

# The Logic of the Tenure Decision: *In Dubio Contra “Reum”*

Kurt Weyland, *University of Texas at Austin*

**ABSTRACT** Since tenure decisions concern the award of an employment guarantee, the burden of proof ought to rest on the candidate; in cases of doubt, the vote should be negative. However, a number of corrosive tendencies often weaken the strict application of this principle. To counteract these tendencies, this article advocates a strategy of pre-commitment to fairly objective standards and reliance on the professional judgments of a variety of anonymous outside experts, as reflected in a candidate’s success in the double-blind peer review process.

One of the most important professional judgments in academia is the tenure decision, which is not only a milestone in the candidate’s career, but also has lasting significance for a department and the college or university. In principle, errors in both directions can be costly. On the one hand, a department may lose a faculty member who has had a slow start but is on the verge of transforming great potential into actual production. On the other hand, a department may retain a professor who only narrowly meets the requirements but soon proves unable or unwilling to make significant contributions to the academic vibrancy and visibility of the institution. Rigorous reflections about the tenure decision and the principles and procedures that should guide this process are therefore imperative.

The tenure decision-making process has some distinctive features. Whereas the capitalist market economy tore apart the medieval guild system in most areas of the economy and society, core principles of this system still prevail in spheres that make a special claim to be governed by reason, such as the legal profession and academia. Essentially, assistant professors serve as “journeymen” for a probationary period, and their eventual fate depends on the judgment of the “masters” of their academic guild—that is, associate and full professors. Thus, the fundamental mechanism of the tenure decision is cooptation—that is, selection by the established members of the “guild,” or the already-tenured faculty. The first stage of the tenure decision, which has the greatest impact on the eventual outcome, is the responsibility of a candidate’s department. Specifically, assistant professors’ performance is eval-

uated by their tenured colleagues—that is, their fellow producers. The voice of the “consumers,” the students and readers of the assistant professor’s publications, is considered only indirectly in this process, via teaching evaluations or citation counts. As a result, faculty members who participate in tenure decisions have tremendous responsibility and may therefore find the following reflections interesting and thought-provoking.

Making judicious decisions about the retention of assistant professors is especially important because the academic tenure system has faced intermittent challenges from society at large, sometimes from “populist” state legislatures. These challenges have forced the advocates and (prospective) beneficiaries of the tenure system to try to bolster the legitimacy of the institution, arguing for its crucial role in protecting academic freedom; facilitating unconventional, bold, long-term research projects; and inducing intelligent, promising students to undertake the risky investment in an academic career. The tenure system is best strengthened through the actions of its participants, especially the prudent, impartial, and universalistic application of proper principles and guidelines. A pattern of substantive decisions that consistently promote competent, productive, and innovative faculty members and exclude their unsuccessful peers constitutes the most persuasive defense of the tenure process against societal criticism.

To facilitate proper tenure decisions, this article examines the basic principles and criteria that academics should apply to the decision-making process. I am here writing primarily for faculty at research-oriented institutions, where the attainment of scholarly success and visibility is professors’ single most important task. Teaching is certainly accorded importance as well, but at research-oriented institutions, this activity is clearly of secondary significance.<sup>1</sup>

The following reflections are based on many years of direct and indirect participation in tenure and promotion decisions.

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*Kurt Weyland is a professor of government and Lozano Long Professor of Latin American Politics at the University of Texas at Austin. He has written many books, articles, and book chapters on democratization, neoliberalism, populism, and social policy in Latin America. He is currently working on a book analyzing the wave-like diffusion of political regime changes across countries, starting with the explosive spread of the 1848 revolution in Europe and Latin America. He can be reached at kweyland@austin.utexas.edu.*

Tenured professors commonly examine, struggle with, discuss, and vote on many cases in their departments and the college promotion and tenure committee. Moreover, we are all involved in a much larger set of tenure decisions through the numerous referee reports that other universities and colleges request from us. By preparing these assessments, one can gain insight into the major inputs of tenure decisions, namely candidates' research records and unpublished drafts. As a result of these direct and indirect experiences, this article is informed by a sizable sample of cases from a variety of academic institutions.

