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The Tenure Process: A Qualitative Content Analysis of Tenure Standards and Application Processes at the Eight State Funded Universities in Mississippi

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The Tenure Process: A Qualitative Content Analysis of Tenure Standards and

Application Processes at the Eight State Funded Universities in Mississippi

by

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Abstract

The tenure application process is a very important period in any university faculty's professional career and can be a very stressful event. The results of a faculty's tenure application will determine whether they will have continued employment at their current university, if they will be required to take another probationary year, or if they will need to seek employment elsewhere. Due to how important this process is, any information associated with this process and the required documentation must be properly managed, easily accessible, and easy to understand. This qualitative analysis develops a list of best practices through a review of the literature surrounding the issues in university tenure and determines whether the eight state-funded Mississippi universities follow these best practices. After compiling the needed information, it could be determined that out of six best practices there were two of these best practices that most universities did not follow. Best practices not followed were 1) making clear what number of publications were needed and where they should be published, and 2) making certain to inform applicants of any changes in the application process. Due to a lack of information, it could not be determined if each university followed the sixth best practice, which would be to follow any pre-existing tenure standards, so further research would be needed. Overall, the eight state-funded Mississippi universities generally followed the best practices.

Key Words: tenure, application, management, process, career, university, Mississippi

Dedication

Meerkat:

Thank you for keeping me company and keeping my lap warm throughout the many

hours spent writing and researching this thesis.

You are the best cat I've ever had.

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First, I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Peyrefitte, for his support and guidance throughout this project, and for his encouragement and understanding when things felt overwhelming. Second, I would like to thank the Honors College, the College of Business and Economic Development, and the University of Southern Mississippi for the support and opportunities they've given me and the chance to grow through the challenges they've presented me. Finally, I would like to thank my family, friends, and boyfriend for supporting me when I felt like I couldn't complete this thesis, as their encouragement is what kept me going.

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List of Abbreviations

AAUP   American Association of University Professors
ASU   Alcorn State University
DSU   Delta State University
JSU   Jackson State University
MSU   Mississippi State University
MUW   Mississippi University for Women
MVSU   Mississippi Valley State University
Ole Miss   University of Mississippi
USM   University of Southern Mississippi

Chapter 1 : Introduction

The existence of tenure status within a university has been the subject of increasing controversy over the years. To those outside of academia, it may seem a position gained through favoritism, giving professors undeserved privileges and allowing them to slack off on their course load. Gould (2011) discusses these assumptions, describing how some view tenure as, "an unaffordable privilege for a few" (p. 39), and a merit that leaves faculty, "Retired In Place (RIP)" (p. 39), as well as how, "some observers have always considered the system of who is acceptable and who is not as elitism based on subservience to existing (stale?) standards defined by the academy" (p. 39). However, the tenure process has not only been designed to protect a professor's ability to research and discuss the areas they want to without fear of repercussion but to make professors prove their worth as an employee of their university through an extended performance review. According to Martocchio (2015) a performance review is where "Supervisors periodically review individual employee performance to evaluate how well each worker is accomplishing assigned duties relative to established standards and goals" (p. 75). Given the importance of the tenure process to a professor's continued employment, it should go without saying that this area should be very well managed, while the process itself should be made very clear and easy to follow. However, this is not always the case.

The purpose of this research is to engage in a qualitative analysis and review the literature addressing the university tenure application process to develop a list of best practices, and to determine if Mississippi's eight state-funded universities follow these best practices. While there is no official national standard for tenure applications, the

American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has published a few documents and loose guidelines on the tenure application process. The publication *Academic Freedom and Tenure: Statement of Principles* discusses probationary periods in the tenure process as well as academic freedom and where it should be applied. This research reviews this 1952 AAUP publication, more recent publications from the AAUP, and other related publications to develop a best practices list for the tenure application process.

