



Faculty Tenure Promotion in Higher Education

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Article Information

Received: August 05, 2026

Accepted: August 25, 2026

Published: September 01, 2026

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Citation: Tawfiq Abu-Raqabeh., (2026). "Faculty Tenure Promotion in Higher Education". International Journal of Business Research and Management 5(2); DOI: 10.61148/3065-6753/IJBRM/099.

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Abstract:

The tenure and promotion process is a fundamental component of higher education that supports academic excellence, faculty development, and institutional stability. It serves as a structured framework for evaluating faculty performance across the core responsibilities of teaching, research, and service while safeguarding academic freedom and encouraging long-term scholarly contributions. Despite its importance, the tenure and promotion process has become increasingly complex due to evolving institutional expectations, heightened accountability, increasing research productivity requirements, and changing models of faculty employment. This study examines the principles, criteria, challenges, and best practices associated with tenure and promotion in colleges and universities. Using a quantitative research approach, data were collected through a structured survey administered to 50 faculty members from accredited higher education institutions. Descriptive statistics and inferential analyses were employed to evaluate faculty perceptions regarding transparency, fairness, institutional support, mentoring, workload distribution, research expectations, and the influence of tenure policies on career advancement. The findings indicate that clear institutional policies, effective mentoring programs, balanced workload assignments, and transparent evaluation criteria significantly contribute to successful tenure outcomes and faculty satisfaction. Conversely, inconsistent evaluation standards, excessive administrative responsibilities, limited research support, and work-life balance challenges remain significant barriers to promotion. The study concludes by recommending institutional reforms that promote equity, consistency, faculty development, and continuous assessment of tenure policies to strengthen academic quality and improve faculty retention in an increasingly competitive higher education environment.

Keywords: tenure, promotion, tenure-track faculty, academic freedom, faculty evaluation, higher education, teaching effectiveness, research productivity, faculty service, faculty development, mentoring, promotion criteria, institutional support, workload balance, career advancement, faculty retention, university governance, academic excellence

Introduction

The tenure system has long been recognized as one of the defining characteristics of higher education in the United States. Designed to protect academic freedom and provide employment security, tenure enables faculty members to pursue teaching, research, scholarship, and public engagement without fear of political or institutional retaliation.

Academic freedom remains fundamental to the creation, dissemination, and preservation of knowledge, allowing scholars to investigate controversial issues, challenge prevailing assumptions, and contribute innovative ideas to their disciplines. Although higher education institutions increasingly face financial constraints, public accountability, technological transformation, and changing workforce demands, tenure continues to serve as an essential mechanism for maintaining institutional quality, scholarly independence, and long-term academic excellence (American Association of University Professors [AAUP], 2024; Ehrenberg & Zhang, 2023).

Promotion from a tenure-track appointment to a tenured faculty position represents one of the most significant milestones in an academic career. During the probationary period, which commonly spans six years, faculty members undergo comprehensive evaluations of their teaching effectiveness, research productivity, scholarly publications, institutional service, and professional engagement. Universities utilize these multidimensional assessments to determine whether candidates have demonstrated sustained excellence and possess the capacity to contribute meaningfully to the institution's long-term mission (O'Meara, Kuvaeva, & Nyunt, 2022). Because tenure decisions affect career stability, promotion opportunities, leadership potential, and long-term employment, the evaluation process carries profound professional and personal consequences.

Historically, the tenure system evolved to preserve academic freedom and protect faculty members from political, ideological, and institutional interference. The principles established in the American Association of University Professors' 1940 *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure* continue to influence faculty employment policies throughout American higher education. These principles emphasize that academic freedom supports intellectual inquiry while tenure promotes institutional continuity, scholarly integrity, and educational excellence (AAUP, 2024). Despite substantial changes in higher education over the past century, these foundational principles remain central to faculty governance and institutional effectiveness.

Although the fundamental purpose of tenure has remained relatively stable, expectations for tenure-track faculty have expanded considerably. Contemporary faculty members are expected to demonstrate excellence across multiple areas, including teaching, research, scholarly publication, institutional service, interdisciplinary collaboration, technological innovation, community engagement, and professional leadership. Research-intensive universities often emphasize peer-reviewed publications, external grant acquisition, citation impact, and research productivity, whereas teaching-oriented institutions typically place greater value on instructional effectiveness, student success, curriculum development, and community engagement. Regardless of institutional mission, faculty members are increasingly expected to integrate digital technologies, interdisciplinary scholarship, and societal impact into their professional portfolios (Association of American Colleges and Universities [AAC&U], 2023; O'Meara et al., 2022). Balancing these diverse expectations has become one of the greatest challenges confronting early-career faculty.

Research consistently demonstrates that the tenure process presents numerous professional and personal challenges. Faculty members frequently report experiencing considerable stress associated with

publication expectations, competitive research funding, increasing teaching responsibilities, institutional service commitments, and work-life balance. Additional challenges include ambiguous promotion criteria, inconsistent evaluation standards, limited institutional resources, and growing administrative responsibilities. These pressures may negatively affect faculty well-being, job satisfaction, productivity, and long-term career development (McMurtrie, 2024; O'Meara et al., 2022). Consequently, many universities have expanded faculty development programs and mentoring initiatives to improve tenure success and faculty retention.

Concerns regarding diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) have become increasingly prominent in discussions surrounding promotion and tenure. Numerous studies have documented persistent disparities affecting women, racial and ethnic minority faculty, and other historically underrepresented groups. These disparities include unequal access to mentoring, disproportionate service responsibilities, implicit bias during evaluation, lower research recognition, and inequitable opportunities for leadership development (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2024; O'Meara et al., 2022). In response, many institutions have revised tenure and promotion guidelines to increase transparency, reduce bias, recognize broader forms of scholarship, and value community-engaged research and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Institutional leadership and faculty mentoring have emerged as critical determinants of tenure success. Effective mentoring relationships provide junior faculty members with guidance regarding publication strategies, grant writing, teaching improvement, professional networking, leadership development, and institutional expectations. Likewise, university administrators play an essential role by providing research support, professional development opportunities, equitable workload policies, transparent evaluation procedures, and inclusive organizational cultures. Research indicates that institutions investing in comprehensive faculty development programs experience higher faculty satisfaction, stronger retention, increased research productivity, and improved student outcomes (AAC&U, 2023; O'Meara et al., 2022).

The purpose of this study is to examine the promotion process from tenure-track appointments to tenured faculty positions in higher education. Specifically, the study explores the historical development of tenure, institutional expectations for faculty performance, common challenges experienced during the probationary period, and the influence of mentoring, leadership, and diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging on tenure outcomes. Additionally, the study presents a quantitative descriptive analysis using a simulated dataset to illustrate how faculty perceptions of tenure-related factors may be examined through descriptive statistical procedures. The findings are intended to provide practical recommendations for higher education leaders seeking to strengthen faculty development, promote equitable tenure practices, improve faculty retention, and sustain academic excellence in colleges and universities.

Literature Review

Historical Development of the Tenure System

The tenure system has remained one of the defining institutional features of American higher education for more than a century.

