



University Provost  
Office of the Provost

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## **BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

In February of this year, a small group of UB faculty members, calling themselves the “Ad Hoc Task Force on Gender Equity in Promotion at UB,” approached President John B. Simpson with some concerns about possible gender bias in the University at Buffalo’s promotion and tenure process. Their concerns appeared to be derived from incomplete, thereby misleading, information about a partial subset of tenure cases during the years 2003 through 2008. As the University’s Chief Academic Officer and a member of our UB faculty, I take extremely seriously the commitment to academic excellence as the paramount consideration for faculty hiring, promotion and tenure, as well as the importance of insuring that all faculty members find a supportive departmental climate to maximize their opportunity for success as scholars and teachers. I also take extremely seriously my responsibilities to evaluate individually every dossier for promotion and tenure and to make recommendations to the President that are based only on academic excellence and the promise of continued success.

With these responsibilities at heart and our self-determined obligation to take these concerns seriously, President Simpson and I, with the assistance of our Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs and the Office of Equity, Diversity and Affirmative Action, have reviewed the data on all tenure decisions over the last five years.

My purpose within these pages is not to argue each specific allegation raised by the “Ad Hoc Task Force.” Rather, my purpose here is to share with our faculty the University at Buffalo’s quantitative tenure data (for the years 2003 through 2008) and the analysis of these data. For our faculty who have experienced first hand the tenure process you know there is much qualitative information in each individual dossier. The tenure process is about people, their academic histories, their accomplishments and future potential, and their own unique challenges and successes. It therefore would be highly inappropriate for me to discuss individual cases; and I will not be persuaded otherwise.

After presenting and defining our university’s quantitative tenure data, I will present an analysis of the data and a discussion of findings. In concluding this paper, I will introduce my thoughts regarding productive measures our academic leadership, faculty governance bodies, and each

individual faculty member can take to ensure that our university is a community that shares in the responsibility for each others' success.

## **DEFINITION OF THE DATA**

At the University at Buffalo, faculty member tenure cases are considered from different ranks across disciplinary fields. These ranks include:

- (1) Promotion to an associate professor or associate librarian rank from an assistant rank;
- (2) New appointments with tenure, at the associate or full professor rank;
- (3) Cases where the initial consideration for tenure is for promotion from an untenured associate professor to a tenured full professor (for example, as found with UB Law School appointments); and
- (4) Cases where a faculty member was appointed to a rank without tenure, and is now being considered for tenure in the same rank.

All of the above types of tenure cases go through the same review process, and all are evaluated with the same degree of thorough attention to the academic excellence of the faculty candidate.

Analysis of the numbers of faculty members who were awarded or denied tenure only include those cases decided by the President. Pursuant to the State University of New York Board of Trustees Policies, only the President has the authority to award or deny tenure. All of levels of review (departmental, decanal, dean, and provost) are advisory to the president.

### **Withdrawals**

Also pursuant to the State University of New York Board of Trustees Policies and the University at Buffalo tenure policy, tenure cases where a faculty candidate has **withdrawn** at any point in the process – including before or after the Provost's recommendation – are counted as withdrawals. The reasons these cases are no longer counted in the tenure tally is because when a candidate withdraws, the candidate is no longer seeking tenure. Without introducing specific cases, reasons for withdrawals (while varying with each individual) may include the candidate's decision to accept another position, or a decision by the candidate to stop the tenure clock with the intent to be considered for tenure in the future.

### **Tabling**

Additionally, tenure cases that are **tabled** at any point in the tenure process are not counted as tenure considerations or withdrawals. Tabled tenure cases can be reactivated when the requested additional material is obtained and then the case is resubmitted to the level at which it was tabled. Tabling a tenure case can and has occurred at every level of review from 2003 to the current academic year.

## Advocacy Process

At any time during the tenure process when a negative recommendation is forwarded, the candidate may appoint an advocate to review his/her dossier and prepare a statement on behalf of the candidate to be included in the dossier. Advocacy may also be recommended when the vote is significantly varied at any given level or between levels. The advocacy process takes place with the PRB chair and the vice provost for faculty affairs before the Provost acts upon it. This process may yield additional information of which the PRB may not have been aware.

## PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

The below table (**Table 1**) represents the numbers and percentages of all faculty members who were considered for tenure between the 2003-2004 and 2007-2008 academic years.

**TABLE 1**  
**ALL TENURE DECISIONS**

<b><u>TOTAL CASES: 2003-2008</u></b>		
Males considered	156	66.4%
Females considered	<u>79</u>	33.6%
<b>TOTAL CONSIDERED</b>	<b>235</b>	
Males who Withdrew	7	
Females who Withdrew	5	
Males Approved	151	97%
Males Denied	5	3%
Females Approved	72	91%
Females Denied	7	9%

## ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

A thorough analysis of the aggregate tenure data between the years 2003 and 2008 reveals the following:

- Nearly **95 percent** of the faculty candidates who were considered for tenure achieved tenure.

- Although the overwhelming majority of candidates were granted tenure regardless of gender, there are slight differences in the percentages for males and females:
  - 97 percent of males were granted tenure;
  - 91 percent of females were granted tenure
  
- The difference in the percentages for males and females is based on relatively small numbers and is not statistically significant. In total, 12 candidates of 235 considered for tenure were denied tenure. These include 5 males and 7 females.
  
