

CASE REPORT

Promotion and tenure in nursing education: Lessons learned

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Abstract

Current nursing faculty spend part of their careers in service settings before they move to the academic milieu. The promotion and tenure process may not be familiar to novice nurse educators prior to their entry into the academy. Fewer nursing academics successfully achieve tenure than other disciplines outside of allied health. These low numbers have been attributed to underperformance in the domain of scholarship by these female professionals socialized to practice and service.

This article explains the essential components of the tripartite process necessary for achieving success in the promotion and tenure process. The authors draw on their own experiences and that of their colleagues locally and nationally to demystify this career path. Intended as a primer on the promotion and tenure process for new nurse educators the article concludes with eight bulleted admonitions and commentary to inform and streamline successful achievement of career goals.

Key words

Tenure, Promotion, Nursing, Boyer

1 Introduction

Knowledge of the promotion and tenure process is essential to success for nurse educators. The majority of this faculty come to the academic milieu from service settings. Therefore it often takes the neophyte nurse academic not socialized to the faculty role, time, that is in short supply, to discover the essentials of the promotion and tenure process^[1, 2]. Only 37% of nursing faculty achieve tenure successfully^[3]. This is lower than other disciplines outside of allied health^[9]. These low numbers have been attributed to underperformance in the domain of scholarship by these female professionals socialized to practice and service^[3].

This article is designed to summarize what may be a daunting undertaking. It shares lessons learned from personal experience, colleagues, and the literature to educate novice academics to the promotion and tenure process. As two nursing faculty, one recently tenured and the other hopeful, we offer our acquired understanding of history and modern trends to provide an experiential perspective on promotion and tenure.

2 Literature review

In the United States nurses have taught in academic institutions since the early 1900s. Lillian Wald developed the first post diploma course in public health nursing at Teacher's College in New York City^[4]. However, access to a doctoral degree which is the basic requirement for tenure in other disciplines did not exist for nurses until 1924^[5]. Teachers College created a Doctor of Education (EdD) for nurses offering courses in theories and methods of teaching and learning and curriculum development. In 1934 New York University offered the first PhD in nursing. Nurses who sought advanced degrees also obtained them in related fields like the biological and social sciences.

Contemporaneously nurses have continued the practice of seeking doctoral degrees in nursing and other disciplines. For those nurses who do work in academic institutions, 54% of the institutions require doctoral degrees as a condition of employment^[6]. Currently, only one percent of the United States nursing population had doctoral degrees^[7]. The AACN reported that nurses with doctoral and master's degrees composed 13.2% of the nursing population^[8]. This same organization concludes that this supply does not meet the current demand for master's and doctorally prepared nurses in advanced practice, clinical specialties, teaching, and research.

Like other practice professions many of which are female, nursing entered the traditional gendered academy with a unique historical development. The clinical practice component, essential to the nursing profession is absent from the three pronged promotion and tenure process^[9]. Often the nursing academic has been placed in the difficult position of choosing between her clinical competence and the rigorous demands of the promotion and tenure process^[9]. This is particularly true for nurses who hold advanced degrees as nurse practitioners who must complete a set number of clinical hours annually to maintain certification; however, clinical practice is arguably intrinsic to creation of nursing knowledge, the development of clinical placement sites for students as well as continued licensure and certification. The creation of the clinical track offers one alternative.

3 Historical perspectives

The word tenure derives from both French and Latin meaning "to hold". The word was adopted by American academic institutions in 1915 to describe a process whereby teachers kept their positions permanently and were not subject to periodic contract renewals^[10]. A talented faculty and productive academic received economic security in exchange for dissemination of research and scholarship which enhanced the reputation of the educational institution. In return the scholar was free to explore intramural sources of knowledge which might be deemed controversial and participate in extramural activities without fear of repercussion or censorship^[11].

Historically the discovery of truth and its subsequent generation and dissemination of knowledge has been one of the central roles of academics. Teaching students who were developing scholars in the field was a mechanism valued in part for its ability to expand and propagate a particular body of knowledge^[12]. With the creation of a system of peer reviewed journals the scholar was able to circulate findings to a larger sphere of like-minded thinkers. Thus acceptance of articles for these publications became the most significant evaluation criteria for continued employment and funding to underwrite ongoing research^[13].