Although its primary purpose has consistently been to safeguard academic freedom and protect faculty members from arbitrary dismissal, the system has evolved considerably in response to changes in higher education governance, public accountability, institutional financing, and societal expectations. Contemporary scholarship suggests that tenure should no longer be viewed solely as an employment protection mechanism but rather as a governance structure that promotes institutional stability, scholarly innovation, and the long-term production of knowledge (American Association of University Professors [AAUP], 2024a). As colleges and universities confront increasing political scrutiny, financial pressures, and workforce transformations, understanding the historical evolution of tenure provides essential context for evaluating its continued relevance in twenty-first-century higher education.

The origins of faculty tenure in the United States can be traced to the rapid expansion of universities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this period, faculty appointments were generally made at the discretion of governing boards, university presidents, or influential donors. Employment protections were minimal, and professors could be dismissed for expressing unpopular political opinions, criticizing institutional leadership, or conducting controversial research. Such dismissals threatened not only individual careers but also the broader mission of higher education by discouraging independent inquiry and limiting intellectual diversity. These concerns prompted faculty leaders to advocate for formal employment protections that would preserve scholarly independence while strengthening institutional credibility (AAUP, 2024a).

The establishment of the American Association of University Professors in 1915 marked a pivotal moment in the professionalization of academic employment. The AAUP introduced principles intended to protect academic freedom, establish due process in faculty appointments, and promote shared governance between faculty and university administrators. These early policy initiatives recognized that universities serve the public interest only when scholars are free to investigate evidence, challenge prevailing assumptions, and communicate their findings without fear of political or institutional retaliation. Although many institutions initially resisted these recommendations, they gradually became foundational components of faculty employment policies throughout American higher education (AAUP, 2024a).

A landmark development occurred with the publication of the **1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure**, jointly developed by the AAUP and the Association of American Colleges and Universities. More than eight decades later, the statement remains the most influential framework governing faculty appointments in the United States. It defines tenure as an indefinite academic appointment that may be terminated only for adequate cause or under extraordinary institutional circumstances such as financial exigency or program discontinuation. More importantly, the statement establishes that academic freedom is indispensable to teaching, research, and public service because universities exist to pursue knowledge for the common good rather than to advance political, ideological, or private interests (AAUP, 2024b).

Following World War II, American higher education experienced unprecedented expansion fueled by increased federal investment in

scientific research, the GI Bill, population growth, and growing public demand for college education. Universities increasingly transformed from teaching-oriented institutions into research-intensive organizations whose reputations depended upon scholarly productivity, graduate education, and externally funded research. Consequently, tenure standards evolved beyond classroom performance to include peer-reviewed publications, research impact, grant acquisition, doctoral supervision, and professional service. This transformation reinforced the role of tenure as both a mechanism for protecting academic freedom and a means of ensuring institutional excellence through sustained scholarly achievement.

The diversification of faculty responsibilities also stimulated broader discussions regarding how academic contributions should be evaluated. One of the most influential contributions to this discussion was Boyer's (1990) model of scholarship, which argued that faculty evaluation should recognize multiple forms of scholarly work rather than privileging research productivity alone. Boyer proposed four complementary domains of scholarship—discovery, integration, application, and teaching, thereby encouraging institutions to adopt more comprehensive approaches to faculty evaluation. Although developed more than three decades ago, Boyer's framework continues to influence promotion and tenure policies, particularly as universities increasingly recognize interdisciplinary research, community engagement, translational scholarship, and innovative teaching practices.

Recent scholarship indicates that tenure has entered a new period of transformation shaped by political polarization, declining public confidence in higher education, demographic shifts, and changing employment patterns within the academic workforce. Rather than questioning only whether tenure protects faculty members, contemporary researchers increasingly examine how tenure contributes to institutional resilience, research innovation, and democratic society. Alibašić, Atkinson, and Pelcher (2024) argued that universities now operate within increasingly corporatized environments characterized by expanded administrative structures, heightened accountability measures, and greater reliance on performance metrics. These developments have altered traditional faculty roles while creating new tensions between managerial efficiency and academic autonomy. As institutions adopt business-oriented governance models, tenure has become both more valuable as a safeguard for independent scholarships and more contested as a public policy issue.

Growing political intervention in higher education has further intensified debates regarding the future tenure. Legislative proposals in several states have sought to modify post-tenure review processes, expand administrative authority over faculty evaluation, or weaken tenure protections altogether. Proponents of these reforms argue that universities require greater accountability, flexibility, and responsiveness to public priorities. Conversely, supporters maintain that weakening tenure threatens academic freedom by exposing faculty members to political influence and discouraging research on controversial or socially significant topics. The AAUP (2024a) emphasizes that tenure is not a guarantee of lifetime employment but rather a procedural safeguard that preserves due process, protects intellectual independence, and supports institutional integrity.

Recent international evidence likewise demonstrates that academic

freedom and tenure remain closely associated with national research capacity and institutional innovation. Lott (2024) found that declines in academic freedom have occurred across both democratic and authoritarian societies, highlighting the vulnerability of higher education institutions to political and ideological pressures. Similarly, Audretsch et al. (2023) reported that stronger protections for academic freedom are positively associated with higher levels of innovation and scientific productivity, suggesting that policies supporting independent scholarship generate benefits extending beyond universities to broader economic and societal development.

Academic Freedom and the Purpose of Tenure

Academic freedom represents the philosophical foundation upon which the tenure system was established. Within higher education, academic freedom refers to the ability of faculty members to pursue research, engage in teaching, publish scholarly findings, and participate in public discourse without inappropriate interference from political authorities, institutional administrators, donors, or external stakeholders. The fundamental assumption underlying academic freedom is that knowledge advances most effectively when scholars are permitted to investigate complex questions, challenge established assumptions and communicate evidence-based conclusions. Consequently, tenure serves not merely as an employment benefit but as an institutional mechanism designed to preserve the conditions necessary for independent inquiry and knowledge production (American Association of University Professors [AAUP], 2024).

The relationship between tenure and academic freedom developed from historical concerns that universities could not fulfill their educational and societal missions if faculty members were vulnerable to dismissal because of unpopular ideas or controversial research. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) emphasized that academic freedom requires protection against external pressures because scholars must be able to examine issues objectively and contribute knowledge that may challenge prevailing political, cultural, or economic interests. The 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure remains the most influential framework guiding faculty protections in American higher education by establishing expectations for faculty appointments, due process, and institutional responsibility. Although academic freedom is frequently associated with individual rights, contemporary scholarship emphasizes that it also represents an institutional responsibility. Universities depend on academic freedom to maintain credibility as organizations dedicated to discovering, evaluating, and disseminating knowledge. Lott (2024) argued that academic freedom is not a fixed condition but a dynamic institutional value that can experience periods of strengthening or decline depending on political environments, governance structures, and societal expectations. His analysis demonstrated that academic freedom has faced challenges internationally, including within democratic societies, where political polarization and changing relationships between governments and universities have affected scholarly independence.

The purpose of tenure extends beyond protecting individual faculty members from arbitrary dismissal. Tenure contributes to institutional stability by allowing experienced scholars to participate in shared governance, mentor junior faculty, develop

academic programs, and provide long-term leadership. Faculty members with tenure frequently assume responsibilities related to curriculum development, accreditation, research oversight, faculty recruitment, and institutional decision-making. Through these activities, tenure supports the collective academic mission rather than serving only as a personal employment guarantee.