Through collecting information and documentation of the promotion and tenure processes of the eight state-funded universities in Mississippi, I discovered that not all of the application processes are alike, and some are more difficult to navigate than others. While a number of the universities kept their information up to date and accessible, some of them claimed the required documentation would be available in specific places online but did not maintain them. Some information was buried within seemingly unrelated sections of a website, while other information was simply not up to date. I even encountered documents and web pages in desperate need of maintenance, as their links and documents were either broken or missing. The second contribution of this research is to assemble data taken from the eight state-funded universities in Mississippi regarding their tenure application processes, and other associated protocols, to determine whether or not they follow the list of best practices for the tenure application process developed by this research.

Chapter 2 : Literature Review

   I found many common criticisms of the tenure process in my literature review which formed the basis of the best practices. To begin with, I reviewed each university's faculty handbook entries on tenure and any associated tenure application documentation to create a spreadsheet of information regarding the application process. Then, I searched for literature pertaining to the tenure application process through university access to the EBSCO Host platform, an online database that addresses a wide range of disciplines. Next, I performed a review of the literature and assembled a list of six best practices that I felt would address the criticism set forth of the tenure process. Finally, I used the data previously gathered to determine which universities followed these best practices.

<div align="center">

<u>Best Practice #1: Probationary Periods</u>

</div>

   The first of these best practices is that probationary appointments of professors on a tenure track should not exceed seven years, with a maximum of six probationary years as the preference. The AAUP released their *Academic Freedom and Tenure: Statements of Principles*, and have updated it over the years as needed to properly address new issues or questions regarding academic freedom and tenure. In regards to probationary periods, the AAUP (1952) believes that, "Beginning with appointment to the rank of full-time instructor or a higher rank, the probationary period should not exceed seven years, including within this period full-time service in all institutions of higher education" (p. 118). While many universities do adhere to this suggestion by the AAUP, according to the article *A Study of Selected Faculty Handbooks: Policies on Promotion, Tenure, and Research* as written by Neher (1990), "Some handbooks suggest that the decision is made in the seventh year… two give the probationary period as eight years. Two others indicate a period of four to five years" (p. 12). While a shorter probationary period may

seem purely positive to some, Neher (1990) also points out that, "An early decision could be advantageous or disadvantageous to the candidate depending upon other duties and standards required. If standards include a list of publications, four to five years may be insufficient to develop a credible record" (p. 12).

<div align="center">**Best Practice #2: Publication Requirements and Preferences**</div>

The second best practice is to be very clear about what exactly is wanted for a tenure application, like the number of publications, where they should be published, what formats to be published in, what is expected in areas of teaching, service, and research, and which area is considered the most important. According to the AAUP's (1952) *Academic Freedom and Tenure: Statements of Principles* statement, "The precise terms and conditions of every appointment should be stated in writing and be in possession of both institution and teacher before the appointment is consummated" (p. 118). In a study by Duffy and Webb (2017), *Do Southeastern Public Universities adhere to the ACRL Tenure and Promotion Standards*, they found that, "the standards are vague and lack clarity. In spite of wide dissemination, most of the standards have not been fully adopted" (p. 343). Although focused on tenure standards in political science departments, the article *Tenure Standards in Political Science Departments: Results from a Survey of Department Chairs* by Rothgeb and Burger (2009) echoes some of the concerns seen in other articles regarding tenure in this passage:

> An overall assessment of the research literature on tenure is that it provides only superficial guidance regarding the factors colleges and universities examine when evaluating tenure cases. The literature does not give those interested in the issue much specific information and does not address such issues as the numbers, types, and quality of publications that might be expected of those seeking tenure; the precise means by which teaching is evaluated; and the role service plays as one tries to build the credentials needed to get tenure. Leaving these types of questions unanswered means that as they enter the profession, young academics continue to

confront a degree of uncertainty that diverts their attention from scholarly activities and that, as was noted above, may put some at an unacceptable disadvantage. (p. 514)

Best Practice #3: Notice of Special Circumstances and Changes

The third best practice is to make sure that the faculty member applying for tenure is aware of any special circumstances or changes. The AAUP's (2009) publication *The Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure* states that as a general rule:

> The faculty member will be advised, at the time of initial appointment, of the substantive standards and procedures generally employed in decisions affecting renewal and tenure. Any special standards adopted by the faculty member's department or school will also be transmitted. The faculty member will be advised of the time when decisions affecting renewal or tenure are ordinarily made and will be given the opportunity to submit material believed to be helpful to an adequate consideration of the faculty member's circumstances. (p. 101-102)

Just as a tenure applicant should be clearly informed of what is required of them in their application process, any special circumstances should be clearly stated as well should they arise.