#### THE LOGIC OF TENURE

To fully understand the logic of the tenure decision, it is crucial to reflect on what the award of tenure entails. The high degree of job stability that comes with tenure gives the successful candidate a virtual blank check for the rest of his or her academic career, which will last about thirty more years. As a highly valuable guarantee of employment and income in a volatile economy, tenure is a huge prize. What makes this award especially valuable is the combination of this income security with a high degree of autonomy over

their careers. These colleagues occupy tenured positions for many years, and even decades, without making the expected contributions to scholarship in the forms of research and publication, especially after their promotion to full professor. This neglect of the central tasks of a tenured academic imposes significant burdens on colleagues, who are forced to take on additional responsibilities that unproductive faculty cannot properly fulfill, such as the active, intensive training of Ph.D. students and supervision of these. An even more critical element of these situations is the opportunity cost: every unproductive scholar occupies a valuable faculty line that could be filled with a much more promising colleague who could help to enhance the institution's academic visibility and attract better students and faculty.

These simple, straightforward considerations suggest the fundamental principle of the tenure decision: Whoever bids for this 30-year blank check needs to carry the burden of proof and establish his or her academic productivity beyond doubt. The candidate must present a clear, watertight, and unassailable case, based on a weighty promotion file and a reasonable degree of visibility in the field. Given that scholars' research productivity usually

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one's professional life. (Of course, the price for this unusual combination is a comparatively limited salary level.) A professor can focus on various activities—research, teaching, administration—and enjoy wide latitude in determining his or her substantive research and teaching interests. He or she can design his or her own productive activities and, to some extent, control the fruits of such efforts. Academia thus constitutes an island of unalienated labor, in Marxian terms. For all of these reasons, tenure has great value.

This institution rests on a foundation of trust that the now-permanent faculty member will reciprocate by maintaining a successful research trajectory; producing a stream of visible publications; training a new generation of scholars, especially graduate students; and mentoring assistant professors. Yet as all departments with pre-terminal associate professors or real “deadwood” know, there are always tenured faculty who renege on their part of the deal and engage in little, if any, research, publishing only intermittently in third-tier outlets and providing little mentoring of Ph.D. students and assistant professors. Certainly, significant professional incentives and social pressures to not abuse the employment and income guarantee that tenure constitutes do exist, with the most prominent being the subsequent promotion to full professor. However, some academics prove impervious to these pressures, lose control of their agenda, or become too eager to occupy administrative positions at an excessively early stage in

trends downward with seniority (due in part to increasing administrative demands on their time), a tenure candidate must establish a strong record of pre-tenure publications, as well as frame and start a promising project for future research in order to qualify for the grant of employment and income security. Certainly, a convincing track record and significant progress on a major post-dissertation project are not failproof guarantees of future productivity, but they do constitute the best available indications of later success—especially because academic success depends not only on scholarly aptitude and intellectual firepower, but also to a considerable extent on motivation, drive, work ethic, time management, persistence, and self-discipline. Perhaps even more than sheer talent, these attitudes—which are demonstrated through a tenure candidate's past research and publication success—offer a probabilistic guarantee of strong future performance. The “masters” of the academic guild who serve as judges in the tenure decision therefore should insist on a convincing pre-tenure record.

For these reasons, the logic of the tenure decision stands in opposition to the basic maxim underlying the rule of law, which gives the accused the benefit of the doubt: *In dubio pro reo* (when in doubt, in favor of the accused). By contrast, the burden of proof in tenure decisions needs to be inverted: *In dubio contra reum* (when in doubt, against the “accused”). If a candidate's publication record is limited and there is good reason to doubt his or

her prospects of future productivity, the award of tenure is not justified. Gray-zone cases in which the candidate does not rise above the bar set by an institution ought to be turned down. Obviously, this bar differs from institution to institution; a top-10 department will demand more quality and quantity than a lower-ranked institution. And, of course, the height of this bar is never specified precisely, and the resulting gray zone will therefore always have fuzzy boundaries. But when a tenure candidate has not established a strong, convincing case and reasonable doubt exists about his or her future trajectory, the decision should be negative.