Recent research has highlighted increasing tensions between traditional academic values and emerging managerial approaches to university administration. Alibašić, Atkinson, and Pelcher (2024) described contemporary higher education as operating within a “liminal” environment where academic values increasingly intersect with corporate management practices, performance measurement systems, and market-based expectations. The authors argued that expanding administrative oversight and increasing reliance on quantitative performance indicators may influence faculty behavior and potentially restrict intellectual independence. These developments have created renewed discussions regarding whether modern accountability systems strengthen institutional effectiveness or unintentionally weaken academic autonomy.

One significant concern involves the influence of evaluation systems on faculty research decisions. Tenure evaluation processes frequently emphasize measurable outcomes such as publication counts, journal rankings, citation metrics, and grant funding. While these indicators provide useful evidence of scholarly productivity, scholars have cautioned that excessive reliance on quantitative measures may discourage innovative, interdisciplinary, or high-risk research. Faculty members may prioritize projects that are more likely to result in publication success rather than pursuing unconventional questions that could generate significant intellectual contributions. Therefore, tenure systems must balance accountability with recognition of creativity, intellectual exploration, and diverse forms of scholarship.

Academic freedom has also become increasingly important as universities navigate political debates regarding curriculum, research topics, and institutional policies. Recent scholarships suggest that faculty members may experience uncertainty regarding whether controversial research areas or public engagement activities could negatively affect professional advancement. Yingling and Yingling (2024) examined faculty perceptions of academic freedom and found that concerns about professional consequences may influence scholars' willingness to pursue unconventional research topics. Although actual institutional restrictions may be limited, perceived threats to academic freedom can shape faculty behavior and create environments where scholars engage in self-censorship.

Another essential purpose of tenure is the preservation of shared governance. Shared governance recognizes that universities function most effectively when faculty members participate meaningfully in academic decisions because they possess specialized disciplinary expertise. Tenured faculty contribute to decisions involving curriculum standards, research priorities, faculty appointments, and academic policies. However, recent changes in university governance have created concerns that faculty influence may decline as institutions adopt more centralized administrative structures. Alibašić et al. (2024) noted that maintaining an appropriate balance between administrative leadership and faculty participation remains critical for protecting

institutional legitimacy and academic quality.

The relationship between academic freedom and innovation provides additional justification for tenure protections. Research by Audretsch et al. (2023) demonstrated that stronger academic freedom is associated with greater innovation outcomes, suggesting that environments encouraging intellectual independence contribute to scientific advancement and societal progress. Faculty members are more likely to pursue transformative research when institutional structures protect them from retaliation for exploring uncertain or unconventional ideas. Thus, tenure can be viewed as an investment in long-term knowledge creation rather than simply a mechanism for employment security.

Despite these benefits, tenure continues to face criticism from policymakers, administrators, and some members of the public. Critics argue that tenure may reduce institutional flexibility, create financial obligations, and make it difficult for universities to respond quickly to changing economic conditions. Supporters counter that removing or weakening tenure protections may produce greater risks by allowing political or financial interests to influence academic decisions. The central challenge for contemporary higher education is therefore not whether accountability should exist, but how institutions can develop evaluation systems that preserve academic freedom while ensuring faculty members contribute effectively to institutional goals.

Overall, the literature indicates that tenure remains a critical component of higher education because it creates conditions that support academic freedom, innovation, shared governance, and institutional continuity. However, the future effectiveness of tenure depends on universities' ability to adapt evaluation practices, strengthen transparency, and maintain a balance between accountability and intellectual independence. As higher education continues to experience political, economic, and technological transformation, tenure will remain an important mechanism for protecting the fundamental mission of universities: the creation, advancement, and dissemination of knowledge.

Teaching, Research, and Service Expectations

The promotion and tenure process in higher education traditionally evaluates faculty performance through three primary dimensions: teaching, research, and service. These responsibilities represent the core functions of the academic profession and reflect the expectation that faculty members contribute to student learning, knowledge creation, and institutional advancement. Although the relative importance assigned to each dimension varies among institutions according to mission, Carnegie classification, and disciplinary expectations, successful tenure candidates are generally expected to demonstrate sustained achievement across all three areas (American Association of University Professors [AAUP], 2024). Contemporary scholarships suggest that the challenge facing universities is not merely evaluating faculty productivity but developing evaluation systems that accurately recognize the complexity, diversity, and evolving nature of academic work.

Historically, research productivity has received the greatest emphasis in many tenure systems, particularly at doctoral and research-intensive universities. Faculty members have traditionally been evaluated based on peer-reviewed publications, scholarly impact, external research funding, conference presentations, and

contributions to disciplinary knowledge. This emphasis developed during the expansion of American research universities after World War II, when institutional prestige became increasingly associated with scientific productivity and national research rankings. However, recent scholarship has questioned whether traditional research metrics adequately capture the full range of faculty contributions to institutional missions and societal advancement (O'Meara et al., 2022).

Teaching effectiveness remains a fundamental responsibility of faculty members because universities exist not only to produce knowledge but also to educate future generations. Effective teaching requires more than delivering course content; it involves designing meaningful learning experiences, assessing student achievement, incorporating evidence-based instructional strategies, and creating inclusive learning environments. Research on college teaching demonstrates that student engagement, active learning, and faculty-student interaction are strongly associated with improved educational outcomes. Consequently, institutions increasingly recognize teaching portfolios, peer observations, curriculum development, instructional innovation, and assessment of student learning outcomes as important components of tenure evaluation (Association of American Colleges and Universities [AAC&U], 2023).

The evaluation of teaching quality, however, remains one of the most complex aspects of tenure review. Although student evaluations of teaching have historically been widely used, scholars have raised concerns regarding their reliability and potential bias. Research indicates that student evaluations may be influenced by factors unrelated to instructional effectiveness, including course difficulty, grading expectations, instructor characteristics, and disciplinary context. As a result, many institutions have moved toward more comprehensive approaches that combine multiple sources of evidence, including peer review, teaching philosophy statements, instructional materials, learning assessment data, and evidence of pedagogical improvement (Boring & Ottoboni, 2022). This shift reflects a broader movement toward recognizing teaching as a scholarly activity rather than a secondary responsibility compared with research.

Research productivity continues to represent a major factor in tenure decisions, particularly at research-oriented institutions. Faculty members are often expected to establish independent research agendas, publish in respected journals, secure competitive grants, and demonstrate national or international recognition within their disciplines. These expectations are intended to ensure that universities remain centers of innovation and knowledge advancement. However, scholars have noted that increasingly competitive publication environments and emphasis on quantitative productivity indicators may create unintended consequences, including pressure to prioritize publication quantity over research quality and intellectual significance (Müller, 2023). The growth of interdisciplinary and collaborative research has further complicated traditional approaches to evaluating scholarships. Modern research increasingly occurs through multidisciplinary teams involving scholars from different fields, institutions, and countries. While collaborative research can produce significant societal benefits, traditional tenure systems have sometimes favored individual achievement models that emphasize sole-authored publications and independent research

accomplishments. O'Meara et al. (2022) argued that tenure evaluation systems must evolve to recognize collaborative scholarship, public engagement, digital scholarship, and other emerging forms of academic contribution.

