

# Top 10 Strategies for Preparing the Annual Tenure and Promotion Dossier

<http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/faculty-evaluation/top-10-strategies-for-preparing-the-annual-tenure-and-promotion-dossier>

April 25, 2012

By: [Joy J. Burnham, Ph.D.](#), [Lisa M. Hooper, Ph.D.](#) and [Vivian H. Wright, Ph.D.](#) in [Faculty Evaluation](#)

Assembling the annual tenure and promotion dossier to best represent one's teaching, research, and service can be overwhelming and anxiety-ridden for some junior faculty. Yet, prior to earning tenure, junior faculty in colleges and universities across the country spend untold hours preparing the annual dossier to present and illustrate accomplishments and productivity across teaching, research, and service.

From our discussions with colleagues in various disciplines and at different institutions of higher education across the country, we learned that few faculty have navigated the dossier process with ease or without some angst. Many faculty members commonly report on the lack of precise directions about the preparation and documentation process, and, further often find the dossier process ambiguous and overwhelming. For those who look to the literature for direction, few books and articles exist; and even fewer books and articles direct junior faculty toward specific annual dossier preparation, even though this is a critical step toward earning tenure.

During the past four years, each of us has earned tenure, presented on the topic of preparing the annual tenure and promotion dossier, and recently published a book, *Tools for dossier success: A guide for promotion and tenure*, (Burnham, Hooper, & Wright, 2010) related to dossier preparation and documentation process. From our own experiences, we learned several ways to reframe this process to help make the overall tenure and promotion process more feasible, manageable, and controllable—including a focus on what faculty members might do before, during, and after preparing the required annual dossier.

During the dossier preparation process, we often asked ourselves and others such questions as: "How do I present this representative collection of materials related to my teaching, research, and service?", "How can the dossier preparation process be managed efficiently this year and next year?", and "How can I simplify this process, yet at the same time, present accurate, reflective evidence that underscores my accomplishments?"

To assist those still in the tenure-earning trenches, we offer 10 dossier strategies that helped us along the way. We believe if followed, these strategies can assist junior faculty prepare an annual tenure and promotion dossier that best demonstrates and documents competencies in teaching, research, and service.

## 1. Begin

on day one. Each of us realized that the tenure clock started the first day we were on campus. In fact, we began to establish our research, teaching, and service programs even before our arrival. Think in terms of starting your teaching, research, and service activities immediately; start collecting evidence of your teaching, research, and service activities. We suggest keeping a file for all your evidence so it can be easily retrieved and organized later. Initially keep everything; as the dossier develops, you can determine what documentation best illustrates your accomplishments in teaching, research, and service.

## 2. Read

your college and university guidelines carefully. Find the section regarding dossier expectations to determine exactly what should be included in the dossier. If further clarification is needed, consult with others (e.g., department chair, senior faculty) on specific guidelines and unique expectations across all levels at your institution. This strategy simplifies the

dossier process and provides a framework for compiling your evidence correctly, which is an important part of having a successful review.

### **3. Listen**

to the recommendations of senior faculty. Senior faculty members serve on the committees that review dossier evidence and thus inform the process. Senior faculty members have knowledge, perspective, and wisdom that can benefit you greatly. Listen, and most importantly, consider how to respond to their recommendations put forward in previous reviews.

### **4. Follow**

your college/university's specific guidelines and rules for the items that should and should not be included in the promotion and tenure dossier. Know what the guidelines are and follow through with accuracy, diligence, and precision. Although junior faculty members may be tempted to be creative, this is not the time to divert from the prescribed guidelines.

### **5. Work**

persistently and consistently while moving through the tenure process. Specifically, working hard during the academic year, rather than waiting until the last minute, will make the move from dossier preparation to dossier assembly much easier. Of the strategies we offer, working hard is an area in which you have the most control. When you work hard, and do quality work, you are likely on the road to success and on the way to achieving tenure.

### **6. Seek**

out mentors. No one on the tenure-earning track should be on an island. Find people who will assist you. Seek multiple mentors, such as fellow tenure-earning peers who are in the same boat with you. Also, consider seeking out associate professors who still have a perspective of and proximity to what the complete dossier preparation process is like (e.g., activities in which to engage before, during, and after developing and preparing the annual dossier). And, of course, seek out mentors who have years of experience and wisdom (e.g., ask to see their exemplary dossiers). All in all, having mentors is important and, in our opinion, worthy of the time it takes to cultivate the relationships.

### **7. Demonstrate**

transparency in your dossier. Deception is easily detected in dossiers. Hiding problem areas in your dossier instead of noting them will not assist you and, instead, can be detrimental to your success. Similarly, embellishing aspects of your dossier is almost always viewed unfavorably. Transparency, and honesty, in representing all aspects of your teaching, research, and service is important in all cases.

### **8. Show**

consistency and accuracy across the different sections and parts of the dossier. Know that the dossier represents you in the review process (at many colleges or universities you are not present during the review to defend yourself). Make sure your curriculum vita and your dossier are aligned and consistent, be exact with the information you are expected to provide, ensure that you do not have misspelled words or careless errors, and place your evidence in the correct section, often noted by your university's guidelines. We suggest asking a peer to review your work to ensure that careless blunders and inaccuracies are avoided.

### **9. Follow**

the suggestions of the reviewers. Reviewers (e.g., tenure and promotion committee, department head, Dean) often return to previous year's recommendations they put forward in

review letters; and, they expect you to follow through with their recommendations. No doubt, it is imperative that you follow the recommendations outlined from your committee(s) and discuss, how you followed their previous suggestions (you can point these out in your dossier narratives and opening statements). Knowing that you addressed and followed through with recommendations carries significant weight with dossier reviewers and can be beneficial to your tenure-earning review.

## **10. Consult**

at all stages of your dossier preparation (i.e., before, during, and after). We see the importance of consultation within your department, across your college/university, and outside your college/university. When you have questions, consult. This is an important step to ensure that you are doing what you need to do to have an excellent dossier.

Clearly, there are other considerations in preparing the annual tenure and promotion dossier, however, we believe these 10 established and tested strategies provide an excellent start for junior faculty members preparing their first dossier. Further, we hope these strategies will assist you in navigating the complexities you may face as you decide how to best represent your work in the triad of teaching, research, and service.

### **References:**

Burnham, J. J., Hooper, L. M., & Wright, V. H. (2010). *Tools for dossier success: A guide for promotion and tenure*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hooper, L. M., Wright, V. H., Burnham, J. (in press). Acculturating to the role of tenure-track assistant professor a family systems approach to joining the academy. *Contemporary Family Therapy*.

*Joy J. Burnham is an Associate Professor in Counselor Education at the University of Alabama, Lisa M. Hooper is an Associate Professor in Counselor Education at the University of Alabama, and Vivian H. Wright is an Associate Professor in Instructional Technology at the University of Alabama.*

Tags: [faculty career issues](#), [faculty promotion and tenure](#), [tenure portfolios](#)