This principle of *in dubio contra reum* emerges from the basic logic of the tenure decision and constitutes a fair deal for the candidate. Whoever bids for a huge prize should possess a weighty dossier and the promise of future productivity. From the perspective of a department, this principle is validated by the availability of new Ph.D.s, who are eager to bid for an open faculty line. Because in principle it is not prohibitively difficult to replace a candidate who has been denied tenure with another promising assistant professor, the cost to a department of a tenure decision that errs on the side of excessive strictness is limited, and, for a number of reasons discussed in the next section, such mistakes (i.e., false negatives) are unlikely. By contrast, the opportunity and other costs of an improperly lenient tenure decision are high, because an associate professor who ends up conducting little high-quality research and producing no prominent publications is virtually impossible to remove, given the minimal standards usually applied in post-tenure reviews. By blocking a valuable faculty line for decades, a weak colleague can withhold a significant opportunity from a new Ph.D. who might offer much greater service to the university. Therefore, excessive leniency in a tenure decision, inspired by worries of being unfair to a current assistant professor, can be highly unfair to potential future colleagues, as well as detrimental to a department as a whole.

### CORROSIVE TENDENCIES IN TENURE DECISIONS

The reliance on cooptation by the masters of the academic guild as the principal mechanism of academic tenure decisions can stand in the way of the core principle of *in dubio contra reum*. The result is a tendency toward soft and generous tenure decisions that can hold back a department's progress for many years. Because of mis-conceived notions of solidarity among academic colleagues and several other factors explained in the present section, tenure decisions can err on the side of retaining and promoting "false positives" and questionable cases who do not live up to their academic promise and produce a diminishing stream of publications that soon fades to a trickle.

Bonds of collegiality and the webs of personal friendships that prevail inside academic departments and play a positive role in facilitating scholarly exchanges and activities can make it difficult to put on the blindfold of justice, disregard personal factors, and consider only how the scales actually tip. Senior faculty have a professional obligation to nurture their junior colleagues by supporting, mentoring, and advising them on how best to attain academic success. These faculty are usually on the side of assistant professors, who are particularly likely to introduce new ideas to the field and constitute the future of the discipline. However, at tenure time, established professors have a similarly important professional obligation to make impartial, objective decisions on

whether a tenure candidate has in fact attained sufficient professional success. Tenured professors hope that their junior colleagues will be successful and are eager to help them achieve this success, but when decision time arrives, they must suspend wishful thinking and dispassionately judge whether tenure candidates have established strong records and demonstrated future promise.

Exercising those two different roles—mentor and impartial judge—is uncomfortable. The natural tendency is to retain even those candidates who have not managed to establish a sufficient record. Instead of viewing the candidate objectively, professors may turn a blind eye to the deficiencies and weaknesses in his or her record. This tendency toward leniency is reinforced by the spirit of collegiality and the bonds of friendship that colleagues often maintain. How awkward to run into a tenure candidate whose case one was unable to support! How to react—pretend nothing happened? Have a frank and candid discussion, which undermines professional norms of confidentiality and may expose one to resentment and recriminations? Professors are often tempted to avoid the risk of facing such unpleasant situations, and therefore, when in doubt, they may vote in favor of a candidate, disregarding the basic logic of the tenure decision.

A related obstacle to the rendering of proper tenure decisions arises from the fact that established professors see the current candidate but not the potential replacement who would be hired in case of a negative tenure decision. These faculty know how hard a specific assistant professor has worked and how desperately he or she has tried to get article and book manuscripts placed in prominent, or at least respectable, outlets. The cognitive accessibility of this information tends to turn a tenure decision into a choice of whether to retain a specific person, rather than make an impartial judgment about a "case." By contrast, the budding scholar who would occupy this faculty line if a questionable candidate received a negative vote is, by nature, unknown. How hard that person has worked, how successful and promising he or she is, and how desperately he or she wants to become a productive professor cannot factor into a tenure decision. The immediate availability of information on the tenure candidate but not the potential replacement tends to skew judgment in favor of the former. The thought that goes through a decision-maker's mind is frequently, "Do I want to be (co-) responsible for making a big dent in this candidate's professional career?" He or she does not tend to consider the equally important and relevant question, "Do I want to give a significant boost to the academic prospects of a bright and promising freshly minted Ph.D.?" This bias reinforces the tendency toward problematic tenure decisions by erring on the side of promoting false or questionable positives.