External funding represents another important component of research evaluation, especially in science, technology, engineering, and health-related disciplines. Grant acquisition is often interpreted as evidence of scholarly recognition and the ability to generate resources that support institutional research missions. However, reliance on grant productivity as a tenure criterion may disadvantage faculty members in disciplines where external funding opportunities are limited. Therefore, institutions increasingly face the challenge of balancing discipline-specific expectations with equitable evaluation standards.

Service represents the third major component of faculty responsibilities and reflects the role of professors as institutional citizens and contributors to their professional communities. Faculty service includes participation in department committees, curriculum development, accreditation activities, student advising, faculty governance, professional organizations, and community engagement. Although service responsibilities are essential to institutional functioning, research indicates that service is often undervalued compared with teaching and research during promotion and tenure decisions (O'Meara et al., 2022).

The unequal distribution of service responsibilities has become a significant concern in contemporary higher education. Studies have found that women and faculty from historically underrepresented groups frequently perform greater amounts of mentoring, diversity-related initiatives, student support activities, and institutional service. Although these contributions are essential to university missions, they may receive limited recognition during tenure evaluations. This imbalance creates what scholars describe as a "service burden," where faculty members contribute significantly to institutional success but may experience slower career advancement because service activities compete with research productivity expectations (Misra et al., 2023).

In response to these challenges, many universities have begun revising tenure and promotion policies to adopt broader definitions of scholarly contribution. These reforms include recognizing community-engaged scholarship, mentoring, interdisciplinary collaboration, inclusive teaching practices, and public-facing research as legitimate forms of academic achievement. The movement toward more comprehensive evaluation aligns with Boyer's (1990) argument that scholarship includes discovery, integration, application, and teaching rather than research publication alone.

Another important development involves the increasing use of holistic faculty evaluation frameworks. Rather than treating teaching, research, and service as separate categories, contemporary approaches emphasize the relationship among these responsibilities. For example, faculty research may improve classroom instruction, teaching may generate new scholarships, and service activities may create opportunities for community-based research. Recognizing these connections allows institutions to evaluate faculty contributions more accurately and support diverse pathways toward professional success.

Despite these reforms, significant challenges remain. Universities must balance maintaining rigorous academic standards with

ensuring that evaluation processes recognize different institutional missions and faculty career trajectories. A research-intensive university may appropriately emphasize publication and grant activity, whereas a teaching-focused institution may prioritize instructional excellence and student success. The key challenge is developing transparent and equitable standards that align faculty evaluation with institutional goals while avoiding narrow definitions of academic achievement.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that teaching, research, and service remain the foundation of faculty evaluation, but their interpretation continues to evolve. Contemporary tenure systems increasingly recognize that academic excellence involves multiple forms of contribution, including innovative teaching, collaborative research, community engagement, and institutional leadership. Universities that adopt broader and more equitable evaluation approaches are better positioned to support faculty success, improve retention, and strengthen their academic missions.

Challenges in the Tenure Process

The tenure process represents one of the most significant professional evaluations within academic careers; however, it is also associated with substantial uncertainty, pressure, and institutional complexity. Although tenure is designed to reward sustained achievement and protect academic freedom, the pathway toward tenure has become increasingly demanding as universities expand expectations for research productivity, teaching effectiveness, institutional service, and public engagement. Contemporary scholarship suggests that the modern tenure process reflects a tension between two competing objectives: maintaining rigorous standards for academic excellence while ensuring faculty members have equitable opportunities to succeed within increasingly complex institutional environments (O'Meara et al., 2022).

One of the most frequently identified challenges in the tenure process is the increasing emphasis on research productivity. At many research-intensive universities, publication output, journal prestige, citation impact, and external funding have become dominant indicators of faculty success. While research productivity contributes to institutional reputation and knowledge advancement, excessive emphasis on quantitative performance measures may create unintended consequences. Faculty members may experience pressure to produce a high volume of publications within limited time periods, potentially encouraging research practices focused on productivity metrics rather than intellectual contribution and societal impact (Müller, 2023). This pressure is particularly significant for early-career faculty members who must establish independent research identities while simultaneously meeting teaching and service obligations.

The competitive nature of academic publishing further contributes to tenure-related stress. Faculty members often face lengthy review processes, uncertain publication outcomes, and increasing competition for limited journal space. The expectation to publish in highly ranked journals may create additional challenges because disciplinary norms vary considerably. A publication strategy that is considered successful in one field may be viewed differently in another. Consequently, scholars have argued that tenure systems should account for disciplinary differences and evaluate scholarly contributions based on intellectual significance rather than relying exclusively on narrow quantitative measures (O'Meara et al.,

2022).

Another major challenge involves balancing teaching responsibilities with research expectations. Faculty members, particularly those at teaching-intensive institutions, frequently report difficulty allocating sufficient time among classroom preparation, student advising, scholarship, and service activities. Although teaching is central to the university mission, research expectations may limit the time available for instructional innovation and student engagement. Conversely, faculty members who dedicate substantial effort to teaching excellence may find that these contributions receive less recognition than traditional research accomplishments during tenure evaluation. This imbalance has contributed to ongoing debates regarding whether existing tenure systems adequately value teaching effectiveness and student success (Association of American Colleges and Universities [AAC&U], 2023).

Work-life balance represents another significant challenge during the tenure period. The probationary years often coincide with important personal and family responsibilities, creating additional pressures for early-career faculty members. The expectation of continuous productivity, long working hours, conference participation, research collaboration, and institutional service can contribute to stress and burnout. Recent studies indicate that faculty burnout has increased due to expanding workloads, administrative responsibilities, and changing expectations regarding technology integration and student support (Sabagh et al., 2022). Burnout can negatively affect faculty productivity, job satisfaction, and long-term retention within higher education.

Institutional ambiguity regarding tenure expectations can further complicate the process. Faculty members frequently report uncertainty regarding promotion criteria, evaluation standards, and departmental expectations. Although many universities publish formal tenure guidelines, interpretation of those standards may vary among departments, committees, and administrators. Differences in expectations between hiring institutions, departments, and individual evaluators can create uncertainty for candidates attempting to determine whether they are meeting tenure requirements. O'Meara et al. (2022) emphasized that transparent and consistent evaluation processes are essential for reducing inequities and improving faculty confidence in tenure decisions.

The changing structure of the academic workforce has also affected perceptions of tenure. Over the past several decades, higher education has experienced substantial growth in non-tenure-track and contingent faculty appointments. While contingent faculty members contribute significantly to teaching and institutional operations, they often experience lower levels of job security, limited participation in governance, and reduced access to professional development opportunities. This changing labor structure has created concerns regarding the sustainability of traditional tenure models and the future of academic employment (Kezar & DePaola, 2023).

Political and social pressures represent additional challenges affecting contemporary tenure systems. In recent years, universities have experienced increased scrutiny regarding research topics, curriculum decisions, diversity initiatives, and faculty public engagement. These pressures have generated concerns that faculty members may avoid controversial research

areas or modify their scholarly activities because of perceived professional risks. Academic freedom scholars argue that tenure remains particularly important in environments where faculty members may face external criticism for pursuing research that challenges established political or social perspectives (American Association of University Professors [AAUP], 2024).

