

Deborah Lee

On the tenure track

Strategies for success

The tenure track. The concept leaves virtually no one indifferent in academic librarianship . . . you either love it or hate it! Accepting a tenure-track position can fill some new librarians with dread, but it does not have to be a harrowing experience. If you're new to the tenure track (or are considering accepting a tenure-track position), there are strategies you can pursue that will make the process less stressful and maybe even enjoyable.

As a tenured professor at the Mississippi State University Libraries, I've chaired and served on both library and campus promotion/tenure committees and served as an external reviewer for other promotion and tenure candidates. In these roles, I've seen numerous successful applications, as well as some that were not successful. Tenure doesn't have to be a mysterious process. There are strategies that you can use that will enhance the odds that you, too, will have a successful tenure application.

Start planning early

It's never too soon to start planning a successful tenure bid. From your earliest days on the job, you should make sure you have a copy of the most recent promotion/tenure document for your library. Don't wait for someone to give you a copy. Some documents are very specific about the expectations for tenure; others will couch the tenure process in vague terms of "excellence" without defining how that is measured. If you have questions, be sure to find good mentors in the library and ask for clarification. Tenure expectations can change dramatically over time, so be sure you're getting the most recent information about the tenure process on your campus.

Build a strategic plan for tenure. You wouldn't take on a large project and not make goals for the project, set up a timeline, and build in benchmarks along the way. Tenure is no different.

Visualize what a strong, successful tenure portfolio would look like at your library and then develop goals that break this long-term objective into yearly benchmarks. Remember that it can take time to build a strong service or research record. You may need to lay the groundwork for a service or research activity years in advance.

As you build your tenure plan, be sure to develop a system to collect the information you need to provide as documentation in the tenure process. It can be difficult (if not impossible) to remember all the classes you taught five years ago or the numerous projects to which you have contributed. I have a notebook for each year and divide it by the categories we use at my institution: teaching, research, and service. (Your library may use different categories.) In each notebook, I'll keep a copy of my annual review and my goals for that year. Into each section, I place supporting documentation. This might include a list of the classes that I taught, a committee report that I authored, or even a thank you e-mail or card from a faculty that I helped. You don't have to use everything you save in your supporting documentation, but it is much easier to choose not to use an item than to hunt years later for that conference brochure listing your presentation.

Deborah Lee is coordinator of library instructional services and associate director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at Mississippi State University Libraries, e-mail: dlee@library.msstate.edu

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Teaching

For many of us, teaching is the heart of our academic appointment. In some institutions, this concept is referred to more broadly as practice of profession. However you define it, this section will typically include the bulk of what many of us would describe as librarianship. Just as you invest time and energy into building a service or research record, you have to be willing to invest in your area of professional expertise. And then invest time in documenting the development of your career.

Many institutions are moving away from summary measures of teaching (such as student evaluations) to a more inclusive teaching portfolio approach. A teaching portfolio can serve two purposes: to provide systematic documentation of your teaching accomplishments and developments, and to provide an opportunity for reflective analysis and enhancement of teaching-related activities.

Even if your institution does not require a teaching portfolio as part of the promotion and tenure process, it may be in your best interest to develop and maintain such a document.

Whatever approach you take, you need some means to provide documentation of the goals you set in this area, steps taken to meet those goals, and some means of assessing the level at which the goals were met.

Profession of practice, as this section is sometimes called, encompasses more than actual instruction sessions in front of students or other users. It may also include cataloging, acquisitions, collection development, and general library management. Professionals engaged in those areas may have to invest extra time in developing good promotion and tenure packets that spell out the worth of their contributions. This can be a challenge, given that many of the readers in the promotion and tenure process may not be familiar with the essential work that goes on behind the scene (or desk) at a typical academic library.

For example, suppose one of your primary responsibilities is the original cataloging of serials. That statement, in and of itself, will mean little to some of the readers of your dossier. Instead, focus on the contribution of the activity: by performing original cataloging, you contribute to a worldwide bibliographic database using approved national/international standards (OCLC). Your work allows scholars to systematically identify and use unique and complex research materials.