Best Practice #4: Evidence of Professional Achievement

The fourth best practice is that tenure policies and procedures should include particular evidence of professional achievement. According to the *Mississippi Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning Policies and Bylaws* document (2018):

> Heads of institutions in making decisions regarding ranks and promotions in rank shall take into consideration evidence of professional achievement and academic growth to include, but not necessarily be limited to the following: Professional training and experience; Effectiveness of teaching; Effectiveness in interpersonal relationships, including professional ethics, cooperativeness, resourcefulness and responsibility; Professional growth, such as research, publications and creative activities; and Service and other non-teaching activities which reflect favorably upon the institution. (p. 68-69)

To determine whether or not an applicant has done the necessary work at the appropriate standard to qualify for tenure, evidence of their achievements and qualifications should be provided as proof of their merit.

Best Practice #5: Clear Standards and Requirements

The fifth best practice is to allow for only a minimal looseness of standards for research as well as the application process itself, focusing on clarity since standards that are too vague can allow for personal bias. According to *Fear and Loathing in the Fog: The Perceived (and Persistent) Vagaries of Tenure Standards Among Mass Communication Professors* by Thomas Gould (2011):

> Flexibility avoids harsh, immovable standards that might lead to a possible disqualification of a worthy candidate. At the same time, however, some candidates—at least as exhibited in this survey—feel the vagueness of the standards and the process of evaluating those standards might allow for personal, non-scholarly bias. (p. 37)

Gould (2011) also questions tenure standards by asking:

> Should tenure standards be explicit? Should candidates be made clear on precisely what is expected for tenure? Should the committee be allowed to use unstated standards? Should the entire process be kept in the shadows, that is, anonymous? Should tenure-track faculty be mentored along the way or are they expected to rise to the standard ''on their own'', as have many prior faculty candidates. (p. 37)

Best Practice #6: Adopting Preexisting Tenure Standards

The sixth and final best practice is to adopt in full any preexisting tenure standards that have been developed on a departmental basis. Duffy and Webb (2017) found in their study *Do Southeastern Public Universities Adhere to the ACRL Tenure and Promotion Standards?* that, "the standards are vague and lack clarity. In spite of wide dissemination, most of the standards have not been fully adopted. To serve as criteria to determine effectiveness of a library, the standards must be followed" (p. 343). If

standards are available for a particular department, they should be followed in order to ensure clarity of what is needed from an applicant as well as help establish a standard that can be recognized by any school.

In this paper, I will be reviewing the tenure standards of the eight state-funded universities of Mississippi to determine whether they follow these six best practices. This will provide a view into the general tenure application procedures for professors around the state and whether this important and time-consuming process has been made accessible and understandable for the applicant, or is complex and difficult to complete.

Chapter 3 : Methodology

Data

The faculty handbooks that I acquired came from each university's website, and any additional tenure application procedure documentation either came from the corresponding university website or a staff member through a request for documentation by email. The literature I chose for my literature review came from the collection of article databases on the EBSCOhost platform, and I looked for documents that specifically discussed the tenure application process.

To determine whether or not a university followed identified best practices, I first reviewed each university's faculty handbook in order to find their tenure application processes. Once I found the information I typed and cited it in a separate document and acquired any extra application forms, policies, or other supporting documentation and added it all to a folder with the name of each corresponding university. After doing this, I created a spreadsheet that held the names of the universities at the top and each of their requirements listed on the left side. Some universities had pieces of the application process that was nearly identical, while others had unique requirements. I added comments and footnotes where necessary to help ensure clarity when using the information later on.

After accumulating the tenure application process data from each university, I turned to the literature to see what some of the key points of debate were and what problems were being called on to be addressed. Through reading these articles and reports, I came up with six best practices that would aid in resolving some of the issues these papers presented and began the process of comparing these best practices to the practices in place at each university.