Post-tenure review policies have also generated debate within higher education. Supporters argue that periodic post-tenure review promotes accountability and ensures that tenured faculty members remain professionally engaged. Critics contend that poorly designed review systems may undermine academic freedom by creating opportunities for external pressures to influence faculty employment decisions. The challenge for institutions is developing accountability mechanisms that encourage professional growth without weakening the independence that tenure is intended to protect (AAUP, 2024).

Diversity, equity, and inclusion concerns represent another important dimension of tenure-related challenges. Research demonstrates that faculty members from historically underrepresented groups may encounter additional barriers during the tenure process, including unequal access to mentoring, disproportionate service expectations, limited professional networks, and implicit bias in evaluation procedures. These challenges may influence publication productivity, research recognition, and promotion outcomes (Misra et al., 2023). Therefore, institutions seeking equitable tenure systems must address not only formal policies but also organizational cultures and informal practices that shape faculty experiences.

Mentoring availability is another factor influencing tenure success. Faculty members who receive effective mentoring often develop stronger publication strategies, gain better understanding of institutional expectations, and build professional networks that support career advancement. However, access to high-quality mentoring varies considerably across institutions and disciplines. Inadequate mentoring can leave junior faculty members uncertain about expectations and are less prepared to navigate the complex tenure process (O'Meara et al., 2022).

Despite these challenges, research indicates that institutions can improve tenure outcomes by implementing transparent evaluation criteria, strengthening mentoring programs, providing equitable workload distribution, and recognizing diverse forms of scholarly contribution. Successful tenure systems require a balance between maintaining academic rigor and creating supportive environments where faculty members can develop professionally. Universities that address structural barriers and invest in faculty development are better positioned to retain talented scholars and sustain academic excellence.

In summary, the tenure process remains a complex professional journey influenced by research expectations, teaching responsibilities, service demands, institutional policies, and broader social pressures. Although tenure continues to provide important protections for academic freedom and scholarly independence, contemporary challenges demonstrate the need for ongoing reform. Future tenure models must preserve rigorous standards while adopting more equitable, transparent, and comprehensive approaches to evaluating faculty achievement.

Mentoring and Faculty Development

Mentoring and faculty development have become increasingly

recognized as essential components of successful faculty retention, professional growth, and advancement through the tenure process. Although individual achievement remains an important factor in tenure decisions, research demonstrates that faculty success is not determined solely by personal productivity or ability. Institutional structures, access to professional networks, availability of developmental resources, and quality of mentoring relationships significantly influence whether early-career faculty members successfully navigate the expectations associated with tenure and promotion (O'Meara et al., 2022). Consequently, universities have increasingly shifted from viewing tenure success as an individual responsibility toward recognizing it as a shared institutional responsibility.

Mentoring traditionally refers to a developmental relationship in which experienced faculty members provide guidance, support, and professional knowledge to junior colleagues. Within higher education, effective mentoring assists faculty members in understanding institutional expectations, developing research agendas, improving teaching practices, building professional networks, and preparing tenure portfolios. Unlike informal collegial relationships, structured mentoring programs provide intentional support designed to reduce uncertainty and improve faculty members' ability to meet promotion and tenure requirements (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM], 2021).

One of the most important contributions of mentoring is helping junior faculty members understand the implicit expectations of academic careers. Although universities typically provide written tenure guidelines, many aspects of academic success involve unwritten rules related to publication strategies, disciplinary expectations, collaboration opportunities, committee participation, and professional networking. Experienced mentors help early-career faculty interpret these expectations and develop strategies for achieving career objectives. Research indicates that faculty members who receive effective mentoring are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of research productivity, institutional engagement, career satisfaction, and retention compared with faculty members who lack mentoring support (O'Meara et al., 2022).

Research mentoring is particularly important because publication productivity remains a central component of tenure evaluation at many institutions. Junior faculty members often enter academic positions with strong disciplinary knowledge but limited experience navigating peer-review processes, selecting appropriate publication outlets, developing research collaborations, or securing external funding. Effective research mentors provide guidance regarding manuscript development, grant preparation, conference participation, and professional networking. These activities are especially important during the early years of academic employment when faculty members must establish scholarly identities while simultaneously managing teaching and service responsibilities.

Faculty development programs complement mentoring by providing structured opportunities for improving professional competencies. These programs may include workshops on instructional design, assessment methods, research methodologies, grant writing, technology integration, leadership development, and inclusive teaching practices. Recent changes in higher education

have increased the importance of faculty development because instructors are expected to adapt to rapidly changing learning environments, including online education, artificial intelligence tools, data-informed assessment, and evolving student expectations (Association of American Colleges and Universities [AAC&U], 2023).

Teaching development represents a particularly important area of faculty support because effective teaching requires continuous improvement throughout an academic career. Faculty development initiatives that emphasize evidence-based pedagogy, active learning strategies, inclusive classroom practices, and assessment techniques can improve instructional effectiveness and student outcomes. However, research suggests that teaching development is often less systematically supported than research development, particularly at research-intensive institutions where publication expectations may dominate faculty evaluation systems. This imbalance reinforces the need for institutions to create faculty development structures that recognize teaching as a scholarly activity rather than merely assigned responsibility.

Mentoring also plays a significant role in addressing inequities within faculty advancement. Studies have shown that access to influential professional networks, research collaborations, and institutional information is not equally distributed among all faculty members. Women and faculty from historically underrepresented groups may experience additional barriers, including limited access to senior mentors, exclusion from informal networks, and disproportionate service responsibilities. Structured mentoring programs can help reduce these disparities by ensuring that all faculty members have access to developmental resources and professional guidance (NASEM, 2021).

However, mentoring relationships are not automatically effective. Poorly designed mentoring programs may reproduce existing inequalities if mentors are selected without attention to diversity, training, or accountability. Effective mentoring requires institutional commitment, clear expectations, recognition of mentoring contributions, and appropriate preparation for mentors. Faculty members who provide extensive mentoring often invest significant time and emotional labor, yet these contributions may receive limited recognition during promotion and tenure evaluations. Recognizing mentoring as a valuable form of institutional service is therefore important for sustaining effective faculty development systems.

Organizational culture represents another important factor influencing the effectiveness of mentoring and professional development. Institutions with collaborative cultures that encourage knowledge sharing, collegial relationships, and professional support are more likely to create environments where junior faculty members succeed. Conversely, highly competitive environments characterized by unclear expectations and limited communication may increase stress and reduce faculty engagement. O'Meara et al. (2022) emphasized that faculty reward systems and institutional cultures strongly influence faculty members perceive their workplaces as supportive environments for professional growth.

Leadership commitment is also essential for successful mentoring initiatives. Department chairs, deans, and senior administrators influence faculty development through resource allocation, workload policies, evaluation procedures, and institutional

priorities. Leaders who actively support mentoring programs can strengthen faculty retention by ensuring that junior faculty members receive guidance and opportunities for advancement. Conversely, institutions that fail to provide adequate support may experience higher turnover, reduced morale, and loss of talented faculty members.

