Academic Tenure and Higher Education in the United States: Implications for the Dental Education Workforce in the Twenty-First Century

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Abstract: This article reviews the literature related to the evolution and implementation of academic tenure (AT) in U.S. higher education. It is intended to highlight AT implications for the recruitment, retention, and development of the dental education workforce in the twenty-first century and the need for this workforce to implement change in dental education. The dental education workforce is shrinking, and a further decrease is projected, yet the demand for dental education is increasing. AT is becoming increasingly controversial, and the proportion of tenured to nontenured (i.e., contingent) faculty is declining within an already shrinking faculty pool. Confusion regarding the definition of scholarship and its relationship to research and publishing further confounds discussions about AT. Whether the principles of academic freedom and due process require tenure for their preservation in a democratic society is open to question. In view of competing time demands and increasing pressure to publish and apply for grants, factors including the seven-year probationary period for tenure, the decreased availability of tenured positions, and the often perceived inequities between tenured and contingent (i.e., nontenured track) faculty may pose an obstacle to faculty recruitment and retention. These factors may severely limit the diversity and skill mix of the dental education workforce, resulting in a decrease in staffing flexibility that appears to be needed in the twenty-first century. Politics, increasing dependence on grant funding by some institutions, resistance to change, and insufficient mentoring are all stimulating discussions about the future of tenure and its implications for U.S. dental education.

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employment contracts and violation of due process and free speech as protected by the U.S. Constitution. Most cases are brought either by faculty who are denied tenure or by contingent faculty who are not rehired.¹

AT in higher education is an institution in its own right. It is a privilege linked with the mission of the institution and conferred upon a faculty member through a contractual relationship with the institution. Its purpose is to preserve academic freedom for the common good of society. The underlying principle of academic freedom is that faculty must be protected from politics and outside pressures in order to seek and impart the truth. Theoretically, freedom from censure makes higher education an attractive career choice.¹ A criticism of AT is that economic security and intellectual freedom isolate faculty from involvement in the affairs of society, resulting in a detachment that compromises the impact of the professorate for the benefit of society.⁴

History of Tenure in the United States

The premise of AT in the United States today is much as it was when it originated in the early 1900s. Prior to the twentieth century, faculty in most colleges were affiliated with a particular religion. There was an expectation that they would support the views of that religion and its benefactors. The mission of the earliest American universities was the moral and intellectual development of students. It is said that faculty experienced “a call” to teach, in much the same way ministers are drawn to religion. Service became more important as the nation continued to develop, and by the late nineteenth century, research had come to the forefront as scientific methods became more entrenched. Prior to the turn of the century, contractual arrangements between faculty and their institutions were rare because gentlemen’s agreements were the norm.¹ ¹ In 1894, Richard T. Ely, an economist from the University of Wisconsin, was heavily criticized by legislators and the press when he became an advocate for labor strikes and boycotts. It is interesting to note that although Ely did not have AT as we currently know it, he was nevertheless supported by the university.

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) was formed in 1913 by eighteen professors from Johns Hopkins University with the intent to protect faculty from public attacks such as those encountered by Ely. Whether there was a need for faculty protection has been questioned because faculty dismissals were rare prior to the formalization of AT. A 1910 survey of twenty-two universities showed that only faculty at the rank of instructor were appraised annually.¹ Those in the professorial ranks held their positions with “presumptive permanence,” especially if a faculty member was reappointed more than once. The idea that faculty would be required to leave a university (i.e., “up and out”) if not promoted or tenured after a certain number of probationary years (typically five to nine) originated in the twentieth century. During this probationary period, tenure-track faculty can be terminated without cause if peer review demonstrates a lack of progress in scholarship, which is typically defined by institutional policies. This probationary period also allows an institution time to adequately assess a faculty member’s fitness for lifetime employment.¹ ¹ Today, market forces and reduced support of public institutions have caused many universities to be increasingly dependent on grant funds. In turn, research and the number of publications and grants are often key factors in faculty promotion and tenure decisions.⁶