Procedure

To collect the necessary data, I engaged in qualitative document analysis and accumulated the corresponding faculty handbooks and tenure application process documents from each of the eight state-funded institutions in Mississippi. These eight state-funded institutions are Alcorn State University (ASU), Delta State University (DSU), Jackson State University (JSU), Mississippi State University (MSU), The Mississippi University for Women (MUW), Mississippi Valley State University (MVSU), The University of Mississippi (Ole Miss), and The University of Southern Mississippi (USM). After gathering all of the documentation, I began to narrow the information down into simple outlines of only what steps were necessary to apply for tenure. After doing this, I created an excel spreadsheet table that compared the eight state-funded institutions in Mississippi to the numerous application practices I found and marked in the corresponding boxes which application practices they did or did not follow.

Analysis

I determined whether or not a university followed my best practices by seeking out examples of each university following these best practices in writing. By reviewing the tenure application process data in my spreadsheet as well as re-reading the pertinent sections of each university's handbook, I noted each instance that a university followed best practices. Each time I found proof in writing, I copied the section into another document and listed what document and page number it could be found on for later reference. As well as writing a simple yes or no, I also wrote brief descriptions of exactly how each university did or did not follow these best practices since in some cases they had procedures in place that partially follow the best practices but did not completely do

so. If I could not find proof in writing that a university followed my best practices, I assumed that they did not.

Results Summary by Best Practice

First Best Practice

The first of the six best practices is that probationary appointments should last no longer than seven years with a maximum of six being the preferred option. I found that all eight universities abide by this suggested practice, and each university has written proof of this practice. ASU states in its faculty handbook that,

> For any faculty member appointed to a tenure-track position, the non-tenure probationary period shall not exceed a total of seven (7) years in this university. If tenure has not been awarded by the end of the sixth (6th) year of service to the university, appointment will be a one year terminal appointment. (p. 18)

DSU states on its website that, "The probationary period in a tenure-track position is six years," (Length of Probationary Period section, para. 1). JSU states in its faculty handbook that, "Beginning with a tenure track appointment to any professorial rank (assistant professor, associate professor, or professor), a faculty member must be reviewed for tenure during the sixth academic year of the probationary period" (p. 38). MSU states in its handbook that,

> A faculty member must apply for and be recommended for tenure by the president during the sixth full contract year of employment in a tenure-track position. Failure to earn tenure at the end of the sixth full contract year will result in a terminal contract in the seventh full contract year. (p. 29).

MUW states in its policy number 1302 that, "Beginning with a tenure-track appointment the probationary period shall be six academic years, three of which may have been met at the rank of instructor" (p. 1). MVSU states in its handbook that,

> Beginning with a tenure track appointment to a professorial rank as assistant professor, associate professor, or professor, a faculty member will be reviewed for

tenure during the sixth academic year of the probationary period or at the end of the designated probationary period… (p. 35)

Ole Miss states in its tenure policies and procedures document that,

Each candidate must serve a probationary period of five years of continuous or accumulated full-time employment at The University of Mississippi in a tenure-track professorial position exclusive of summer session employment in order to be considered for tenure. The sixth year shall be the year of formal review unless stated otherwise herein. (p. 2)

USM states in its handbook that,

Beginning with appointment to any professorial rank, a faculty member may be recommended for tenure in his/her sixth year of full-time employment with the university, having fully completed a probationary period of five academic years, three of which may have been met in the rank of instructor… (p. 94)

Second Best Practice

The second of the six best practices is that universities should be clear about the number of required publications, what journals each university prefers the professor's work to be published in, and the value the university places on research, community service, and teaching. Only one university out of the eight lists the number of publications required, one university states that publications should be sent and accepted by well-respected scholarly journals but does not state what journals it considers to be good enough, and all except for one university state whether research, community, or service carries more weight in an application. ASU does not say how many publications should be made or in what journal, but does state, "In granting tenure to a faculty member, academic qualifications are to be considered, especially with regards to the excellence of attainment in teaching, research and service. There should be demonstrable excellence in two of these" (p. 19), although ASU does not specify whether teaching,

