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The

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Questions

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of

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Tenure



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edited by

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RICHARD P. CHAIT

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# *The Questions of Tenure*

EDITED BY  
RICHARD P. CHAIT

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## *The Questions of Tenure*

*To my son, Adam,  
and my daughter, Rachel*

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# *Introduction*

RICHARD P. CHAIT

*T*HIS BOOK IS ABOUT the *questions* of tenure, not the question of tenure. The difference is more than an “s.” In the singular, the question of tenure signifies a matter of political doctrine or moral principle. With equal fervor, interested parties either defend or attack the idea, often based on philosophical predisposition, anecdotes, and personal experiences or preferences. For the defense, we have, among others, *The Case for Tenure* (Finkin 1996), “In Defense of Tenure” (Machlup 1964), and “Tenure: A Summary, Explanation, and ‘Defense’” (Van Alstyne 1971). These works of ardent advocates summon the arguments on behalf of tenure. For the prosecution, the titles are a bit more colorful, but the arguments no less impassioned: *Profscam* (Sykes 1988), *Impostors in the Temple* (Anderson 1992), and “A Conscientious Objection” (O’Toole 1979). There are ill-reasoned and factually erroneous briefs for (e.g., Wiener 1998) and against tenure (Carlin 1999). Neither side has a monopoly on diatribe. And, lest anyone be confused, the United Faculty of Central AFT/NEA (2000) has disseminated “The Truth about Tenure.” Published opinions about the value and the evil of tenure are plentiful enough to comprise a genre of academic literature.

The contributors to this volume wanted to write a book different in substance and in tone from these polemics. Our goal was to write a book that would inform discussions of faculty work life through

research-based, data-driven answers to important, practical, and frequently posed questions about tenure policy and practice. Despite the academy's standards for scholarly research and discourse in the disciplines, questions about tenure are typically answered by impressions, convictions, and stories, or not at all. We approached these questions as scholars, not as proponents or critics of tenure—more in the manner of professors in a department of religion than faculty members in a school of theology. Academic orthodoxy and heresy are not at issue here; more than enough trees have been felled for that purpose. Instead, we attempt to furnish fresh data and balanced analyses.

We could not, of course, address every significant policy question. Some—for instance, the effects of post-tenure review on faculty performance and turnover—still lack sufficient data for us to draw conclusions. We bypassed others, like collectively bargained exceptions to standard tenure policies, as too limited in scope. For the questions that we did ask, definitive and universal answers were not always at the ready. We were, however, able to gather relevant data, offer analytical insights, and reach defensible conclusions, all with an aim of expanding knowledge and understanding—objectives no different from those of scholars of physics or French.

Tenure is a topic better illuminated by multiple spotlights than a single floodlight. Few questions about tenure—never mind the answers—apply uniformly across the vast and varied terrain of higher education. In each chapter, however, a single question dictated the focus. To be sure, certain questions have a broader reach than others. Therefore, some chapters have a wider angle than others. Taken together, the eleven chapters provide not so much a single, integrated picture as a collage.

Chapters 1 and 2 offer an overview of the larger academic context and the current state of tenure policy. “Why Tenure? Why Now?” by Richard Chait discusses the forces that rekindled the tenure debate in the 1990s after some twenty years of relative calm. Chapter 2, Cathy A. Trower’s “What Is Current Policy?” presents the results of a broad-scale analysis of current academic personnel policies at 217 four-year institutions of higher education selected to constitute a stratified random sample by Carnegie classification. In summarizing both normative and unconventional policies, this chapter reveals the range and patterns of policy provisions by institutional type.

Chapters 3 through 10 focus on actual and potential changes in ten-

ure policy and practice. Chapter 3 examines the assumption that tenure empowers faculty. Richard Chait explores the relationships among tenure, power, and campus governance at eight comparatively small, unselective, and undercapitalized colleges, four with tenure systems and four without.

Chapter 4 offers a critical analysis of the criteria, standards, and procedures by which faculty are considered for tenure. Through interviews with new faculty members and graduate students on the pathway to the professoriat, R. Eugene Rice and Mary Deane Sorcinelli examine the disconnect between faculty preferences and institutional priorities and the pressures induced by the heightened and broadened expectations institutions have for faculty.

Arguably, the most widespread transformation in faculty employment arrangements has been the increased reliance on part-time and non-tenure track faculty. In Chapter 5 Roger Baldwin and Jay Chronister document and explain the shift from tenured and tenure track appointments to part-time and tenure-ineligible positions. In analyzing this trend across the spectrum of four-year colleges and universities, the authors trace the evolution of the shift, discuss related policy implications, and offer suggestions for how to preserve institutional vitality and educational quality in the face of these changes.

Philip Altbach offers an international perspective in Chapter 6, "How Are Faculty Faring in Other Countries?" With particular emphasis on the practice of tenure, the changing nature of academic appointments, increased attention to faculty evaluation, and deteriorating conditions of academic work around the globe, Altbach draws on recent changes in the United States both as context and as a comparative touchstone and extends his analysis from Western Europe to Asia, and from Africa to Latin America.

Based on focus groups and an extensive, web-based survey of first- and second-year faculty and doctoral students about to enter the academic labor market from top-ranked departments in the natural sciences, the social sciences, the humanities, and select professions, Cathy A. Trower in Chapter 7 answers the question "Can Colleges Competitively Recruit Faculty without the Prospect of Tenure?" Tenure track positions were clearly the "gold standard." Nonetheless, new and prospective faculty could be lured to non-tenure track positions if the institution's location and the balance of work between teaching and research proved to be very attractive to the candidate. Based on these

results, Trower discusses some practical implications for faculty recruitment.

Charles Clotfelter's Chapter 8 takes the debate over tenure one step further. Drawing on four focus groups of tenured faculty members from premier research universities and liberal arts colleges, Clotfelter considers whether any incentives might persuade professors to waive tenure. Treating tenure as a condition of employment with a potentially quantifiable market value, he asked what, if any, alternative employment arrangements would constitute an acceptable and voluntary trade-off for individual faculty members.

William T. Mallon in Chapter 9 asks "Why Is Tenure One College's Problem and Another's Solution?" Mallon examined six largely undergraduate colleges of modest means and reputations: three that replaced contracts with tenure systems and three that abolished tenure in favor of contracts. All six colleges believed that the policy shift would produce increased performance accountability for faculty and more rigorous personnel decisions.

Anecdote and rhetoric seem to drive tenure debates and policy changes, so Cathy A. Trower and James P. Honan asked "How Might Data Be Used?" They explain why data play a relatively limited role in the decision-making about faculty employment policies, and what both data providers and data users might do differently in order to increase the import of information to the process. The authors report on their experience with two data-driven initiatives: a CD-ROM policy archive of 250 college and university faculty handbooks; and a pilot project—where ten institutions, from small, liberal arts colleges to flagship, land-grant universities, used a "tenure template" that tracks faculty employment from appointment to retirement.

In the final chapter Richard Chait summarizes the findings and identifies several themes that emerged clearly, yet indirectly, from the earlier chapters.

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