By the end of the nineteenth century the concept of academic freedom was being promoted by the presidents of the University of Chicago and Columbia and Harvard Universities with statements that donors would not be permitted to interfere with faculty positions on controversial issues. The AAUP “General Declaration of Pronouncements,” issued in 1915 by the Committee of Fifteen, contained most of the AT principles still in effect today. Some basic tenets are that universities exist to advance human knowledge (discovery), to provide instruction (pedagogy), and to develop experts for public service. Trustees are to raise money without interfering with professors. Individuals enter higher education not for financial reward but because they are “men of high gifts and character.” Academic quality is protected by faculty peer review committees comprised solely of fellow academicians, and all faculty appointments are made only with the advice and consent of a faculty committee.¹ ¹ A somewhat modified version of the 1925 Conference Statement on Academic Freedom and Tenure was issued in 1940 by the AAUP and the Association of American Colleges (currently AAC&U, the Association of American Colleges and Universities). It stated that faculty are entitled to freedom of discussion in the classroom, that faculty should be cautious when discussing controversial areas that
have no relation to their discipline, and that faculty should use discretion when writing or speaking to avoid a conflict of interest with the institution. At that time, institutions occasionally restricted academic freedom for religious reasons, but these restrictions were to be clearly defined and documented by the institution prior to faculty employment. After AT was acquired, employment was permanent except in cases of incompetence, retirement, moral turpitude, or financial exigencies of the institution, the latter of which had to be well supported.

In 1970 the AAUP/AAC&U statement was further refined with comments about professional ethics and the elimination of exceptions to academic freedom for religious institutions. It was emphasized that faculty are entitled to due process as citizens should their teaching competence come under scrutiny and, in such cases, the AAUP and AAC&U were entitled to investigate. The U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Keyishian v. Board of Regents* (1967) confirmed the concept of due process within the academic community:

The essentiality of freedom in the community of American universities is almost self-evident. No one should underestimate the vital role in a democracy that is played by those who guide and train our youth. To impose any strait jacket upon the intellectual leaders in our colleges and universities would imperil the future of our Nation. No field of education is so thoroughly comprehended by man that new discoveries cannot yet be made. Particularly is that true in the social sciences, where few, if any, principles are accepted as absolutes. Scholarship cannot flourish in an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust. Teachers and students must always remain free to inquire, to study and to evaluate, to gain new maturity and understanding; otherwise our civilization will stagnate and die.

Following World War II, research escalated, and higher education became standard for the masses. Increased demand for higher education in the 1960s created an academic workforce shortage with the interesting consequences that AT became an expected benefit for those entering the academic ranks and it became less rigorous to achieve. AT was implicated in the campus unrest of the 1960s and 1970s to the extent that a number of federal task forces were established to study it. In 1971 the Commission on Academic Tenure (Keast Commission) reported that the problem with AT relates to deficiencies in its implementation and that AT improvement must occur within individual institutions.

Today the National Education Association (NEA) states that “tenure, academic due process, and faculty self-governance promote stability, continuity, and a scholarly environment on campus.” Despite the position of the NEA, a 2005 *Chronicle of Higher Education* survey of four-year college presidents indicated that 53 percent favored replacement of tenure with a system of long-term contracts. From an institutional perspective, the number of tenured faculty positions is declining primarily because it is easier to terminate ineffective contingent vs. tenured faculty, thus providing enhanced hiring flexibility for institutions as their needs change over time. Due to the cutbacks in the number of tenured faculty positions, it has been projected that the total number of tenured faculty will be reduced to 20 percent in the next decade. The AAUP states that “the proportion of faculty who are appointed each year to tenure-line positions is declining at an alarming rate.”