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research, or service is more important. DSU does not say how many publications should

be made or in what journal, but does define the university's emphasis in the statement,

> Faculty who are eligible for tenure consideration shall compile and maintain a portfolio that provides evidence of their accomplishments in response to all three criteria used to make tenure decisions. These include teaching, scholarship, and service. Unless otherwise specified in the faculty member's contract, the primary emphasis among the three criteria shall be teaching. (Portfolios section, para. 1)

JSU does specify the number of publications it requires in the statement from their

promotion and tenure document,

> Minimum (promotion to Associate Professor [and/or Tenure]): at least three peer-reviewed publications, including one as senior author; for Fine Arts, participation in three major exhibitions. For graduate faculty, at least four peer-reviewed publications, including one as senior author; for Fine Arts, participation in four major exhibitions. (Effective with faculty class 2005-06). (p. 5)

along with the requirement from the same document of, "A minimum of two grants

submitted" (p. 4). JSU also briefly discusses in its handbook emphasis on responsibilities

in the statement,

> The responsibilities of a faculty member include teaching; research and other scholarly achievement; academic citizenship and professional collegiality; professional development; public service; student advising; and contributions to the department, the school/college, and the University. The emphasis given to each responsibility, as determined by existing circumstances, may vary among the departments/schools/colleges. (p. 39)

MSU does not say how many publications should be made or in what journals but does

briefly discuss emphasis on responsibilities in the statement from their handbook,

> Attainment of tenure at Mississippi State University is by no means automatic, based on years of service, but is the result of a thorough evaluation of a faculty member's performance in teaching, research and/or creative achievement, and service. The proportions of these activities may vary by discipline. Excellence in one area and satisfactory performance in the others are needed to qualify a faculty member for tenure. (p. 29)

MUW does not say how many publications should be made or in what journals but does discuss emphasis on responsibilities in their PS 1304 document in the statement, "Application for tenure must clearly address and document proof of accomplishments in each of the three areas described in item 2 above" (p. 2), and lists those three areas as, "1. Excellence in teaching/advising; 2. Quality and extent of scholarly and professional activities; 3. Quality and extent of service to the department and the entire university" (p. 1). MVSU does not say how many publications should be made or in what journals, but does state the university's focus in their handbook with the statement, "The criteria to be used in recommendations regarding promotion and plan for progress toward tenure include the following, with the greatest weight being given to the first criterion: Teaching excellence" (p. 36). Ole Miss does not say how many publications should be made or in what journals but does state the university's focus in their handbook with the statement, "Teaching is central to the university's mission" (p. 36). Finally, USM does not say how many publications should be made or in what journals and does not say whether research, teaching, or service is more important to the university.

Third Best Practice

The third of the six best practices is to make professors applying for tenure aware of any special circumstances or changes in the application process. Three universities clearly state that they make any changes known to new applicants, two universities discuss changes in tenure policy and how it should be voted on but do not state that applicants must be notified of the changes, and three universities make no mention of procedures for letting applicants know of changes. ASU, DSU, and MUW all made no specific mention of alerting applicants to changes in tenure application processes, so I am

considering them to not follow this best practice. MVSU and Ole Miss both discuss how

changes in policy must be voted on, and faculty must be kept up to date, but do not

explicitly state that it is important for the information to be spread quickly to applicants.

MVSU briefly discusses the dissemination of changes in policy for promotion and tenure

in their handbook, stating,

> Each department shall develop a policy for discipline specific criteria for
> awarding promotion and tenure. The development and implementation of this
> policy must be voted on and approved by all faculty members who are tenured or
> on tenure track. This policy should be given to each new faculty member within
> the first month of employment by the Chair of the Department. During the first
> month of employment, the Department Chair shall meet with a new faculty
> member (tenured, tenure track and non-tenured) and develop a plan for progress
> toward tenure, promotion post-tenure review, or continued employment. This plan
> shall be voted on and approved by the Department Tenure and Promotion
> Committee. (p. 36)

