more year at Brandeis, an eighth, if denied tenure. Although current practices elsewhere vary considerably, this is well within the norm of what exists at comparable institutions.
2. that “early tenure” be used more frequently than current practice. Although most junior faculty will probably choose to wait the full six years before submitting their documents, we encourage departments to consider adopting a three year tenure window – from years five to seven (i.e., after four to six years of residence and scholarship). This will also recognize in a more pro-active way junior faculty who are unambiguous “keepers” and/or have faculty experience elsewhere.
3. that all of this should occur with no changes in current standards for scholarly accomplishments. This was a major reason why an even longer extension was not favored.

The Committee also discussed FMLA and related issues, by examining practices at other institutions as well as our experiences within our own departments. Brandeis is behind the times, certainly in word and perhaps also in deed. For these reasons, the Committee unanimously recommends:

4. a standard one-year extension of the tenure clock for circumstances entailing personal responsibility such as a new child, family illness or family emergency. The Committee tried to define “responsibility” but without success. (For example, should an assistant professor with a new baby but a stay-at-home-spouse or partner be granted an extension?) The Committee therefore urges the Administration and the General Counsel to consider this definition, although it may be possible to move forward while this is ongoing. Also appropriate are

personal illness and other compelling circumstances. The extension(s) should be independent of whether the faculty member requests a leave of absence and is completely independent of the universal one year lengthening recommended above (i.e., they are additive). A maximum of two one year extensions for personal responsibility, personal illness or other compelling circumstances are recommended. Under extraordinary circumstances, additional extension(s) may be granted. This policy should apply to current assistant professors not yet under tenure review, with a maximum retroactive extension of one year. If some extension has already been provided, it may be increased to one year. Current assistant professors should receive the recommended benefits for future qualifying events.

5. a one semester extension for professional service or additional training. This must be relevant to the faculty member's scholarly interests but should not directly advance a research project - in which case a tenure clock extension is not deemed appropriate. A maximum of two one semester extensions (i.e., one year) is recommended.

Coda: The Committee also discussed a lengthening of the tenure clock for unusual obstacles to scholarly achievement but ultimately reached unanimous agreement to drop that idea. However, it would be helpful in the future if there were guidelines for ad hoc committees, perhaps more than one set of guidelines depending on discipline. There was the sense that even within a given discipline different ad hoc committees did not operate from the same set of expectations, e.g., is the threshold one book or more than one? Could work accomplished at a first job be considered part of a Brandeis tenure portfolio? Although this issue is outside the purview of this Committee, we urge the Administration to consider this issue -- perhaps with another committee -- in the near future.

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