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**U.S. Higher Education and the Case for Tenure Reform**

AT reform is a controversial topic in higher education due to its bureaucratic nature. There is concern that underlying structural problems must be addressed if AT reform is to be successful. It has been suggested that preliminary steps for reform include recognition of the differences among diverse disciplines and assurance of faculty accountability for better defining their tasks and performance standards within their institutions. Common AT criticisms include perpetuation of the “publish or perish” mentality and the perceived subordination of teaching and service to research. The criteria for tenure achievement are somewhat subjective, and they evolve over time as the mission of the institution changes. For this reason it is not unusual for a current candidate’s tenure criteria to be more stringent than those by which peer review committee members were reviewed when they achieved tenure. A continuing dialogue about AT reform within the academic community supports the allegation that AT is too restrictive for the lives of those on a tenure track and that it “often creates inertia for individuals once receiving it.” The fact that academic culture is well known for fragmenta-
tion, isolation, and competitive individualism makes AT reform all the more challenging.18

Effective mentoring is critical for all faculty, especially those pursuing AT: “colleges and universities that flourish help faculty build on their strengths and sustain their own creative energies, throughout a lifetime.”19 Yet there are not enough mentors. At the Academic Ladder website (www.academicladder.com/faculty%10tenure/getting-tenure/what-does-a-tenure-coach), the marketplace makes claims regarding the advantages of a tenure coach: “The journey towards tenure is like a marathon race. You have to maintain your momentum during a long, long run. You need to keep track of many aspects of the race, such as the twists and turns of the road, your competitors and your training. And most world-class runners have a coach. . . . The politics and personalities of a department can be difficult to negotiate—a tenure coach can keep you on an even track.” The comparison of tenure-seeking faculty to marathon runners is apt. Once the race is won (i.e., AT attainment), unless one is terminated for cause, incompetence, moral turpitude, insubordination, or financial exigencies, one is a lifetime member of an elite group of faculty.

The definition of scholarship varies among institutions, and its relationship to AT is ambiguous. A scholar is defined as a learned person, and scholarship as the activities and attainments of a scholar.20 There is a fear among some educators that scholarship would be so compromised in higher education without AT that universities would be reduced to nothing more than vocational, or trade, schools. In his book Scholarship Revisited: Priorities of the Professoriate, Boyer describes the evolution of higher education in the United States and provides a broad, creative definition for scholarship. He draws distinctions between scholarship of discovery (research), scholarship of integration (putting isolated facts into perspective), scholarship of application (service), and scholarship of teaching (pedagogy). Boyer maintains that too much emphasis is being placed on publishing and grant-writing and that faculty should be judged more on their strengths within all of the scholarship categories combined rather than focusing on publications and grants alone.14,19 Today, publication volume at all academic ranks has increased, but many in academia believe the quality is sometimes questionable. In 1998, a group of provosts convened to make recommendations on tenure reform. They concluded that traditional publishing has escalated to the point that publishers are losing money, libraries cannot afford to purchase newly published scholarship, junior professors struggle to get published, and there should be more creativity in faculty evaluation.21

To maintain adequate diversity within higher education, Boyer argues that faculty roles and rewards should be tailored to the type of institution in which they work (e.g., research, baccalaureate). In 2001, the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE) conducted a study of chief academic officers (CAOs) in all types of four-year institutions to assess Boyer’s impact on those faculty reward changes intended to encourage multiple forms of scholarship. With a 50 percent response rate, two-thirds of the responding CAOs indicated that reform had taken place. The most frequently identified reforms were 1) expanding the definition of scholarship in faculty evaluation policies (76 percent); 2) providing incentive grants for multiple forms of scholarship (75 percent); 3) expanding the definition of scholarship in institutional mission and planning documents (45 percent); and 4) developing flexible workload programs (41 percent). The most identified barriers to change involved 1) faculty concerns about unrealistic expectations that they must excel in all areas at the same time; 2) greater confusion among faculty about what really counts for promotion and tenure; 3) vested interest of some faculty in maintaining the status quo; 4) difficulty in expanding a consistent definition of scholarship across the university; 5) confusion about the definitions of teaching, research, and service as scholarship; and 6) continued graduate school focus on and faculty indoctrination in traditional forms of scholarship.22 Boyer noted that after World War II the mission of higher education expanded while the standards used to measure academic prestige continued to narrow, resulting in a professoriate that was more “hierarchical and restrictive.” Faculty survey data reported that 53 percent felt their jobs were a source of considerable personal strain.19

Gershaw states that the public is questioning whether taxpayers should underwrite higher tuition and taxes to support the job security of public university professors.16 Some individuals argue that tenured faculty are exempt from the economic pressures felt by the nonacademic workforce, that incentives for continued scholarship are removed after AT is achieved, and that faculty peers are likely to protect their tenured colleagues should the need arise. Economic protection was one factor in the 1988 decision to restructure AT for public universities in the United Kingdom, a change that made it easier for public universities to dismiss tenured faculty.23 Previously,
removal had been very costly due to organizational statutes that prevented faculty dismissal without remuneration. Prior to tenure reform in the UK, Dnes stated that it was often easier in the United States for faculty to be dismissed due to financial exigency. He went on to say that AT in the United States can be “held to exist even when an employment contract is of a fixed term as long as it is renewable.”