While this excerpt explains that faculty will be aided in developing a plan for their tenure

application process, the faculty handbook does not explicitly state that faculty would be

made aware of changes in the application process. Ole Miss mentions in its Tenure

Policies and Procedure documents that, "revision to this tenure policy shall only be made

after consultation with the Academic Council and the Senate of the Faculty" (p. 16), and

briefly discusses in their promotions document,

> At that time, the faculty member must be given, in writing, the guidelines or
> standards of each of the units, the methods to be used for informing the faculty
> member of his or her progress toward promotion, and a statement about how
> possible disagreements between units will be handled. Should the standards be
> altered, each faculty member shall receive written notification of the changes
> from the chair or dean. (p. 1)

JSU, MSU, and USM all explicitly state that any changes in application procedure or

tenure policy will not be enforced until publicized and shared among applicants. JSU

states in their handbook that,

The precise terms and conditions of every appointment should be stated in writing and be in the possession of both the University and the faculty member before the appointment is consummated. Moreover, fairness to probationary faculty members prescribes that they be informed, early in their appointments, of the substantive and procedural standards that will be followed in the promotion and tenure processes. The University may revise such standards, or implement new ones, at any time for the best interest of the University. New policies will not be enforced until after being publicized. (p. 40)

MSU states in their handbook that,

The policies and procedures in effect in any academic year must have been fully approved by the Faculty Senate and signed by the provost and the president. If the changes to the university document are approved between May 16 and October 1 of a given year (calendar year 1), then the changes to the university document will go into effect May 16 of the following year (calendar year 2). If the changes are approved after October 1 (calendar year 1) and before May 16 of the subsequent year (calendar year 2), then changes in the university document will go into effect on May 16 of the following year (calendar year 3). In both cases, all college and department documents must be revised as necessary no later than the effective date of the revised university document. Copies of all officially-approved, university promotion and tenure policies and procedures, including subsequent revisions, together with their dates of approval, will be kept in the Faculty Senate Office and the Office of the Provost. In addition, an electronic copy of the current policies and procedures will be posted on the MSU website (at www.facultysenate.msstate.edu). (p. 27)

USM states in their handbook that,

Additional guidelines, policies, or criteria governing promotion in rank within an academic unit must be developed by the academic unit and approved by the college dean and the Provost; stated in objective terms in a written document; disseminated among all academic staff members of the academic unit; and followed in all promotion proceedings. (p. 90)

Fourth Best Practice

The fourth of the six best practices is that universities should show the following evidence of professional achievement: professional training and experience; effectiveness of teaching; effectiveness in interpersonal relationships including professional ethics, cooperativeness, resourcefulness, and responsibility; professional growth such as research, publications, and creative activities; service and other non-teaching activities

which reflect favorably upon the institution. The following tables list whether each

university requires these items or not:

Evidence of Professional Achievement	Alcorn State University (ASU)
Professional training and experience	YES
Effectiveness in teaching	YES
Effectiveness in interpersonal relationships including professional ethics, cooperativeness, resourcefulness, and responsibility	YES
Professional growth such as research, publications, and creative activities	YES
Service and other non-teaching activities which reflect favorably upon the institution	YES

Table 1: Evidence of Professional Achievement - Alcorn State University (ASU)

Evidence of Professional Achievement	Delta State University (DSU)
Professional training and experience	YES
Effectiveness in teaching	YES
Effectiveness in interpersonal relationships including professional ethics, cooperativeness, resourcefulness, and responsibility	YES
Professional growth such as research, publications, and creative activities	YES
Service and other non-teaching activities which reflect favorably upon the institution	YES

Table 2: Evidence of Professional Achievement - Delta State University (DSU)

Evidence of Professional Achievement	Jackson State University (JSU)
Professional training and experience	YES
Effectiveness in teaching	YES

Effectiveness in interpersonal relationships including professional ethics, cooperativeness, resourcefulness, and responsibility	YES
Professional growth such as research, publications, and creative activities	YES
Service and other non-teaching activities which reflect favorably upon the institution	YES

Table 3: Evidence of Professional Achievement - Jackson State University (JSU)

