The question of tenure

Corrections

Before Wood became chairman of the newly created Political Science Department in 1966, Ellwood Fein, Saloma, and Johnson, had been added to the Political Science faculty of the Allegheny Department of Economics and Social Science.

There is no policy against appointing MIT PhD's in political science directly to the faculty of the department. The competitive hiring market for political science scholars is fierce and the competition is fierce for all positions, it occurs infrequently and rarely exceeds a single contract.

By Edward Grosman

This is the third in a series of articles concerning tenure in the Political Science Department. It represents only the author's perspective on tenure and not necessarily that of The Tech.

II. Tenure in Political Science—A Personal Perspective

I believe tenure to be merely a peculiar economic characteristic of the university; by no means is it the solution to university problems. Indeed, as one cannot properly view the tenure of the President of the University as an isolation from the national Movement, one cannot discuss the development and changes in the tenure of Political Science professors. This path sacrificed alternative careers with money, fame, power, and security (as usually institutionalized by a community of men of another nation). It was an extension of "citizenship" for the welfare of the community as well as the security of the professor. So, tenure decisions at this time were a commonueto itself. Because the university represented a distinct way of life involving intense intellectual involvement, prospective professors in the Economics and Social Science departments had a long and arduous road of training (specialization) ahead of them before they could enter the hallowed halls. These path sacrificed alternative careers with money, fame, power, and security. The university was an institution of higher learning, and its scholars had to make the academic pursuit economically secure. Tenure was also an acceptance by a community of men of another nation. It was an extension of "citizenship" for the welfare of the community as well as the security of the profession.

So, tenure decisions at this time were based upon a professor's- contribution to and integration into his academic community. This said, he took in his teaching and his personal relationship to the other professors in that community. Since such communities were small and tightly-knit, integration of new members occurred quickly after arrival or at all. The tenure decision was probably more consensual, more a matter of compatibility than a "rejection" of one professor in favor of another.

However, the academic communication network expanded beyond the individual college when the writing of a professor at one end of a continent could reach and inspire students at the other end during his lifetime. The frequency and ease of this communication increased radically. Through breakthroughs in communications (and transportation) technology, particularly notable were the developments of academic (and professional) journals and publications. A professor's name became associated with his "liquid assets" (lecturing and teaching—oral and written) at a particular university and more with his "solid" assets (books and writings) in his specialty. A national publications market removed the barriers separating universities; with this increased interaction among professors on a regional and national scale, the universities became homes within a national "academic community." This "community" viewed as an increase in horizontal mobility or the establishment of a national (vs. local market) place for academic ideas and concepts.

Meanwhile, American universities had received the aid and encouragement of both business and government; MIT for instance, was established under the Land-Grant Act of 1862. In time of national emergency, these same universities were active in the war effort and in the war-effort business recognized the value of training personnel to take charge of those outside their classrooms and were willing to pay well for their skills in non-academic matters.

This development meant greater vertical mobility for professors than had been the case from their traditional dependance on academia. These two developments shifted the relative isolationism of the universities that had characterized their existence for centuries. A professor now competes on an open market across the nation for jobs in corporate bodies, including universities. Because of this, "tenure's" crime significantly relates to his achievements, professional competence in his specific professional area rather than his performance as a teacher. The ethos of these men is no longer Scholasticism and teaching, but professionalism and scholarship.

In short, as the professional outlook has changed, the historical justification for tenure has disappeared. Professors have acquired mobility and flexibility, the absence of which tenure was intended as a compensation; faculty are currently affiliated with a particular university and have moved more than communal.

However, tenure has taken on new forms. It has been awarded by tenure committees (as opposed to the department with which one was affiliated) in its present form, making it a job to be awarded to (or valued by) a community of junior faculty members to stay on; the status of appointment to such a prestigious post is an inducement to remain. However, because professors often are offered tenures by a number of universities concurrently, the professor may actually be free to select the particular school he chooses. For example, in 1968 two tenured political science professors were offered by their department either to remain and hope to be promoted to tenure or to resign; both chose to leave.

Furthermore, universities are tenure at a quality control device to ensure that their staff is of the highest caliber. In this sense, tenure represents a "local license" for the university in education, which has been not- insurable in its (e.g. AAPS) refusal to consider the practice of licensing in the professions. Tenure might best be seen as a "by-passing system" for the cream of academia. However, as with all tenured positions, tenure has been awarded, the universities lose most of its leverage on a professor's performance. A tenure is a discriminatory-rewards system, people can argue pro- and-con the need for such a system, the validity of choosing particular professors differentiating standards and the reliability of these criteria.

Alternatively, some state that tenure is necessary for the preservation of "academic freedom." However, academic freedom is an honor and desired by students and faculty as well as tenured faculty. One might even consider tenure as a threat to academic freedom as it often has been perceived (in the tenured teacher) to reward conformity and punish creativity and diversity; Nisket, "Its [tenure's] crime is not in its own doing, but in its creativity." However, tenure could be used to reward this creativity. If tenure was eliminated, the teacher would have more freedom, but this does not mean that they would be more creative than at present. Scholarly creativity is a necessary part of the individual, independent of the need for tenure.

What I think disturbs students most about tenure is the guilt the student feels as a criterion in tenure decisions. One of the reasons (rationalization) that "tenure's" existence has been seemingly ignored by the department is the difficulty and ambiguity of defining and applying this standard (this is especially applicable to task for behavioralists). Hexter writes, "We need a criterion of "teaching ability" above, ceteris paribus, should a university give tenure to (or value that person more highly) the excellent lecturer who is a poor seminar leader. In this way, the poor lecturer who is an excellent seminar teacher is more advanced in his field and more in their area of expertise. For the faculty to rationalize the absence of "teaching ability" means to recessfully provide for the poor lecturer who is an excellent seminar teacher.

The Political Science Department is currently considering the "teaching ability" of the professor. To this end, it was considered that the presence of Fein, Johnson, and Saloma's ambiguous and un- monitored faculty members to assure those observations. If stu- dents wish to modify the present system of tenure, they face the procedural difficulty of discovering the number of students willing to have a professor's post be examined by a panel of other professors. The procedure for making such a decision should not be underestimated.

In short, this time seems amenable to new proposals, with the hope of making this strategy at present should not be underestimated. Before all, it is the "tenure" of the students, their faculty. At this time, the institution of tenure has been abandoned, and there are no more tenure positions available. To this end, one might consider the idea of tenure as a way of changing the present system.

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