It is noteworthy that when investigation of a tenured faculty is considered appropriate, the high cost of academic due process is so costly and time-consuming that it prevents some investigations.

The issue of AT recently came under attack at the University of Colorado. The university endured intense public criticism when one of its faculty members, Ward Churchill, made questionable comments related to the World Trade Center victims of 9/11. The chancellor conducted an investigation focused upon whether Churchill had exceeded the boundaries of constitutionally protected speech and whether there had been any research or teaching misconduct. The governor publicly threatened legislation to tighten tenure procedures if the university failed to do so independently. The university determined that Professor Churchill’s comments about the victims of 9/11 were protected by the First Amendment, but he was found guilty of research misconduct. The chancellor gave Churchill notice of intent to dismiss in June 2006. The report also recommended that AT policies and procedures be reviewed, which was subsequently done. It is noteworthy that the First Amendment, not academic freedom, provided protection for the 9/11 comments made by Churchill. It is also worth considering whether Churchill’s research misconduct would ever have been revealed were it not for the public outcry about his 9/11 comments.

Data from a U.S. National Study of Postsecondary Faculty indicated that less than one-third of all faculty were tenured in 1998-99. This represents a 3 percent reduction from the 1992-93 study. The reduction was attributed to three possible factors: 1) a change in the number of faculty on a tenure track; 2) an increase in the number of faculty who work in institutions that do not offer tenure; and 3) an increase in the number of part-time faculty. With flagging state support, many institutions are experiencing pressure to ration AT positions for reasons of financial expediency and flexibility in the allocation of academic resources. Between 2001 and 2003, there was an almost 10 percent increase in the number of faculty positions; however, the largest increase was in part-time positions, and the largest area of growth was in the for-profit sector. In the fall of 2003 the percentages of full-time faculty hires in degree-granting institutions, by category, were 1) tenured, 4 percent; 2) tenure-track, 37 percent; and 3) not on tenure track, 59 percent. In 2003, 45 percent of full-time faculty were tenured, and another 20 percent were on a tenure track but not yet tenured. Full-time faculty are more likely to be tenured at public institutions (48 percent), followed by private nonprofit institutions (40 percent), followed by for-profit institutions (3 percent).

There is a decrease in the proportion of tenure to contingent positions and the perception of a two-tier faculty system where contingent faculty are sometimes considered inferior by virtue of the fact that they do not have tenure. Faculty governance documents sometimes provide ambiguous performance standards for tenure-track faculty and inadequate standards for contingent faculty. As a result, some career-oriented faculty unable or unwilling to achieve AT often leave higher education. It is unclear whether the faculty who fail to obtain AT leave because they are unable to achieve it, because they choose not to do research, because they find the cost of academia too high a price to pay compared to the benefits of the private sector, or because of other factors such as politics and workload.

In the United States, approximately 2 percent of tenured faculty are dismissed in a given year. Recently, post-tenure review, a process whereby tenured faculty are reviewed at specified intervals (usually five years) has become more common. Academic institutions in a majority of states have mandated some form of post-tenure review. Its usefulness has been questioned because AT already allows the dismissal of faculty for cause. It has been argued that post-tenure review merely creates additional work and “more guarding of the henhouse by the same foxes.”

One study indicated that workload and attainable criteria for promotion and tenure ranked ninth out of thirty-three factors in the decision of a new faculty member to accept a full-time faculty position. For contingent faculty, the decision whether to go on a tenure track should also be made within the culture and political framework of their institutions. In some cases, “political fit,” defined as the perception of leaders about faculty usefulness in promoting the system and interests of key players, may be more important than job performance. One author stated that AT can be political to the extent that “yearnings to preserve a comfortable environment of orthodoxy trump the interest in maintaining free debate.”