The increasing complexity of academic careers has expanded the purpose of faculty development beyond tenure preparation alone. Contemporary faculty members must navigate responsibilities related to interdisciplinary collaboration, community engagement, digital scholarship, institutional leadership, and changing expectations regarding diversity and inclusion. Therefore, faculty development should be viewed as a continuous process that supports faculty members throughout their careers rather than a short-term intervention focused only on achieving tenure.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that mentoring and faculty development are critical factors influencing tenure success. While individual scholarly productivity remains important, faculty achievement occurs within institutional environments that either support or constrain professional growth. Universities seeking to improve retention, equity, and academic excellence should invest in comprehensive mentoring systems, recognize developmental contributions, and create organizational cultures that enable faculty members to succeed.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging in the Tenure Process

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) have become increasingly important considerations in discussions of faculty development, academic careers, and promotion and tenure processes. Although universities have historically emphasized merit-based evaluation systems, extensive research demonstrates that faculty advancement does not occur within a socially neutral environment. Institutional cultures, access to professional networks, mentoring opportunities, workload distribution, and evaluation practices can influence faculty experiences and career outcomes. Consequently, contemporary scholarship argues that achieving equitable tenure systems requires examining not only formal policies but also the organizational structures and cultural practices that shape faculty success (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM], 2021).

Historically, higher education faculty positions have not reflected the demographic diversity of the broader population. Women, racial and ethnic minorities, first-generation scholars, and other historically underrepresented groups have often encountered barriers affecting recruitment, retention, promotion, and leadership advancement. Although representation has improved in recent decades, disparities remain evident in faculty career progression, particularly at senior ranks and within tenure-track positions. Research indicates that institutional practices, disciplinary norms, and unequal access to resources continue to influence faculty advancement opportunities (Misra et al., 2023).

One significant challenge involves unequal access to mentoring and professional networks. Mentoring relationships often provide junior faculty members with critical information regarding publication strategies, grant opportunities, departmental expectations, and professional advancement. However, faculty members from underrepresented backgrounds may have trouble accessing influential mentors or informal networks that facilitate

academic success. Because academic careers depend heavily on collaboration and professional visibility, unequal access to these networks can negatively affect research productivity, recognition, and tenure outcomes (NASEM, 2021).

The distribution of institutional service responsibilities represents another important equity concern. Faculty members from underrepresented groups are frequently asked to participate in diversity initiatives, student support activities, recruitment efforts, and institutional committees because of their expertise and lived experiences. While these activities contribute significantly to institutional missions, service work is often undervalued compared with research productivity during tenure evaluation. Misra et al. (2023) argued that this unequal distribution of service responsibilities can create a structural disadvantage by reducing the time available for research activities that are typically rewarded more heavily in tenure decisions.

The concept of the “minority tax” has been used to describe the additional responsibilities often placed on faculty members from historically marginalized groups. These responsibilities may include mentoring students from similar backgrounds, participating in diversity committees, advising organizations, and representing institutional diversity efforts. Although these contributions enhance campus environments and student success, they may negatively affect faculty advancement when evaluation systems fail to recognize them as legitimate scholarly or institutional contributions. Therefore, equitable tenure systems must reconsider how service and community engagement are valued.

Implicit bias in faculty evaluation represents another significant concern. Promotion and tenure committees evaluate complex evidence, including research quality, teaching effectiveness, professional reputation, and institutional contributions. Although evaluation processes are designed to be objective, research demonstrates that unconscious assumptions may influence perceptions of scholarly achievement, leadership ability, and professional potential. Bias may affect decisions involving publication recognition, citation impact, teaching evaluations, and assessments of collegiality (NASEM, 2021). Developing transparent evaluation criteria and committee training can help reduce the influence of bias in tenure decisions.

Teaching evaluations represent a particularly important area of concern regarding equity. Although student feedback can provide valuable information about instructional effectiveness, studies have shown that evaluations may be influenced by instructor characteristics unrelated to teaching quality, including gender, race, accent, and perceived identity. Faculty members from marginalized groups may receive lower evaluations despite demonstrating effective teaching practices. Because teaching evaluations are often considered in promotion and tenure decisions, institutions must carefully consider how these measures are interpreted and combined with other evidence of instructional effectiveness (Boring & Ottoboni, 2022).

The recognition of diverse forms of scholarship has become another major component of equitable tenure reform. Traditional tenure systems have historically emphasized disciplinary publications, particularly articles appearing in highly ranked academic journals. Although these contributions remain important, contemporary universities increasingly recognize additional forms

of scholarly activity, including community-engaged research, interdisciplinary collaboration, public scholarship, digital scholarship, and applied research. O'Meara et al. (2022) argued that broader definitions of scholarship can improve equity by allowing institutions to recognize meaningful contributions that may not fit traditional academic models.

The relationship between DEIB initiatives and academic freedom has also generated substantial discussion. Supporters argue that inclusive academic environments strengthen scholarly excellence by expanding participation, encouraging diverse perspectives, and improving knowledge creation. Critics have raised concerns about whether institutional DEIB requirements may influence academic decision-making or limit intellectual diversity. The challenge for universities is developing approaches that promote inclusion while maintaining academic freedom and open inquiry. The literature suggests that diversity and academic freedom are not competing objectives but complementary principles that strengthen the educational mission when implemented appropriately (American Association of University Professors [AAUP], 2024).

Institutional policies play a critical role in shaping equitable tenure outcomes. Universities seeking to improve DEIB outcomes have implemented initiatives such as inclusive mentoring programs, revised evaluation standards, workload assessments, faculty climate surveys, and broader recognition of scholarly contributions. However, scholars caution that policy changes alone are insufficient without corresponding cultural transformation. Sustainable improvement requires institutional commitment, leadership accountability, resource allocation, and continuous assessment of faculty experiences.

Faculty belonging represents an emerging area of research connected to retention and professional success. Belonging refers to the extent to which faculty members feel respected, valued, and integrated within their academic communities. Research indicates that faculty members who experience stronger institutional belonging demonstrate higher job satisfaction, greater organizational commitment, and increased likelihood of remaining at their institutions. Conversely, exclusionary cultures may contribute to disengagement, burnout, and faculty turnover (NASEM, 2021).

Overall, the literature demonstrates that DEIB considerations are central to understanding contemporary tenure processes. Although universities have made progress toward creating more inclusive environments, persistent inequities remain embedded within evaluation systems, workload structures, and institutional cultures. Developing equitable tenure systems requires moving beyond formal statements of commitment toward meaningful reforms that recognize diverse scholarly contributions, provide equitable access to mentoring and resources, and ensure that all faculty members have opportunities to achieve professional success.

Institutional Leadership and Faculty Success

Institutional leadership plays a central role in shaping faculty experiences, professional development, and outcomes within the tenure process. Although individual faculty achievement remains an important factor in promotion and tenure decisions, research increasingly demonstrates that faculty success is strongly influenced by organizational structures, leadership practices, institutional resources, and workplace culture. The tenure process does not occur in isolation; rather, it operates within institutional

environments that either facilitate or constrain faculty members' ability to meet expectations related to teaching, research, service, and professional engagement (O'Meara et al., 2022). Therefore, university leaders, including presidents, provosts, deans, and department chairs, have significant responsibility for creating conditions that support faculty achievement and institutional excellence.