3.1 The current critique

As the tenure process evolves in the 21st Century there are questions about its continued viability^[14]. Researchers report several factors which contribute to the undermining of the process. Senior faculty mentors may not be "available, knowledgeable or motivated to provide effective guidance"^[15]. Already tenured faculty may be overloaded with competing demands on their time. Since mentoring of junior non-tenured faculty may not be calculated in their academic loads, there may not be systematic incentive to participate in the development of junior faculty^[16]. The role of mentor is contingent upon senior faculty willingness to exert the time and energy required to familiarize themselves with an

institutional tenure process that has changed over the years. As such senior faculty may be less familiar with requirements by which junior faculty are being evaluated. Finally, inherent in the mentoring process is that of professional trust and cooperation -not competition.

As increasing numbers of women have joined the academic ranks particularly in predominantly female professions like nursing, the tenure process has become gendered. On the most basic physiological level the “tenure clock” overlaps with the “biological clock”. The modern promotion and tenure process typically spans six to seven years and begins upon hire. If women follow the recommended educational trajectory attending graduate school immediately upon completion of their undergraduate degree they are pursuing tenure at the same time that they may be childbearing and rearing. Policies may be in place to adjust the tenure process to address these events.

3.2 Nursing’s perspective

Historically nursing differed from other disciplines that required the earned doctorate to enter the academy^[17, 18]. While 68% of nursing deans currently require a doctorate for tenure^[6] and the doctorate is the “preferred” degree for new nursing faculty hires in baccalaureate and graduate programs, only 50% of nurse educators meet this academic standard^[19]. These numbers also reflect another pattern which is that nurses typically enter the academy later in their professional careers. The average age of nurses on the first rung of the academic ladder, the assistant professor, is 50 years^[19, 20]. In this case another aspect of the “biological clock” is “ticking”- that of aging and retirement. In their faculty positions women stereotypically have spent more focused time on teaching and advising. Consequently they have less time in the long run for scholarship^[16, 21].

Because of the paucity of doctorally prepared faculty, potential applicants for tenure track positions may be hired while they are finishing advanced degrees. These individuals often receive contracts with specified deadlines for completion if employment is to continue. Course of study for the advanced degree may be in disciplines complementary to but not in nursing.

Once faculty accept positions they are on the promotion and tenure track and must be attentive to its requirements. Established programs of orientation and mentorship by senior nursing faculty are essential to the process of successful role transition^[22, 23]. Yet new nursing faculty have the same issues with finding mentors as those in other disciplines as well as those which are unique to the profession. Similarities include: lack of interest, incentive, expertise and time on the part of senior faculty^[24]. Nursing like other professions who are placing increasing importance on scholarship may also have senior faculty who were tenured under very different circumstances and requirements than their junior counterparts^[12, 25]. The inability to recognize this and the competition that the potential mentor might experience do not contribute to a successful partnership.

Junior faculties are evaluated at set intervals to qualify for advancement on the tenure track as they are able to show development in teaching, scholarship, and service. The time honored ultimate goal is to “...(become) excellent teachers, engage in significant research and participate actively in institutional, professional and community service” at the same time that they “keep abreast of current knowledge and developments within their field, take part in student development, assume administrative roles and be active in professional organizations”^[26].

The evaluation process takes place within an institutional environment and is therefore skewed to the mores of that setting. The Carnegie Foundation categorizes universities by number of research doctorates conferred and level of research activity. Faculty in institutions labeled “very high” and “high” can expect increased emphasis placed on their seeking monies to fund research and undertake it as a significant part of their job responsibilities^[27]. Schools offering only professional doctorates in fields like nursing, physical and occupational therapy are not included in this schema but the classification system may be alluded to or referenced.