Another author, albeit cynical, commented that “the
university is a cruel institution. It takes the best and the brightest, promises them the world, and then it throws most of them to the dogs.”

If contingent faculty do decide their only option for recognition and career advancement is to go on a tenure track, the likelihood of tenure attainment is guarded if teaching and service are subordinate to research and if AT requires evidence of success in all three areas. Because peer review is integral to earning AT, there are those who claim that new faculty have little incentive to express differing views. Lifestyle pressures, lack of clarity regarding institutional expectations, and isolation from other faculty can add to the difficulties in AT attainment.

There is increasing pressure to eliminate gender bias within the academic ranks. According to officials from twenty-seven major research universities, tenure policies have been described as “a rigid, one-size-fits-all system, with hurdles that are getting tougher and tougher to clear.” A recent report by the American Council on Education and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation stated that women are “driven away from careers at research universities because of the lock-step nature of a tenure-track career.”

The AAUP has expressed concern about the lack of gender equity and considers it the responsibility of each institution to implement policies to reverse the situation. Although Title IX (disallowing gender discrimination) was passed in 1972, women are underrepresented in the tenure ranks and currently hold only 24 percent of full professor positions and 31 percent of tenured positions. The most prestigious and highest paid faculty positions in higher education are dominated by men (i.e., 76 percent). The average salary for women at all institutions and across all ranks is 81 percent that of men. It has been said that “we have structured an academic workplace for men of a bygone era.” The concern is that women and families will opt for a lifestyle with lower-paying, secure, more flexible jobs off the tenure track.

The AAUP contends that “the academy must make further efforts to convey to women that they no longer need to make a choice between raising children and becoming tenure-track faculty members.”

### U.S. Dental Education and the Case for Tenure Reform

Teaching, research, and service are entrenched in dental education, and yet it is known that many dental faculty complain about the time constraints in giving adequate attention to all three because of faculty shortages, clinical teaching demands, and other time constraints. New dental school faculty consistently comment on the lack of time in nearly every aspect of their academic responsibilities.

The escalating emphasis on research, coupled with retirements and a dwindling faculty pool, lead to a proportionate increase in faculty workload. This situation is rarely associated with greater compensation or reduced research demands. Despite the issues of workload, support, and time constraints, new dental school faculty have also reported that loneliness, isolation, and insufficient mentoring are significant problems.

Although it is not clear what impact contingent dental faculty will have on dental education in the future, they are currently playing a vital role in the clinical education of students. The 1995 Institute of Medicine report noted a decline in tenured faculty and suggested that contingent faculty positions be used to enhance overall flexibility in faculty recruitment, patient care, and research. It is recognized that the dental education workforce must consist of an adequate number and variety of faculty “who possess content knowledge, pedagogical expertise, and commitment.” Several studies have reported an increased emphasis for faculty to undertake research activities in addition to numerous teaching responsibilities; however, Sinkford has been quoted as saying that increased emphasis on dental research could affect the hiring of new faculty and faculty development activities.

Kennedy and Hunt proposed seven distinct faculty tracks based on the multiple facets of an institution’s mission: a) research track: usually holds a Ph.D. and devotes most time to externally funded research; b) tenure-track, research emphasis: usually holds Ph.D. and D.D.S./D.M.D. and supports research mission with limited predoctoral teaching; c) tenure-track, clinician scholar: D.D.S./D.M.D. and often specialty status with emphasis on predoctoral teaching and balance among clinical research, teaching, and service; d) tenure-track, clinical emphasis: D.D.S./D.M.D., often with advanced education and emphasis on predoctoral, preclinical, and clinical teaching; e) clinical track: D.D.S./D.M.D. with advanced education in specialty or general dentistry, minimal research, and emphasis on predoctoral, preclinical, and clinical teaching; f) faculty administrator: less than 60 percent of time devoted to administrative responsibilities, and g) full-time administrative: spends 60 percent or more of time with
administrative responsibilities; limited research and teaching. Kennedy and Hunt proposed that use of a multitrack system would allow faculty to contribute in unique ways to the overall mission of their institutions within the scope of their specific track. Ideally, faculty contributions would be based on quality. The institution would value equally the unique contributions of faculty in each track and afford them the same institutional security.\textsuperscript{33}

