

Demystifying the Promotion and Tenure Process

Academic Careers Workshop
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Russ Joseph - Northwestern University

About Me

From: St. Thomas, USVI

Research: Computer Architecture

Career Path:

Carnegie Mellon BS ECE/CS (1999)

Princeton PhD EE (2004)

Advisor: Margaret Martonosi

Northwestern EECS

Assistant Professor 2004-2010

Associate Professor 2010-present

Fun: running, golf, basketball



Understand Expectations

Right balance between research/teaching/service?

Know what your university expects of you

- Critical to achieving tenure
- Sometimes publicly stated policy differs from actual policy

Expectations depend heavily on:

- Mission of university
- Culture of department / research area

Talk to mentors/senior people to calibrate

Tenure Portfolio @ Northwestern

Things You Control

Curriculum vitae

Summary Statements:

Research: Research vision and contribution

- Target Audience: Letter Writers

Teaching: Educational activities, teaching philosophy, course development

Service: Committees and activities for university, professional org, research community

Representative Publications: ~3 papers that showcase your work

Things You Don't Control

Outside Letters: 6-8

Comments on your work written by prominent leaders in your field

You can suggest some letter writers / others are chosen independently

Use your research statement to help them write their letters

Expected Balance @ Northwestern

Activity	Expected Effort (Official)	Expected Output (Actual)
Research	40%	Very strong
Teaching	40%	OK (e.g. just avoid disaster)
Service	20%	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review papers (e.g. serve on PC for top conference)• Small amount of conference organization (e.g. high visibility + hard to screw up)• Member of some departmental committee (attend some meetings)

Often people won't say how many publications you need

But may give you ballpark numbers or milestones for other things:

- Graduate a PhD student (or be close to)
- Be PI on ~2 NSF grants and co-PI on a few others

Pick trajectory for those tangibles and then spend most of your effort on growing research program

Intermediate Feedback @ Northwestern

Formal annual review process for all faculty

- Used for salary increases
- University compiles summary of measurable activity (funding, publications, teaching evals)
- Meet with department chair
- Sometimes useful, sometimes not so much

Mid-point evaluation for junior faculty (mini-tenure)

- Candidate writes statements (research, teaching, service)
- Request external letters

Hopefully, some informal/ad hoc feedback, too

Avoiding Common Pitfalls

Don't be a hero!

- Stay clear of ambitious non-research projects
 - Small tweaks to a course are fine
 - Be cautious about major curricular overhauls
- Lobby for manageable teaching/service assignments

Don't be a perfectionist!

- Try to do good work...obviously
- If you wait for it to be perfect...it won't get out the door...or will be too late