Calculations tainted by self-interest further strengthen the tendency to retain current assistant professors, even if they lack a sufficiently strong record and spark doubts about their future productivity. Because of budget constraints, the possibility of an unsuccessful tenure candidate being replaced by a promising job applicant who is eager to occupy that coveted faculty line may be uncertain. If the university administration cuts the position that a negative tenure decision frees up, then a department and its faculty, especially the specialists working in the candidate's area, suffer a clear net loss. The risk of such a loss makes some professors reluctant to cast a negative vote for a present candidate. The tendency to consider the issue in this light introduces

problematic utilitarian calculations into decisions that, in principle, should be strict and unconditional, addressing whether the candidate under consideration has lived up to the standards set by the department and university. Even comparatively unproductive professors make some kind of contribution, and weighing the risk of their retention against the danger of losing the faculty line therefore tends to lower the standards of judgment and facilitate the promotion of candidates with limited records and questionable promise.

Another factor that increases the likelihood of excessively soft tenure decisions is the prevalence of opportunities for implicit, tacitly understood transactions, which exist in larger departments in particular. For several of the reasons discussed so far, specialists in a candidate's field are more likely than their colleagues in other fields to advocate a positive vote. They know the candidate well, may maintain personal bonds with him or her, are likely to face the candidate on "the day after," and will be most directly affected by the loss of that faculty line. All these factors increase the probability of bias in favor of the candidate under consideration. Professors in other fields are less influenced by the tendencies that run counter to the logic of the tenure decision. However, these individuals also have significantly less at stake and therefore less reason to assert their views. On one hand, they properly defer to the expert judgments of the specialists; on the other hand, they may not want to speak out on tenure cases that lie outside their own specific area. Even more deleteriously, an implicit, tacit understanding may exist in which specialists in other fields approve a tenure candidate in the hope that the experts in that field will support their own candidates in simultaneous or subsequent tenure decisions.

For all of these reasons, an unspecifiable number of tenure decisions run the risk of deviating from the proper logic of *in dubio contra reum*. Although many successful cases arise in which a candidate's record is clearly above the bar and the promise of future productivity is strong, there are also inevitably cases in which candidates fall short of the bar, even if not by a huge degree. By the logic developed in this article, tenure and promotion are undeserved in these cases. But, as just explained, various tendencies arising from the cooptation procedure applied by academic guilds threaten to erode the logic of the tenure decision and create the risk of false positive decisions.

The review of departmental tenure decisions by college-wide promotion and tenure committees, deans, and provosts provides a certain safeguard against this tendency toward excessive generosity, but this filter operates with insufficient stringency. Whereas these additional layers in the decision-making process are less exposed to the direct effects of the corrosive factors previously discussed, they lack the professional expertise to independently judge the quality of the candidate's work and the prominence of his or her publication outlets. When in doubt, they tend to accept the assessments of the candidate's department and outside referees, who are often hand-picked by the candidate and his or her close colleagues, leading the assessments themselves to be inflated. Therefore, higher layers in the tenure process can catch the most clear-cut and egregious instances of unjustified departmental leniency, but cases in the gray zone—the primary concern of this article—have a good chance of passing their scrutiny unscathed. When in doubt, promotion and tenure committees and administrators tend to go along with departmental recommendations, contrary to the logic outlined here.