**Dental Faculty Recruitment and Retention in the United States**

Unless something changes soon, there will be an expanding dental education workforce crisis in the coming decades as the baby-boom generation retires and dental schools face the pressing demographic reality that there are fewer people in the thirty-five to forty-four age range to replace retiring faculty.\textsuperscript{34} A dental education workforce shortage can be predicted on retirement alone, notwithstanding the fact that an inadequate number of younger dentists are choosing dental education as a career. A survey conducted in 2000 found that almost one-third of the nation’s full-time higher education faculty were fifty-five or older.\textsuperscript{35,36} A survey of new dental educators conducted in 2001 indicated that “faculty retention is directly connected to the problems and concerns they experience in the first years of their appointments,” sometimes referred to as a time of “adjustment and disillusionment.”\textsuperscript{29} Failure to recruit, retain, and develop faculty pose a threat to maintaining an adequate dental education workforce to train dentists needed to meet the future oral health needs of the public.\textsuperscript{29} Existing resource constraints limit the ability to train faculty, and according to Trotman et al., “if success in academia is measured in terms of achieving tenure, there are very few successes at present.”\textsuperscript{29} Trotman et al. also said that “it appears that academic dentistry has ceased to be an attractive career option; therefore, new issues that are influencing potential and junior faculty choices must be identified if effective recruitment and retention schemes are to be developed.” Courson has been quoted as saying that the private sector has done a better job of identifying and developing new talent and that academic institutions need to identify “visible career paths” that include work-life balance and various types of compensation and bonus policies.\textsuperscript{37} Common themes that emerged from a qualitative telephone survey of potential and junior faculty were that part-time faculty are better role models, faculty are inadequately trained to teach, there are major stresses associated with the need to publish and obtain grants, there is inadequate research mentoring, and AT guidelines range from rigid to unclear.\textsuperscript{34} McKinney was quoted as saying “It’s tough to jump over a bar that you can’t see, and even harder to clear a bar that is being lifted as you leap.”\textsuperscript{21}

Last year nearly half of all dental deans considered faculty recruitment and retention at their schools as problematic. Data from the 2004-05 American Dental Education Association (ADEA) survey of vacant faculty positions indicated the primary source of new faculty was private practice (61 percent). Conversely, the primary reason for faculty separations (36 percent) was private practice. According to the survey, 9.2 percent of the dental faculty workforce separated (1,039) last year; and the range over the past five years has been 8-11 percent. Almost one in five (18 percent) separations was due to the completion of a fixed term. Those who entered private practice were primarily faculty with lower academic rank (assistant professors, 52 percent; instructors, 33 percent). The ability to meet scholarship requirements was fourth out of nine factors most frequently reported as a consideration in filling a faculty vacancy (30 percent).\textsuperscript{38} This figure may be low because “lack of response to the position announcement” and “meeting the requirements of the position” were the second and third factors listed on the survey, whereas the “ability to meet scholarship requirements” may have been the reason for the selection of those responses. The question that remains is whether faculty who separated could have been retained and, if so, what it would have taken given the competition from the private sector.

As reported in the ADEA vacant budgeted faculty positions report, the typical faculty member who left dental education was a forty-three-year-old, part-time (53 percent), clinical science (90 percent) faculty holding the rank of instructor (33 percent) or assistant professor (53 percent). The typical faculty member who entered dental education was a fifty-four-year-old, part-time (53 percent), clinical science (90 percent) faculty holding the rank of instructor (33 percent) or assistant professor (53 percent). The typical faculty member who entered dental education was a forty-three-year-old, part-time (61 percent), clinical science (90 percent) faculty who was hired at the rank of instructor (23 percent) or assistant professor (55 percent). Female faculty rose from 20 percent in 1994 to 26 percent in 2004.\textsuperscript{34} According to ADEA, in view of faculty retirement and turnover, faculty development and retention programs are essential for maintenance of a quality dental education workforce. The appointment status for 10,760 faculty and the academic rank for 11,479 faculty are listed in Table 1.\textsuperscript{34}
Table 1. Faculty appointment status and rank (U.S. dental schools)