As with any promotion and tenure advice, your approach should be appropriate for your particular institution. Some institutions have specific expectations about where certain types of activities are reported. One good example is the development of a textbook. While some institutions count this type of productivity as research, others would only consider it under the teaching section. Be sure you're familiar with these types of expectations as you decide which projects to pursue as an untenured library faculty member.

ACRL/LAMA Spring Virtual Institute

Are you a library manager? Have ideas to share with library managers? ACRL and Library Administration and Management Association (LAMA) are now accepting proposals for their Joint Spring Virtual Institute, "Leading from the Middle: Managing in All Directions."

Taking place in an online conference community from April 29–30, 2008, the institute offers a forum for the exploration of issues and challenges facing middle managers and leaders.

Visit www.acrl.org/ala/acrl/acrlevents/springvirtualinstitute.cfm for the full text of the Call for Participation. Proposals must be submitted via the online proposal form at <https://marvin.foresightint.com/surveys/Tier1Survey/ACRL/212/> by December 10, 2007. Send any questions to Margot Sutton Conahan at msutton@ala.org or (312) 280-2522

Research

For many librarians, the research expectation of a typical tenure-track appointment is the most daunting aspect of the process. Faculty members in most other parts of the university usually have completed a dissertation and their early publications are derived from this research. Many new librarians will not have written even a master's thesis. But there still may be papers and projects that began in the library science program that can be expanded into the first research projects. While that first year or two on the job can be busy (learning a new community, a new job, and a new set of colleagues), I've found that successful tenure applicants did not wait to start working on their research activities.

As with other aspects of your job, it is important to find out what research activities are expected in a tenure application. Some institutions have an open and inclusive approach to research and value a wide range of activities. Others will expect more traditional measures of research productivity, including publications in national peer-reviewed journals and presentations at national conferences. Even within these more traditional expectations, it is possible to develop a research program that reflects your interests and is relevant to your career.

How to start a research program? There is lots of advice out there, but here are a few suggestions. First explore the options available within your state. Does your state library association support a journal? If so, can you write a short article, prepare a conference report, or even review a book for the publication? Depending on the publication, this type of activity may or may not contribute substantively to the tenure process, but it can help you become more familiar with the writing (and editing) process required for establishing a research agenda. And seeing your name in print for the first time is a thrill! Remember that all editors, regardless of the publication, value well-written and thought-out pieces. Treat your research and writing with the same level of professionalism you bring to other areas of your career.

Don't be afraid to present your research in appropriate venues and don't undervalue the importance of your voice in the literature. I've mentored several new library faculty members, and I've noticed a habit of undervaluing the importance of the research they complete. If you have an innovative research project and a good write-up, don't be afraid to send it to a well-known journal. I've published in journals of both library science and other fields; in my experience, library journal editors are some of the most supportive and encouraging editors you will meet.

All editors are looking for well-written articles that would be of interest to their readers. If you've examined the journal and found that your article is appropriate for the journal and is a topic not recently covered, send it in.

Service

Service probably comes more naturally to librarians than to other faculty members. We are, after all, a service profession. Still, it is important to be sure that the service activities you choose support your long-term tenure goals. As with the other areas, you need to find out how various service activities are valued in the promotion and tenure process. At some institutions, service on university committees is valued very highly. Others will discount local service and prefer service with a higher visibility at the state, regional, or even national level.

Service is an excellent way to be more fully engaged with your profession. No offense to all the wonderful ALA workshops and programs I've attended over the years, but at many conferences I've found that my most meaningful moments occurred at the micro level, when I've worked on committees and had the opportunity to network with colleagues from institutions across the nation and world.

It is easy, however, to find yourself on too many committees. Especially for new librarians who might have some anxiety about writing, there is a temptation to gravitate to

the activity with which you're most comfortable. Many of us would much rather serve on a committee than write an article.

Early in my career, someone gave me what I've found to be excellent advice: balanced portfolios are better. This means that you should strive to balance the areas of teaching, research, and service. While most candidates will excel at one or two areas and be satisfactory in the third, stellar activity at the service level will seldom compensate for substandard performance in the other two areas, especially in research. So choose service activities carefully.