A well thought out plan starting from the day the new faculty member accepts their position is intrinsic to successful awarding of tenure. Creation of a faculty development plan (FDP) establishes a concrete blueprint for accomplishment of promotion and tenure requirements^[28]. Cottingham suggests answering these questions to provide information in construction of this plan^[29]:

- What is the schedule and mechanism for faculty review?
- How much of the department is already tenured?
- Is there a quota?
- Who decides tenure and how?

The composition of the promotion and tenure committee is significant^[18]. A committee primarily composed of nursing faculty may be more familiar with the significance of research done in nursing. By comparison faculty from other disciplines notably “bench scientists” may be predisposed to quantitative research methods.

4 Teaching

To neophyte educators it might seem intuitively obvious that teaching is the central function of the college. For that reason the university would heavily weigh teaching in the evaluation process, especially given the amount of time and energy allocated to this endeavor by junior faculty. However, this is only one part of a tripartite process. It is important to balance teaching with scholarship and service.

Institutional teaching expectations vary dramatically and require careful clarification. Questions which may assist with this include^[29]:

- How many courses do faculty teach in a semester?
- Are they different courses which require time consuming new preparations or several sections of the same course requiring only one preparation?
- How flexible is the teaching schedule on a weekly basis/by semester?
- Are the numbers of students in each section taken into consideration?
- What kind of secretarial and teaching support is available?
- Are teaching assistants provided?

Once teaching expectations have been established the next concern is course preparation. Variables which may influence the amount of time and energy spent in this area include teaching experience, availability of support, and the soundness of the course to be taught.

Teaching load may be heavy for junior faculty. Some institutions, notably research intensive ones, will arrange work load to allow for scholarship-related time. Teaching intensive institutions may expect that the new faculty is able to choose textbooks appropriate to the level of the students, review the literature to update knowledge of theory development in the content area, and restructure syllabi, topical outlines and assignments to correspond with desired or required changes.

Novice nurse educators must know what constitutes valid and reliable measures of teaching effectiveness in their institutions. Historically student course evaluations have formed the bedrock of teaching effectiveness. Institutions or departments may have set procedures by which all faculty receive student feedback. Course and teacher evaluation tools can require the identification of the author or may be submitted anonymously at the end of the semester. Responses are collected and collated by designated departmental personnel submitted to faculty administrators and should be shared with

the course teacher. Because the process is summative, the information obtained can only influence future courses not the current one.

The student may not be cognizant or appreciative of the organization, development and creativity implicit in the syllabus^[30]. It is advantageous (and may be required) to invite a senior faculty in your department as well as expert faculty from other departments to observe a class. The visiting faculty can provide insight into development of teaching expertise and the ability to manage and motivate students.

Another useful validation involves a faculty member evaluating the course syllabus and materials to provide analysis and feedback about the success of meeting course goals and objectives. Collection of a representative sample of student course work may be offered to illustrate successful teaching strategies.

As the neophyte educators develop a more complete assessment of their teaching abilities, they should explore resources available at the university, school, and department level. Forums may be available to inform and support new teachers. Teaching collaboratives, writing seminars, and senior faculty are valuable assets. Departmental monies may be applied to attend conferences which offer workshops on the teaching process and specific techniques. Electronic posting of course materials can diminish time consuming activities like duplicating-and be more energy efficient overall.

Faculty acquire courses in two forms. The majority of courses have been previously owned and have a historical trajectory. The novice nurse educator will typically not be asked to develop a new course from the ground up. There are advantages to inheriting a course with structure. The course can be taught using previous course materials including pre-selected textbooks, syllabi, topical outline, and assignments and exams. This may take the new educator through the first iteration of classroom teaching. All courses become unique to their faculty. Personalizing of the course requires time and energy which may be in short supply.

At some point, the faculty will be required to develop new courses. It may seem to offer academic autonomy; however, an understanding of the internal departmental and external accreditation requirements is essential to successful course development. A curriculum committee may have generated a generic template for syllabi construction and may require approval of the course. As a result, a new course may need several years to become academically sound.