#### THE LIMITED PROMISE OF THE "IDEAL" APPROACH TO TENURE DECISIONS

In light of the corrosive tendencies just examined and of other features of contemporary academia, the best imaginable approach to making tenure decisions has, in reality, limited promise. Ideally, the most accomplished scholars who have advanced to the top of the career ladder would render judgment on the inherent quality and creativity of a tenure candidate's research and writing.<sup>2</sup> These faculty would assess the true academic contributions of an assistant professor's portfolio, asking questions such as: Has this colleague identified the theoretically most interesting and relevant issues? Has he or she framed and conducted his or her studies well, collecting the most important information and data efficiently and applying the most appropriate and productive set of methods? Above all, has the candidate extracted novel findings in an imaginative fashion and distilled important and provocative insights? In this way, decision-makers would assess whether the candidate has made a scholarly field look differently at a significant topic and opened up new avenues for research and thought. Ideally, a tenure candidate should have left an indelible mark on a reasonably broad area of study, such that nobody could ignore his or her contributions.

Such judgments of the inner quality and unique contributions of a tenure candidate seek to assess the most decisive element of an academic's future career—namely, his or her creative intelligence and drive to use this intelligence to produce major insights. Such an assessment focuses on an assistant professor's thinking and writing and attributes only secondary importance to actual output. Accordingly, one brilliant, truly pathbreaking piece could have more weight than five mechanical, solid, but not particularly imaginative articles that have been published by leading refereed journals. Similarly, a monumental book that is only half-written at tenure time but has the makings of an unrivaled masterpiece could count as more than two volumes that make modest contributions but have been accepted by highly ranked university presses.

With its direct focus on assessing scholarly quality and creativity, this approach to making tenure decisions may seem ideal, and it is therefore embraced by a number of academics. In the real world, however, this approach does not often work well, because established professors are exposed to the problematic tendencies, considerations, and calculations analyzed in the preceding section. Therefore, these faculty run a serious risk of allowing their judgments to be distorted and improperly softened. This danger is especially pronounced because of the difficulty of assessing inherent academic quality. Disciplines such as political science are highly heterogeneous and fragmented. Professionals in these fields embrace strikingly different methods, theories, and approaches. Some prefer quantitative techniques, whereas others find qualitative methods more useful; some adopt rationalist approaches, whereas others find their ideal-typical premises unrealistic, and so on. In addition to this pronounced degree of methodological and theoretical pluralism, the postmodern tendency to criticize universal criteria and standards may create further obstacles to quality assessments.

In this context of pluralism and relativism, how can a candidate's senior colleagues arrive at a reasonable agreement on inherent quality? The "ideal" approach to tenure decisions presupposes consensus about fundamental standards and criteria that is unrealistic today. And, in the absence of a consensus anchoring

direct assessments of academic quality, the judges will remain exposed to the corrosive tendencies that threaten to undermine proper tenure decisions. The divergence of standards and criteria opens the door wide for other considerations to come into play. Seeing their own standards questioned by equally accomplished colleagues, will the individual judges really cling to them and arrive at a negative vote? Furthermore, claims of brilliance often seem designed to rescue assistant professors who have not been very successful in their actual publication efforts at decision time. And how many books-in-progress that have been touted as overturning the conventional wisdom of a whole field end up being far less impressive once they appear—if they ever appear at all?

In sum, inherent quality assessments have a weak flank, especially in disciplines characterized by high levels of methodological and theoretical pluralism. Because they apply soft criteria and rely on subjective judgments in making a momentous decision on a concrete individual—namely, a colleague of several years—they run a serious risk of corroding and deviating from the proper logic of the tenure decision. Too many established professors get wobbly knees and avoid casting a negative vote for an assistant pro-

eral professional journals such as the *American Journal of Political Science* be assigned the highest quality ranking, or are these outlets too dominated by one subfield, American politics, to offer a level playing field to colleagues from other areas of the discipline? For the sake of building a pluralistic, intellectually diverse, and interesting department that reflects the heterogeneity of many disciplines and is fair to assistant professors in a variety of areas, weighting publication within the leading journals of a candidate's subfield appears the more reasonable strategy.

Despite these disagreements and other potential problems of applying proxies that are clearly imperfect, there are considerable advantages to adopting a pre-commitment strategy. Above all, the creation of clear, objective criteria that are defined in universalistic terms before deliberations on any specific candidate begin protect decision-makers against a number of the corrosive tendencies examined previously. By setting general standards and self-committing to their consistent application, the judges in tenure reviews effectively make most of the actual decision before any specific person enters under consideration. The judgment, then, is not about a particular tenure candidate, but about whether this

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fessor whom they regularly see in flesh and blood. The approach to tenure decisions that is in principle ideal is therefore fraught with problems in the real world.