Tenured and having fun

Accepting a tenure-track position in an academic library does not have to be an intimidating option. The tenure track gives you the ability to become fully engaged with your profession and often rewards you for your service and research activities. Good academic libraries that offer tenure-

track positions also offer support for the type of activities that lead to a successful tenure bid. Applicants may find that they have access to time for research, mentoring programs, travel support, and even access to more professional literature at institutions that support tenure for librarians. And librarians who also serve as tenured faculty on their campus usually have access to a greater array of campus activities by serving on university committees. This last type of service is perhaps most beneficial to the academic library because it helps the library be perceived as a fully integrated partner in the university mission.

If you've avoided tenure-track positions in the past, please reconsider. While the tenure track is not for everyone, you may find that it is a good fit for you. If you like exploring the intellectual challenges of our profession, engaging with other professionals on your campus and throughout the

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College Of Wooster Library

Webster University Library

John D. Rockefeller Library

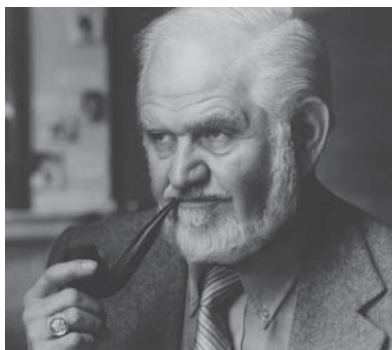
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University of Houston, and University of Texas-Austin. The grant will help fund the development and implementation of the Texas ETD Repository, a state-wide system for managing the entire life-cycle of electronic theses and dissertations from initial submission to final publication.

Acquisitions

The personal collection of Robert Prosky, veteran actor, has been acquired by George Mason University Libraries Special Collections and Archives. The Robert Prosky Collection consists of documents spanning Prosky's prolific career in theatre, film, and television that began more than 50 years ago. Materials include playbills, photos, scripts, articles, reviews, fan letters, personal correspondence, opening night gifts, media, and a scrapbook. The University Libraries hosted An Evening with Robert Prosky, where Prosky shared his experiences in appearing in more



Actor Robert Prosky

than 200 plays nationally and internationally and his 38 film and television roles, including Mrs. Doubt re, The Natural, Rudy, and Dead Man Walking.

Six archival collections from Teachers College related to the history of education and social reform, with a focus on New York, have been acquired by Columbia University's Rare Book & Manuscript Library. Among them are the records of four social agencies—Hudson Guild, Grosvenor Neighborhood House, the Children's Village, and the Wiltwyck School—and the papers of two individuals, Dan Carpenter, former executive director of the Hudson Guild, and Godfrey Dewey, noted spelling reformist. These collections document the history of the family, immigration, and social conditions in New York City from the mid-19th century to the present and relate well to Columbia University Libraries' holdings of primary source material in the area, such as the papers of Lillian Wald and the records of the Union Settlement Association of New York and the La Guardia Memorial House. *~*

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discipline, and enjoy conquering challenges, a tenure-track position may be just what

you're looking for. The key to making tenure a fun process is to apply the planning and organizational skills that we're famous for as librarians to our own careers. *~*

(“International...” cont. from page 649)
and symposia relating to ICA issues; and to critique methods and tools of analysis, ICA practice, history, and policies. It is international in scope, covering the globe and all aspects of the adoption triad. Access: Intadoptresearch@yahoo.com.

Notes

1. Dong Soo Kim, A Country Divided: Contextualizing Adoption from a Korean Perspective, in *International Korean Adoption:*

A Fifty-Year History of Policy and Practice, ed. Kathleen Ja Sook Bergquist et al. (New York: Haworth Press, 2007), 8.

2. For example, Transracial Abductees (www.transracialabductees.org) is a group that vehemently opposes international adoption and has some interesting articles and links; however, the Web site is not very current and thus was not selected for inclusion here.

3. International Adoption Clinic at the University of Minnesota, www.med.umn.edu/peds/iac/. *~*