5 Service

The nursing profession is steeped in service and therefore most nursing faculty are more than adequately involved in this time-intensive category. Research suggests that this area is less well defined than teaching and scholarship and requires clarification to refine institutional requirements^[31]. In one survey of deans of nursing schools fewer than 5% rated service as an important criterion^[31]. The intent of faculty service is to provide representation and contribute to the interests of the educational institution both internally and in the larger local, state and national community. Germain enumerates the following concrete examples: "...contribution of educators to the development of: department/college, institution at large, professional/community organizations and government agencies^[32].

One researcher summarized the impressions of many junior faculty when she reports that "Participants reported a dissonance between stated institutional commitment to service and the actual weight it carried in tenure and promotion decisions"^[31]. For this reason the aforementioned researcher suggested that "junior faculty should be mentored to carefully determine service commitments and outcome indicators to evaluate the quality of service commitment needed to be developed." This advice is best implemented early in the tenure and promotion process. Questions which can be posed to plan activities include:

- What are examples of service and which are more highly valued?

- How much service is “enough”?
- Are service commitments factored into time schedules?
- How is advisement factored into the service requirement-is it?

Once again certain pragmatic issues also intervene. At the beginning of employment junior faculty may only be members, not hold leadership positions, on committees to which they have been appointed. In this period when it may be difficult to be elected because of lack of name recognition, it is still possible to demonstrate initiative and involvement in service endeavors. Typically as faculty become more engaged in the life of the college/university, they are successful in providing examples of a widening circle of influence both within and outside the work environment and their profession.

6 Scholarship: “Publish or perish”

When practice professions like nursing made inroads into the academy, they were confronted with a well-defined tradition of scholarship. Research agendas more suitably based in clinical practice were scrutinized with suspicion and found lacking in scientific rigor. Seasoned nurse clinicians who are novices to the academic role bring their own belief system and may be critical of the imposition of new and unfamiliar standards^[2]. They reported the perception of high to intense pressure to publish, the belief that they could remain current in nursing without a major focus on research and the belief that the increased emphasis on research diminishes the quality of classroom teaching^[33]. Yet acceptance into the academy continues to require conformity with a traditional definition of scholarship that is only slowly responding to inroads into its rigid boundaries. To ensure career success the new nursing academic must comprehend individual organizational cultures which typically value scholarship.

Questions that may assist with the delineation of this multifaceted concept include^[30]:

- What constitutes scholarship?
- What kind of department resources is available to support scholarship development?
- Can faculty receive release time from teaching?
- Are grants available for research?
- Do senior faculty have research agendas that provide opportunities for collaboration with junior faculty?
- Does the overall department have a team and theme-based approach to scholarship and research?
- What kind of institutional supports are available?
- Does the library subscribe to comprehensive data bases and a wide range of journals?
- Are there trained personnel who can assist with literature searches?
- How many publications are required and in what time frame for promotion and tenure?
- How are publications weighted?
- Is it more important to publish an article in a peer reviewed journal than a book or book chapter?

7 Expansion of the definition of Scholarship-Boyer’s contribution

Interpretation of Boyer’s now landmark work, *Scholarship reconsidered: priorities of the professoriate*^[34], has provided practice professions like nursing with innovative solutions to the conundrum of fitting practice research into a traditional

model of scholarship which only championed discovery of new knowledge. In his taxonomy Boyer favored expansion to four “separate yet overlapping” categories of scholarship: Discovery; Engagement/Application; Integration and Teaching and Learning ^[34]. Boyer underscored the importance of stringent evaluation standards for all types of scholarship to be equally valued and legitimated. He refined these standards to include “six yardsticks of excellence”. All forms of scholarship should exhibit: clear goals; adequate preparation; appropriate methods; significant results; effective presentation and reflective critique ^[35].

While the first, the scholarship of discovery, mirrors the classical model of academic scholarship, the other three contribute form and substance to an expanded and enriched definition of research and scholarship. They are more cogent to the work of disciplines which rely heavily on application and evaluation of successful programs, curricula and teaching methods in the community, academy and practice setting. Neophyte academics should explore not only the intricacies of these expanded definitions of scholarship but also the relative legitimacy of this kind of scholarship in their institution.