Department chairs and academic leaders are particularly influential because they serve as the primary connection between institutional policies and faculty experiences. Chairs communicate tenure expectations, allocate teaching responsibilities, facilitate mentoring relationships, evaluate performance, and advocate for faculty resources. Research indicates that effective department leadership can significantly influence faculty satisfaction, productivity, and retention. Conversely, ineffective leadership characterized by unclear communication, inconsistent expectations, or limited support may increase faculty stress and reduce confidence in the tenure process (Kezar & DePaola, 2023). One of the most important leadership responsibilities involves establishing transparent promotion and tenure expectations. Although most institutions provide formal tenure guidelines, faculty members often report uncertainty regarding how evaluation standards are interpreted in practice. Ambiguity regarding publication expectations, teaching effectiveness, service responsibilities, and acceptable forms of scholarship can create anxiety among early-career faculty members. Effective leaders address this challenge by providing clear expectations, consistent feedback, written evaluation criteria, and opportunities for faculty members to discuss progress throughout the probationary period (O'Meara et al., 2022).

Leadership support is also critical in developing equitable workload policies. Faculty members are expected to balance multiple responsibilities, including teaching, research, advising, service, administrative activities, and community engagement. However, workloads are not always distributed equitably. Some faculty members may receive heavier teaching assignments, greater advising responsibilities, or extensive committee obligations that limit time available for scholarly activities. Institutional leaders play an essential role in monitoring workload distribution and ensuring that faculty members have sufficient time and resources to meet tenure expectations.

Research productivity represents another area in which institutional support significantly influences tenure outcomes. While faculty members are ultimately responsible for developing scholarly programs, universities can facilitate research success by providing internal funding opportunities, research infrastructure, grant development assistance, statistical support, research assistants, and opportunities for collaboration. Institutions that invest in research support structures often experience higher levels of faculty productivity and stronger academic reputations. Conversely, limited research resources may create disadvantages for faculty members, particularly those working in disciplines requiring substantial financial support.

Faculty development initiatives represent another important leadership responsibility. Effective institutions recognize that faculty success requires continuous professional growth rather than assuming that new faculty members already possess all skills necessary for academic advancement. Faculty development

programs may provide assistance with research methods, publication strategies, instructional innovation, technology integration, leadership development, and inclusive teaching practices. According to the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2023), institutions that provide sustained faculty development opportunities strengthen teaching quality, student learning outcomes, and faculty engagement.

Organizational culture is another significant factor influencing faculty success. Universities with collaborative cultures characterized by trust, communication, and collegial relationships often provide stronger environments for professional development. In contrast, institutions with highly competitive cultures, limited communication, or unclear expectations may increase faculty stress and reduce organizational commitment. Institutional leaders shape organizational culture through their decisions regarding recognition, resource allocation, collaboration, and faculty participation in governance.

Shared governance represents an important leadership principle connected to faculty success. Effective universities recognize faculty members as essential partners in academic decision-making because faculty possess specialized knowledge regarding curriculum, research standards, and disciplinary expectations. Although administrators are responsible for institutional strategy and financial management, faculty participation enhances decision quality and strengthens institutional legitimacy. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP, 2024) emphasizes that shared governance remains fundamental to maintaining academic freedom and institutional effectiveness.

Leadership also influences faculty retention by shaping the extent to which faculty members feel valued and supported. Faculty turnover can create significant costs for institutions through recruitment expenses, loss of institutional knowledge, and disruptions to academic programs. Research indicates that faculty members are more likely to remain at institutions when they experience supportive leadership, fair evaluation practices, professional growth opportunities, and a sense of belonging. Therefore, retention strategies should focus not only on compensation but also on organizational conditions that support long-term career success.

Another emerging leadership challenge involves adapting tenure systems to changing higher education environments. Universities face increasing pressure related to financial sustainability, technological transformation, enrollment changes, and public accountability. Institutional leaders must balance these pressures while preserving academic values and faculty independence. Effective leadership requires developing policies that maintain rigorous academic standards while allowing flexibility in recognizing diverse forms of scholarly contribution.

The growth of artificial intelligence, digital learning technologies, and interdisciplinary research has further expanded leadership responsibilities. Faculty members increasingly require institutional support to integrate emerging technologies, develop new teaching approaches, and engage in innovative research. Leaders who provide professional development and encourage responsible innovation can help faculty members adapt successfully to changing academic environments.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that institutional leadership is a critical determinant of faculty success during the tenure process.

While faculty achievement depends partly on individual effort and scholarly ability, institutional structures and leadership practices significantly influence whether faculty members have equitable opportunities to succeed. Universities seeking to strengthen tenure outcomes should prioritize transparent evaluation systems, effective mentoring, equitable workloads, faculty development, and supportive organizational cultures.

In summary, tenure success should be understood as the outcome of an interaction between individual faculty performance and institutional responsibility. Leaders who create supportive environments not only improve faculty retention and satisfaction but also strengthen institutional reputation, student outcomes, and the broader mission of higher education.

Research Questions

Based on the literature review, the following research questions guide the study:

Research Question 1

What are faculty members' perceptions regarding the importance of teaching, research productivity, and institutional service in the tenure and promotion process?

Research Question 2

What challenges do tenure-track faculty members experience during the probationary period leading to tenure decisions?

Research Question 3

To what extent do mentoring, institutional support, and leadership influence faculty members' perceptions of tenure success?

Research Question 4

Are there differences in perceptions of tenure-related factors based on faculty characteristics, including academic rank, years of experience, and institutional type?

Research Question 5

Which factors (teaching effectiveness, research productivity, mentoring support, leadership support, and institutional climate) are perceived as the strongest predictors of successful tenure outcomes?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a **quantitative descriptive research design** to examine faculty perceptions regarding factors influencing promotion from tenure-track appointments to tenured faculty positions. A quantitative approach is appropriate because the study seeks to measure relationships among measurable variables and identify patterns within faculty perceptions using statistical analysis.

Descriptive Statistical Analysis

The first method used is **descriptive statistics** to summarize participants' responses and identify general patterns in faculty perceptions. The following descriptive measures will be calculated:

Frequency (f) – number of responses in each category.

Percentage (%) – proportion of respondents represented in each category.

Mean (M) – average response score for each survey item and construct.

Standard Deviation (SD) – amount of variation among participant responses.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), quantitative research designs allow researchers to examine relationships among

variables through numerical measurement and statistical procedures. The descriptive design is particularly appropriate when the purpose is to summarize participant characteristics, identify trends, and evaluate perceptions regarding organizational processes.

The study uses a cross-sectional survey approach in which data are collected from faculty members at a single point in time. The survey method allows researchers to examine faculty perceptions

regarding tenure expectations, challenges, mentoring effectiveness, leadership support, and institutional practices.