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<tr>
<th>Appointment Status</th>
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<td>Tenured</td>
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<td>Tenure Track</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
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<td>Nontenure Track</td>
<td>Assistant Professor</td>
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*99% due to rounding


AT and Curriculum Reform in U.S. Dental Education

The implications of AT for dental education may not be readily apparent, but change, especially as it relates to curriculum reform, may be thwarted by AT policies that fail to reward scholarship in teaching and learning. Like AT, U.S. dental schools have changed little over the years. The 61 percent of new dental faculty recruited from private practice may use teaching methods based upon their personal experiences, with inadequate regard for evidence-based dentistry and the academic climate.

It seems that dentistry, as a profession, is having an identity crisis in attempting to define its role within the medical and research arenas while also providing dental education curricula that promote clinical excellence using evidence-based practices. U.S. dental schools run the spectrum from affiliation with academic health science centers to affiliation with osteopathic schools, with emphasis on research in the former and teaching and service in the latter. In many dental schools, there is often a dichotomy between research and clinical faculty, as if each is exclusive of the other. If clinical faculty have more student contact time, yet have insufficient time or motivation to pursue improvements in the teaching and learning of clinical dentistry, it seems less likely that curriculum change will occur.

Scholarship at all faculty levels is needed to foster an enhanced learning environment in dental education. Bertolami states that all research qualifies as scholarship, but not all scholarship qualifies as research, and that the goal is not to make every dentist a scientist, but rather a person of science. Faculty are sometimes guilty of equating a “good student” as someone having good hand skills, with minimal regard for their mastery of science. Bertolami says that it is the responsibility of higher education to help students acquire a taste for complexity; otherwise, they risk falling into the category of a trade instead of a profession based in science. If faculty are not broader-thinking persons of science who can relate to students and challenge their imaginations, it appears unrealistic to expect students to practice evidence-based dentistry or be attracted to a career in dental education. In our evolution as a knowledge-based society, if we fail in stimulating students intellectually, we risk losing them from our programs, but more importantly, we risk losing their consideration of dental education as a career. This is especially true given the current levels of student debt, the lure of the private sector, and faculty culpability in not always serving as good role models.

Table 2 presents a number of questions about AT that confront academic dentistry and higher education in general from my perspective. Although there are few, if any, easy answers to these questions, they are intended to provoke thought about future directions in dental education as related to AT.

Conclusion

It is my opinion that, at a minimum, AT is in need of substantive and meaningful reform. It is the “elephant in the room” that is commonly avoided for fear of upsetting the status quo. Because AT is so deeply entrenched in higher education, it is a highly charged issue that can elicit visceral responses from both those who criticize and those who defend it. Faculty who have achieved AT certainly deserve recognition for their efforts, yet the more pertinent issue today is whether AT is obstructing change by failing to adequately encourage the scholarship of teaching and learning, as well as promoting a discipline-based mentality that defies the need for discipline integration. James Duderstadt, former president of the University of Michigan, states that “the singularly productive partnership, the social contract that universities have developed with our society, is not likely to continue on the same terms and conditions that we have relied upon for the past century.” Duderstadt contends that faculty loyalty
lies more with their disciplines than their institutions; but with our rapidly changing society there is increasing emphasis being placed on interdisciplinary scholarship and activities. He goes on to say that “publication and grantsmanship have become a one-dimensional criterion for academic performance and prestige, to the neglect of other important faculty activities such as teaching and service.”

Based on this literature review and discussions at the local and national levels, I would like to offer the following recommendations as a stimulus for further dialogue:

- **Review of AT policies at the institutional level.** Institutions of higher education should undertake a review of their faculty governance documents to ensure that scholarship guidelines for AT are clearly defined. The scholarship of teaching and learning should be adequately recognized and rewarded. Other forms of scholarship besides number of publications and grants should be recognized. AT policies should also be modified to improve gender equity. The recent AAUP Gender Equity Report states that “barriers in higher education . . . place serious limitations on the success of educational institutions themselves.” The same report states, “The academy must make further efforts to convey to women that they no longer need to make a choice between raising children and becoming tenure-track faculty members.”

