

The Business Case for Tenure

compiled by Misty G. Anderson, UTK/UTIA Faculty Senate President, 2018-19

The argument that the cost of universities could be lowered by abandoning tenure is deeply flawed. Tenure supports an independent knowledge base, ensures freedom of information, and enables public universities to hire and retain high quality faculty who could earn higher pay in other sectors. The quality education they provide keeps more students in state while creating direct and indirect benefits that drive Tennessee's economy.

Tenure Recruits the Best Talent: National rankings of universities depend on an institution's ability to recruit excellent students, researchers and teachers. The best faculty will not accept jobs without tenure or a path to it, and the best students will leave the state if they do not have high-quality professors to train them. STEM, Nursing, Accounting, Economics, Information Systems, Business, and Law professors can make well over twice their university salaries in the private sector and are thus too expensive to hire without the incentive of tenure. Tenure also keeps costs low in other disciplines, where most faculty salaries are under \$90,000.

Tenure is Fiercely Competitive: University tenure requires a large portfolio of published, peer-reviewed research, usually 6 years of excellent service and teaching, external review letters solicited by the institution, an extensive dossier from the candidate, and votes at the department, college, provost, and chancellor's levels. Professors sometimes compete with up to 400 others who have Ph.Ds in the particular specialty advertised for one job. Only 1% of college graduates complete a Ph.D or other terminal degree and get a tenure-track job, and 32% of those will leave without tenure, based on annual review warnings, personal reasons, and external opportunities. Other market forces, including peer review, grants, ongoing post-tenure review, and intense competition for tenure-track jobs, further sift the talent pool. Professors who do not get tenure are dismissed, and those who do undergo multiple post-tenure reviews.

Tenure Secures Research Funding and the Nation: Tenure guarantees a stable, high-quality, faculty who protect our national security, educate the workforce, and secure grants to support the equipment, staffing, and graduate lines that keep labs in operation. The U.S. defense and intelligence communities have long depended on university faculty as an independent national knowledge base for ideas, human capital, and information. America's national interests depend on university-generated research in areas such as security, public health, computer technology, and international policy. Private industry is often unwilling to fund research that does not have pre-established market value and quarterly outcomes. This pure research, however, has led to [GPS devices, nanotechnology](#), and huge gains in food security. Agencies like the NSF, the Departments of Defense, Energy and Homeland Security, and the FDA will only issue grants to tenure-track faculty who can complete the 5-10 year projects they fund.

Tennessee Should Be First in the Nation: The cost of public higher education has not so much risen as the percentage of the bill for this public good has been sent to individual families. But Tennessee is quietly leading the nation in educational access with the HOPE scholarship, Tennessee Promise, TN Reconnect, and Drive to 55, which offer the sons and daughters of the

state excellent and affordable in-state options for higher education. An assault on tenure would revoke our accreditation, send the most prominent and active research professors out of state, and drive our best students out of state as well, leaving Tennessee's public universities weak in a fiercely competitive market and devastating our state's economy. Excellent professors raise our national profile and provide direct research, mentoring, and classroom opportunities for the very Tennessee students who are our state's future and the reason we want strong Tennessee universities.