Population and Sample

The study uses a simulated sample of **50 full-time tenure-track and tenured faculty members** from higher education institutions in the United States. The sample includes faculty members from different academic ranks, disciplines, and years of academic experience.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 50)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	27	54%
	Female	22	44%
	Other/prefer not to answer	1	2%
Academic Rank	Assistant Professor	20	40%
	Associate Professor	18	36%
	Professor	12	24%
Years in Higher Education	1–5 years	15	30%
	6–10 years	17	34%
	More than 10 years	18	36%

Data Analysis Results (Simulated Dataset, N = 50)

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Tenure-Related Factors (N = 50)

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Research Productivity Expectations	4.42	0.55	Very High
Teaching Effectiveness Expectations	4.28	0.61	High
Tenure Process Challenges	4.18	0.67	High
Mentoring Support	3.96	0.72	High
Leadership Support	3.84	0.76	High
Institutional Service Expectations	3.76	0.79	Moderate

Interpretation

The results indicate that among the 50 participants, **research productivity was perceived as the strongest tenure requirement (M = 4.42)**. Teaching effectiveness was also highly valued (M = 4.28). Participants reported significant challenges during the tenure process (M = 4.18), indicating that workload demands, publication expectations, and evaluation pressures remain important concerns.

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Figure 1

Faculty Perceptions of Tenure Evaluation Factors (N = 50)



Table 3: Correlation Matrix of Major Tenure Factors (N = 50)

Variable	Mentoring	Leadership	Research	Teaching
Mentoring Support	1.00	.66	.54	.48
Leadership Support	.66	1.00	.59	.51
Research Productivity	.54	.59	1.00	.44
Teaching Effectiveness	.48	.51	.44	1.00

Interpretation

The correlation analysis shows a strong relationship between mentoring support and leadership support ($r = .66$). This

suggests that faculty members who perceive stronger institutional leadership also tend to report greater access to mentoring resources.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Predicting Perceived Tenure Success (N = 50)

Predictor	Standardized Beta (β)	p-value
Mentoring Support	.35	< .001
Leadership Support	.30	.003
Research Productivity	.25	.006
Teaching Effectiveness	.17	.041

$R^2 = .61$

Interpretation

The regression model explains **61% of the variance in perceived tenure success**. Mentoring support was the strongest predictor, followed by leadership support, research productivity, and teaching effectiveness, using $N = 50$ consistently in all remaining sections, including the **conceptual framework, hypotheses, discussion, implications, limitations, and conclusion**

Data was analyzed using quantitative statistical procedures. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize faculty perceptions regarding tenure-related factors. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to assess the reliability of the survey instrument. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine relationships among mentoring support, leadership support, research productivity, and teaching effectiveness. Multiple regression analysis was performed to identify the factors that significantly predicted perceived tenure success. Additional inferential tests, including independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA, were conducted to examine differences among faculty groups based on demographic characteristics.

Conclusion

The promotion process from tenure-track appointments to tenured faculty positions remains one of the most significant and rigorous milestones in an academic career. Although the tenure system was originally established to protect academic freedom and ensure institutional stability, its purpose has evolved in response to changing expectations within higher education. Contemporary universities increasingly expect faculty members to demonstrate excellence in teaching, research, and institutional service while also contributing to interdisciplinary collaboration, student success, technological innovation, community engagement, and institutional leadership. Consequently, the tenure process has become more comprehensive and demanding than at any previous time in higher education.

The literature reviewed in this study demonstrates that academic freedom continues to serve as the philosophical foundation of tenure. Tenure provides faculty members with the security necessary to pursue independent scholarship, engage in critical inquiry, and participate in shared governance without fear of political or institutional retaliation. However, recent scholarship also indicates that tenure systems continue to face challenges associated with accountability, financial constraints, changing institutional priorities, increased reliance on performance metrics, and evolving public expectations of higher education. These competing pressures require universities to balance rigorous faculty evaluation with the preservation of academic independence and institutional integrity.

The review further illustrates that successful tenure candidates are evaluated across multiple dimensions of academic performance. While research productivity often remains the most heavily weighted criterion at research-intensive institutions, teaching effectiveness and institutional service continue to play essential roles in promotion decisions. Increasingly, universities are adopting more comprehensive evaluation frameworks that recognize interdisciplinary collaboration, community-engaged scholarship, mentoring, digital scholarship, and innovative teaching practices. Such developments reflect a broader understanding of faculty contributions and acknowledge that academic excellence extends beyond traditional publication metrics.

The literature also identifies numerous challenges experienced by tenure-track faculty members during the probationary period. Publication expectations, competition for external funding, increasing teaching responsibilities, extensive service obligations, work-life balance concerns, and uncertainty regarding evaluation criteria contribute to considerable professional stress. These challenges may be intensified by institutional ambiguity, unequal workload distribution, and limited access to mentoring and professional development opportunities. Consequently, faculty

success depends not only on individual scholarly achievement but also on the availability of institutional support systems that facilitate professional growth and equitable evaluation.

Mentoring and faculty development emerged as critical factors influencing tenure success. Effective mentoring relationships assist junior faculty members in understanding institutional expectations, developing research agendas, improving teaching practices, and expanding professional networks. Likewise, structured faculty development programs enhance instructional effectiveness, research productivity, leadership capacity, and long-term career advancement. Universities that invest in comprehensive mentoring initiatives and continuous professional development are better positioned to retain talented faculty members and strengthen institutional performance.

The literature additionally emphasizes that diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging remain central considerations within contemporary tenure systems. Despite continued progress, disparities persist regarding access to mentoring, workload distribution, professional recognition, and promotion opportunities for historically underrepresented faculty members. Institutions seeking equitable tenure outcomes should implement transparent evaluation criteria, recognize diverse forms of scholarship, promote inclusive mentoring practices, and ensure that service responsibilities are distributed fairly across faculty members.

Institutional leadership also plays a pivotal role in faculty success. Department chairs, deans, provosts, and other academic leaders influence tenure outcomes through policy implementation, workload management, resource allocation, mentoring support, and organizational culture. Transparent communication, equitable evaluation procedures, collaborative governance, and sustained investment in faculty development contribute to stronger faculty retention, higher job satisfaction, and improved institutional effectiveness.

The simulated quantitative analysis conducted in this study supports the findings reported throughout the literature. Faculty participants identified research productivity as the most influential component of tenure evaluation while also recognizing the importance of teaching effectiveness, mentoring, and leadership support. The descriptive statistics indicated that faculty members perceive the tenure process as both rigorous and challenging. Correlation and regression analyses further demonstrated that mentoring support and institutional leadership were among the strongest predictors of perceived tenure success, highlighting the importance of organizational support in addition to individual achievement.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of literature examining faculty promotion and tenure by integrating historical perspectives, contemporary research, and quantitative analysis. The findings suggest that institutions can strengthen tenure outcomes by adopting transparent evaluation systems, expanding mentoring opportunities, supporting faculty development, promoting equitable workload distribution, and recognizing diverse forms of scholarly contribution. As higher education continues to evolve in response to technological innovation, demographic changes, financial pressures, and increasing public accountability, tenure systems must likewise continue to adapt while preserving the core principles of academic freedom, scholarly excellence, and shared governance.

Future research should build upon these findings by examining tenure experiences across different institutional classifications, academic disciplines, and national contexts. Researchers may also investigate the long-term impact of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, digital scholarship, and data-driven evaluation systems, on faculty productivity and promotion outcomes. Such investigations will further inform institutional leaders and policymakers seeking to develop tenure systems that remain rigorous, equitable, transparent, and responsive to the changing landscape of higher education.

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