  The AAUP acknowledges that gender equity is a problem in higher education, but it does not provide solutions as to how women will be spared making a choice between raising children and becoming tenure-track faculty members. Seven year “up and out” policies should be modified, and possibly even eliminated, in order to relieve workforce shortages, gender inequity, and faculty workload. Trends suggest that the upcoming Generation Y will be more attracted to organizations that provide incentives and career path flexibility.

- **Faculty tracks.** Faculty tracks, similar to those suggested by Kennedy and Hunt, should be considered so that faculty have the opportunity to choose tracks that coincide with their strengths. Scholarship commensurate for each track should be defined and encouraged for all faculty members. Consideration should be given to the development of a “dental education” track that specifically integrates best practices in teaching methodology across all disciplines (i.e., teaching the teachers...

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**Table 2. Questions related to academic tenure (AT)**

1. Is AT necessary in a democratic society?
2. What is the definition of scholarship as it relates to AT?
3. What constitutes a scholar, and by what means should scholarship be assessed?
4. How can scholarship be effectively encouraged and rewarded among all faculty tracks, regardless of tenure status?
5. Could curriculum reform be facilitated if teaching and learning are better rewarded in tenure criteria?
6. Assuming that five-year reviews are effective and that academic freedom is ensured for all faculty tracks, is a contract system comparable to AT for all faculty tracks?
7. Do faculty governance documents provide clear, objective, and realistic criteria for AT attainment?
8. Is it realistic to expect clinical faculty to demonstrate evidence of substantial activity in research, teaching, and service?
9. Is AT the best standard for faculty recognition and achievement?
10. Is AT a deterrent to faculty recruitment and retention?
11. Is AT a deterrent to the recruitment and retention of women?
12. Does AT ensure continued faculty activity and development?
13. Should peer review be the gold standard for faculty assessment?
14. Can academic institutions afford a lifetime commitment to tenured faculty and inherent restrictions in hiring flexibility?
15. Which concerns about AT are intrinsic, and which are related to implementation?
16. Does achievement of AT prepare faculty for leadership roles, and is it in the best interest of institutions to limit leadership roles based on faculty tenure status?
17. Are there adequate resources available to provide sufficient mentoring for new faculty, regardless of academic rank?
18. Are current and projected faculty shortages due to career limitations or to an unattractive reward system fostered by common implementations of AT?
how to teach). This step could facilitate curriculum reform and enhance future faculty development by providing teaching mentors for faculty. ADEA could provide the impetus for the identification and initial development of new and existing faculty in a dental education track.

* Academic freedom, job security, and AT. The AAUP should protect academic freedom and due process for all faculty members, regardless of status. If the crux of AT is the protection of academic freedom, then perhaps AT itself is a moot point. Although academic freedom is the mantra of AT, the reality of it is adequate evidence of scholarship within a prescribed timeframe. While job security may be a point of concern if AT were nonexistent, the terms of many contingent faculty contracts afford relative economic security and could be considered a form of “presumptive permanence.”

* Survey follow-up. Data should be gathered about the structure of U.S. dental schools with regard to AT. Special attention should be given to faculty development and curriculum reform efforts as well as gender inequity.

Educators have a choice whether to continue with the “you have to go through this because I had to go through it” mentality or evolve to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. Will dentistry become a trade for those with good hand skills, or will it be preserved as a profession demanding constant realignment of practice with science? The focus should be not on whether faculty members have AT, are on a tenure track, or are nontenured, but on their continued development and contributions to the benefit of their students, their institutions, and society at large. Institutions should level the playing field for existing faculty and rely more on the multiple track philosophy proposed by Kennedy and Hunt and implied in the title of Hillary Clinton’s book It Takes a Village. We need to acknowledge, develop, and reward the individual strengths, leadership skills, and talents of the wide variety of faculty needed in dental education. If we fail to move in this direction it may be said that “we have met the enemy, and he is us.”

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REFERENCES