The Scholarship of Engagement and Application. Paskiewicz notes that this form of scholarship minimizes boundaries between theory and practice by offering insights about why practice professions do what they do ^[35]. Glassick and colleagues stipulate that for these interfaces to constitute scholarship they must “... be tied directly to one's special field of knowledge and relate to, and flow directly out of, this professional activity. Such service is serious, demanding work requiring the rigor and accountability traditionally associated with research activities”.

The Scholarship of Integration. Increasingly academics must be conversant not only with new knowledge created in their field but those of overlapping complementary disciplines. In so doing scholars may perform research that utilizes multiple theoretical bases to expand the depth and breadth of their own discipline.

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (STL). This form of scholarship is particularly suitable for academics interested in their teaching function. “Key features of the scholarship of teaching and learning involve using data for informing future teaching, using peer review, and submitting scholarship for teaching and learning in a public forum” ^[37]. Foundational to the development of expert teaching is a rigorous process of planning, implementation and evaluation of curricular outcomes. “Valuing the education research paradigm as one type of academic scholarship may help broaden its application and significance within the university community of scholars ^[38].”

While educational research is pertinent to nursing academics, this form of scholarly inquiry may not meet the scholarly expectations of the department or institution. Therefore it is important to investigate the weight that this specific form of research will contribute to the tenure process. Reising suggests that one possible reason why nursing education research may not meet tenure requirements is that it is not supported by large research grants ^[37]. Further she recommends that if scholars are drawn to research in nursing education then they should seek employment at institutions which value it.

8 Conclusions / Lessons learned

Lesson One: Know the institutional requirements

For the nursing professor entering the academic arena, knowledge of promotion and tenure is essential. Since the process varies greatly among colleges and universities, the novice nurse educator should start by learning what the rules of the game are before the game actually begins. Therefore, organizational knowledge is critical to career success. For example, one might have a 1-year, a 3-year, and a 5-year review, layered with an application towards Associate-level professorship. Other institutions may do a 2-year, 4-year, 6-year review process layer with the promotion application. The candidate should become well-versed in the college or university's faculty manual as well as any additional manual or guidelines that originate at the Department or School level. Such resources serve as the faculty's ‘bible’ for questions on content, structure and process. The candidate should beware of potential changes made annually in the manuals. These changes, no matter how small, ultimately result in the need to adjust the content of one's portfolio and the preparation process.

Lesson Two: Know the department's available resources (human and material)

Pay attention to the resources available to faculty: secretarial support, library services, and graduate assistants' contributions. Identify the formal and informal structure of each of these parties. Clarify job responsibilities of the support staff, the library and student services. What functions does each contribute to faculty endeavors in teaching, service, and scholarship?

Lesson Three: Find a mentor or mentors

Ideally, the novice nurse educator should identify a mentor early on in the process. This is a challenging task. Faculty peers already have their research agendas established. Groups of faculty may already be grouped according to their scholarly interests. The assigned faculty mentor should share similar interests, but may not always be the case. While a mentor is obviously a critical component in the promotion and tenure process, it is realistic to expect that not one person holds all the expertise in one area, thus the need for multiple mentors.

One might develop a relationship with a faculty member who is a good writer and well versed in publishing scholarly works. Another person who has already navigated the promotion and tenure track could serve as a process expert, explaining how promotion and tenure works and what types of evidence are needed among the triad. Another faculty may help the novice educator in the teaching or service realm.

Lesson Four: Systematically collect cumulative evidence to support your case with knowledge of institutional perspectives and priorities

Begin by archiving one's work in each of the categories. While this step may seem logical and simple, it can actually become a last minute filing challenge if not done from the outset of the process. Collecting evidence should begin on the first day of employment in that college or university. Prior to employment, the new nurse educator will want to establish whether and which earlier work will be credited to promotion and tenure or if the process is one of starting with a clean slate.

Critical to this process is learning the preferred or required method for collection of supportive materials. Electronic portfolios are a newer format for this process and are increasingly utilized; however, many organizations still recommend wide-ring binders or file/storage bins.