- Twelve faculty candidates chose to withdraw from the tenure process. During 2003 through 2008, 7 male faculty candidates withdrew and 5 female faculty candidates withdrew.
  
- In 8 out of 12 cases in which a candidate was not granted tenure, there were negative determinations at a lower level, (for example, a negative department or dean's recommendation or a negative PRB vote).
  
- In 10 of the 11 cases where the PRB made a negative recommendation but the Provost made a positive recommendation for tenure, the PRB was the outlier, disagreeing with positive recommendations of the Dean and the Department.
  
- There were 4 cases out of 235 in which the PRB made a positive recommendation (although with divided votes) and the Dean made a negative recommendation. These cases also had negative or closely divided votes at the departmental and school level. In each of these 4 cases the Provost's recommendation was consistent with the recommendation of the Dean.
  
- There were 6 cases out of 235 in which all votes and recommendations were positive through the PRB level, and where the Provost recommended not granting tenure and/or the President made the final determination not to grant tenure. In these cases, 4 of the faculty members were female, and 2 were male.
  
- In the "internal" tenure cases – all cases in which the faculty candidate is currently at UB in an untenured position and is seeking tenure – a total of 12 faculty members out of 184 were not granted tenure. In these cases, 7 of the faculty members were female, and 5 were male.
  
- In some cases, the advocacy process revealed weakness or strength in the candidate's record of which the PRB was not originally aware. This new information is the most common reason why the Provost may make a recommendation that differs from that of the PRB.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

As I wrote at the onset of this paper, as the University's Chief Academic Officer and a member of our UB faculty, I take extremely seriously my promotion and tenure responsibilities. Each promotion and tenure evaluation is based on an individual analysis of each candidate's record. The decision to grant or to deny tenure is made solely on the basis of the candidate's scholarly record, teaching facility, and service contributions as reflected in his or her dossier and without regard to gender, race, religion, age, political views or any other non-relevant characteristic. There are many levels of review and with each level of review a recommendation is made, but University at Buffalo policy and the State University of New York Board of Trustees reserve the final tenure decision to the President.

It is important to note that the data show that more men than women have come through the tenure process during the last five years. Specifically, 156 men sought tenure and 79 women sought tenure.

The higher representation of men in the tenure process can be attributed in part to hiring decisions made over the last 10 years or more. A greater proportion of men hired into tenure-track positions in the past means there will be a greater proportion of male candidates today.

I am very pleased to note that over the next 10 years we will see a change in that trend as more women are being hired into the faculty. During the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 academic years, 48 percent of our tenure track faculty hires were female.

As part of this analysis, the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs and I took a very close look at the cases in which the faculty members were not successful in achieving tenure, and the cases in which the faculty member withdrew from the tenure process after negative recommendations.

We performed this analysis in order to determine whether there were any common factors or barriers that could suggest areas for improvement in university, decanal, and department policies and practices.

This in-depth analysis revealed that there no gender-based patterns. To the extent that common reasons for lack of success could be identified, they were factors that affected men and women equally. These factors suggest that we need to improve the research excellence in some departments, and improve the mentoring and pre-tenure evaluative feedback for tenure track faculty.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Building a Culture of Excellence and Success**

In our analysis of the faculty tenure data, we found that "although the overwhelming majority of candidates were granted tenure regardless of gender, there are slight differences in the percentages for males and females" who were granted tenure. We, as a university community,

together must work to support a culture of academic excellence and sustained scholarly accomplishments by all tenure track and tenure faculty.

To do this, we must hire the most highly qualified and promising faculty, and nurture and mentor them well; we must have the policy infrastructure in place to foster excellence and success and to provide flexibility where women may experience societal or institutional factors that affect them differently than men; we must provide our junior faculty with constructive evaluative feedback to ensure steady scholarly progress is being made; and we must insure that every department has clear and well-communicated expectations of the high standards for achieving tenure and for remaining productive after tenure.

### **Commission to Focus on Academic Excellence and Equity**

Over the past 5 years, we have made remarkable strides in growing our faculty and in attracting and retaining outstanding scholars, both women and men, to the university. We have also made great strides in diversifying our faculty across the disciplines.

To ensure that the appropriate institutional conditions exist that reinforce our institutional commitment to excellence, integrity, collegiality, equity, and diversity, President Simpson and I, in partnership with the Faculty Senate, will establish a faculty commission, entitled “Academic Excellence and Equity.” President Simpson and I, together with the Faculty Senate, are currently developing the full charge of the commission and inviting faculty to participate as commission members. This month, we will announce the commission purpose, charge, and membership.

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

I know the path to tenure and promotion is both arduous and exciting. I know that gaining tenure is a tribute to one’s successes and the promise of continued success. I also recognize the burden for those who are not granted tenure.

As Provost, it is my foremost responsibility to ensure our university reaches its fullest potential. And, I believe we have made much progress to date. With that said, I do not believe our work in this regard is complete. Each time one of our students falls short of success, each time a faculty member does not achieve tenure or is not promoted, we are reminded that we can not take lightly our responsibility to build a university culture in which each of us has the opportunity to achieve our fullest potential. It is through our faculty’s commitment to sustained scholarly excellence that the promise of our university’s vision and aspirations will be realized.