#### **A WORKABLE SECOND-BEST OPTION: DELEGATION AND PRE-COMMITMENT**

For these reasons, a second-best option for conducting tenure reviews that relies first and foremost on more measurable standards is preferable. The most feasible and realistic safeguard against excessively lenient tenure decisions is for professors to pre-commit to a clear standard defined using objective criteria of productivity and publication success, such as a university press book plus a certain number of refereed journal articles, including some pieces in leading outlets; a second major project certified by the scholarly community through the acceptance of a refereed journal article drawn from it; and so on. This standard will obviously differ from institution to institution, depending on current faculty quality and rankings, as well as a department's level of ambition for future improvement.

Certainly, this pre-commitment strategy has potential problems and is far from ideal; in particular, this system must consider quality as well as quantity in order to not deteriorate into mindless, mechanical bean counting. But how to measure quality? Academics frequently resort to proxies, especially the exclusivity, professional standing, prestige, and visibility of the publication outlet. Of course, individuals disagree about the validity and ranking of these proxies. In political science, should nominally gen-

erally, an assistant professor has lived up to the standards that were previously set, have already been applied to earlier cases in the same way, and will be applied equally to future decisions. The burden of the decision therefore does not fall on the judges but the candidate: Did this scholar manage to produce what he or she was supposed to produce, in terms of both quantity and quality?

By using a certain level of productivity and publication success as the principal criterion, the professors participating in a tenure decision effectively delegate the judgment to the true experts—the peers who anonymously review the candidate's article and book manuscripts and evaluate their contributions to scholarship. If a candidate's work has repeatedly overcome the hurdles of the peer review process, especially the double-blind assessments conducted by prominent professional journals,<sup>3</sup> then a great deal of evidence attests to his or her high academic performance and strong prospects of further success. When a variety of extra-departmental judges who are experts in an assistant professor's area of specialization are able to certify the scholarly quality, creativity, and contribution of a candidate's research and writings, the intra-departmental judges can feel confident in supporting his or her promotion.<sup>4</sup> Candidates who establish and demonstrate their standing in the academic community and thus obtain "tenure in the field" as the result of sustained publication success, especially publications in prominent refereed journals, also deserve tenure in their own department.<sup>5</sup>

In these ways, professors largely delegate the effective tenure decision: because the professional judgments of anonymous

outsiders make most of the real assessment, faculty can shield themselves against the corrosive tendencies highlighted previously. In particular, the anonymous, double-blind review process used by refereed journals is designed precisely to focus scholarly assessment on the quality of professional output and preclude consideration of the author's personal characteristics, offering a crucial safeguard against the various factors that tend to weaken the strict application of academic principles. Therefore, judgments based primarily on documentable publication success approximate the logic of the tenure decision more closely than does a reliance on departmental colleagues' own judgment. Of course, since the review process is imperfect, especially in decisions on book manuscripts (see note 3), the judges in the tenure process will always want to conduct their own quality assessments, but this exercise should constitute a secondary consideration. That is, tenure decisions should be anchored by the objective criteria that condense the verdicts of anonymous outside experts and should then be adjusted by the professional judgments of senior colleagues inside the respective department.

By contrast, officially solicited tenure letters are increasingly less useful, because in the age of open-record rules and lawsuits, most scholars are unwilling to write a negative tenure letter or point to serious problems in a candidate's performance and record. Instead, they simply refuse to write on weak, questionable, and "difficult" cases. As a result of this self-selection by potential reviewers, the actual content of tenure letters has limited informational value. Their main contribution is to allow an assessment of whether a sufficient number of prominent scholars from leading institutions have been willing to write a (almost invariably positive) letter—and how many potential referees had to be contacted to obtain the requisite number of letters.