Lesson Five: Establish the importance of teaching and how it is measured

In many, but not all organizations, teaching is the primary consideration for faculty promotions. Evidence of teaching effectiveness may include course syllabi, content outlines, assignments, and examples of student work such as exams, quizzes, and written exercises. The manner in which the organization measures teaching effectiveness is of paramount importance. Common tools include peer and student evaluations as well as examples of student engagement. The process whereby students evaluate their courses and faculty is usually dictated by the university and is summative, occurring at the end of the semester. Be sure to build time in one of the final classes to administer the tool.

The process of peer evaluation may take some advanced planning. Different departments have requirements about the definition of 'peer' and recommended parameters for the observation visit. Tenured faculty in the department or another may be the only who can observe and/or evaluate the neophyte faculty's teaching abilities. Explore whether the institution or department has recommended guidelines for both a classroom visit and/or a course curricular review. The college or school's faculty handbook may provide good source material.

Lesson Six: Establish the importance of service and how it is measure

The perceived importance of the service component in promotion and tenure varies from institution to institution. Typically, one is expected to serve at the department level and in time proceed to positions at the school, the university and

in the community at-large. Neophyte nurse educators, given their length of time in the profession, have already found ample opportunities to provide service. However, from the institutional perspective, not all service is viewed equally. As with teaching, the faculty member should have a clear understanding of the university or colleges expectations, which may be found in the faculty handbook. On an ongoing basis, the novice educators should keep track of their various service focused activities and collect evidence of such involvement. Membership on committees, advisory boards, councils and commissions with annual thank you letters highlighting active participation from the group's leaders are important pieces of evidence.

Beyond the first or second year of employment in the academic setting, the faculty will be expected to show increasing maturity, assuming leadership roles in the respective service organizations. Some examples include chairing an academic policies committee at the university, leading a major curriculum project, or directing a student organization. Evidence may include the aforementioned letter of support, the ballot which indicated your interest and willingness to serve on a committee, and exemplars of work done by a group.

Lesson Seven: Identify and develop a research/scholarly agenda

Production and demonstration of scholarly activities may be considered the most common yet complex of this triad in the promotion and tenure process. Clearly articulate a research or scholarly agenda to establish its validity to the department and value to promotion and tenure. Scholarship may be narrowly defined and limited to the development of new knowledge and its dissemination. Agendas which are focused on curricular innovation or evaluation of service activities may not be well-suited to the priorities of some departments.

Colleges and universities do require specific evidence of some form of scholarly activity for each step of the promotion and tenure process. There may be suggested or required numbers and kinds of scholarship to achieve each level. Two universally accepted academic attributes are that these activities be peer-reviewed and disseminated. Traditionally accepted forms of scholarship include poster and podium presentations and publication of articles. Some departments are specific about dissemination in preferred journals and conferences.

The most efficient way to generate scholarship is to create a poster around a particular theme. Once that has been accepted for a conference, the author may begin to further develop the idea as a podium presentation for submission to another conference. Finally, it should not be difficult to build on these previous forms as the foundation for a publishable article. As previously noted, all of the above should be submitted for peer review. If they are not, be prepared to accept that they may not be considered as evidence of scholarship.

Lesson Eight: State your case convincingly and present your evidence persuasively

Learn how the process to achieve promotion and tenure takes place over the course of the 6-7 years. Who is the chair and who are the members? Does the applicant write a summary document and present or does the chair? In either case, it is critical for the applicant and the committee to have a clear understanding of accomplishments in all three areas and how they relate to the mission of the department and university. Think of each presentation as one more chapter illustrating unique contributions and achievements to enhance the reputation of the educational institution.

At the (hopefully) successful conclusion of each stage of the P&T process, the applicant should review the recommendations of the committee. In the intervening period before the next P&T review, the applicant should discuss with the Chair / Dean a realistic plan for achieving the goals.

Everyone's journey has similarities and differences. Balancing the triad of teaching, service, and scholarship is undoubtedly complicated. Knowing how and when to place focus on each of these requires determination and organization. The most efficient and effective approach involves viewing the three categories as complimentary, not

conflicting and therefore mutually exclusive. While working hard is a given, working smart is essential to the achievement of the desired outcome.

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