## CONCLUSION

Given the cost of false positive decisions, the cooptation procedure of the tenure system needs to be administered in a more rigorous fashion if it is to retain its academic legitimacy. Tenure plays a central role for universities because it guarantees security and freedom to engage in creative thinking and offers an important incentive for bright students to forego the attractions of much higher salaries in other sectors and invest for many years in specialized academic skills. Therefore, the tenure system needs to be preserved.

At present, tenure decisions work well in the many cases that are clear-cut and beyond doubt. Fortunately, a significant number of candidates manage to establish a strong, impressive record of research and writing, paving the way for uncontroversial judgments. This scenario is the dream of all academics, faculty, and administrators: when a candidate clearly leaps the hurdle, all parties can feel good. Academics therefore root for their junior colleagues to be successful and thus make tenure decisions easy. For a variety of reasons, however, not all junior scholars end up accomplishing this feat. When an assistant professor's difficulties in research and publication are significant and sustained, they themselves often decide to not undergo the tenure process, or if they do, the gap between his or her accomplishments and the university's standards is obvious enough to yield an uncontroversial negative decision.

However, some cases do lie in a grey zone. These candidates may have attained some success in research and writing, but not

enough to make a convincing case for tenure. For instance, they may have published a book but few, if any, articles, or they may have published a number of articles and chapters, but not in leading outlets. In cases that do not quite meet the standards of tenure, a clear reflection on the logic of awarding this huge prize is crucial. Given the 30-year employment and income guarantee that is at stake (revocable only through post-tenure reviews, which tend to apply truly minimal standards), the burden of proof must be on the candidate. Therefore, I argue that the proper maxim guiding judgment ought to be *in dubio contra reum*: when in doubt, a department should not grant tenure.

Yet it is precisely in these cases of doubt that the collegial nature of the tenure process can produce deviations from this logic. Non-competitive decisions on whether to retain scholars who have been members of a department's faculty for years are likely to be biased toward leniency. As this article has sought to explain, the social setting of academia, personal loyalties among professors, the process of voting on a known candidate without considering unknown alternatives, and professional calculations within departments may erode the application of proper standards.

Safeguards against these tendencies toward leniency, which end up restraining a department's collective productivity and performance, are not easy to design, given the obvious difficulties of measuring a candidate's future academic potential. As a less-than-perfect but feasible option, the pre-definition of objective requirements in scholarly research and publication can help counteract these tendencies. Relying primarily on the judgment of outside experts, especially the anonymous reviewers of manuscripts in a candidate's field, can counterbalance the risks arising from the inbred, guild-like nature of the tenure system. Paradoxically, then, the tenure system may operate best if those experts who have the closest knowledge of a candidate effectively tie their own judgment to the decisions of the unknown outside specialists who have evaluated the candidate's work over the years. In other words, scholars deserve tenure in a department only if they have established tenure in their field. ■

## NOTES

I thank James Booth, Gary Freeman, John Higley, James Hunter, Wendy Hunter, and Scott Mainwaring for many thought-provoking discussions and interesting ideas on the topics examined in this article. I am grateful to these colleagues, as well as the anonymous reviewers for outstanding comments on earlier drafts of this article. Obviously, I myself am responsible for any errors or misjudgments that remain.

1. I would argue, nevertheless, that teaching ought to be evaluated in a more serious and valid way than frequently occurs, given that primary significance is attached to students' teaching evaluations, and even basic control factors, such as ease of grading and heaviness of workload, are not considered.
2. I owe this idea and many points of the subsequent discussion to John Higley.
3. Since reviews of book manuscripts are not double-blind; since the circle of competent referees is limited and therefore more likely to include authors' friends and acquaintances; and since authors are usually allowed to suggest reviewers (a relatively uncommon practice for journals), the acceptance of a book by a leading university press constitutes a significantly less valid proxy for academic quality than does publication by a prominent refereed journal. As a result, presses tend to accept more "false positives" than do journals. Because book acceptances therefore constitute a more questionable indicator of a candidate's academic contributions and scholarly caliber, participants in tenure decisions should focus their own assessments of academic quality more on a candidate's book than their refereed articles.
4. I owe this idea to James Booth.
5. I owe this idea and phrase to Jacek Kugler.