Evidence of Professional Achievement	Mississippi State University (MSU)
Professional training and experience	YES
Effectiveness in teaching	YES
Effectiveness in interpersonal relationships including professional ethics, cooperativeness, resourcefulness, and responsibility	YES
Professional growth such as research, publications, and creative activities	YES
Service and other non-teaching activities which reflect favorably upon the institution	YES

Table 4: Evidence of Professional Achievement - Mississippi State University (MSU)

Evidence of Professional Achievement	The Mississippi University for Women (MUW)
Professional training and experience	YES
Effectiveness in teaching	YES
Effectiveness in interpersonal relationships including professional ethics, cooperativeness, resourcefulness, and responsibility	YES
Professional growth such as research, publications, and creative activities	YES
Service and other non-teaching activities which reflect favorably upon the institution	YES

Table 5: Evidence of Professional Achievement - The Mississippi University for Women (MUW)

Evidence of Professional Achievement	Mississippi Valley State University (MVSU)
Professional training and experience	YES
Effectiveness in teaching	YES
Effectiveness in interpersonal relationships including professional ethics, cooperativeness, resourcefulness, and responsibility	YES
Professional growth such as research, publications, and creative activities	YES
Service and other non-teaching activities which reflect favorably upon the institution	YES

Table 6: Evidence of Professional Achievement - Mississippi Valley State University (MVSU)

Evidence of Professional Achievement	The University of Mississippi (Ole Miss)
Professional training and experience	YES
Effectiveness in teaching	YES
Effectiveness in interpersonal relationships including professional ethics, cooperativeness, resourcefulness, and responsibility	NO PROOF FOUND
Professional growth such as research, publications, and creative activities	YES
Service and other non-teaching activities which reflect favorably upon the institution	YES

Table 7: Evidence of Professional Achievement - The University of Mississippi (Ole Miss)

Evidence of Professional Achievement	The University of Southern Mississippi (USM)

Professional training and experience	YES
Effectiveness in teaching	YES
Effectiveness in interpersonal relationships including professional ethics, cooperativeness, resourcefulness, and responsibility	YES
Professional growth such as research, publications, and creative activities	YES
Service and other non-teaching activities which reflect favorably upon the institution	YES

Table 8: Evidence of Professional Achievement - The University of Southern Mississippi (USM)

Fifth Best Practice

The fifth of the six best practices is that tenure research standards, as well as the application process itself, should be made very clear. Having loose tenure standards can be a good thing depending on the kind of research being done, but this same looseness can also create a vagueness that may allow for personal bias. I ranked each university on a scale from "1" to "5", with "1" being not very clear, and "5" being very clear and detailed. Two universities I marked as "5", two universities I marked as "4", one university I marked as "3", two universities I marked as "2", and one university I marked as "1".

Starting from the highest rank and going down to the lowest, JSU and USM were both marked as "5s". JSU had a section on tenure in their handbook which was quite clear by itself, but with the addition of another promotion and tenure document any gaps in procedure were clearly filled in, causing me to rank it as "5" out of "5". USM also has a section in the handbook on tenure as well as a document explaining how to format the tenure dossier, a recommendation form with more information, and examples of every

type of tenure and promotion application for every department available all in one place online.

Moving on, DSU and MSU were both marked as "4s", since they were both very good about clarity but did not have quite as much information and extra documentation. DSU has a section in their online handbook dedicated to faculty tenure and library tenure as well as a separate handbook for tenure and promotion with descriptions of what is needed for an application and what to expect from the process. MSU has a section in their handbook on tenure and promotion with some general information about the process, as well as a tenure application document that fills in much more information about the process as well as some light descriptions.

Next, Ole Miss was the only university marked as a "3", as it was not void of information, but did not provide too much detail either. Ole Miss briefly and generally discusses the application process in its Tenure Policies and Procedures document and lists some of the requirements for the tenure dossier, as well as provides a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) sheet to inform applicants of a little more of the application process and the vocabulary associated with it.

MVSU and ASU are the next down, ranked as "2s" since they give general information and maybe an additional application form, but do not go into detail or have extra documentation as to what is needed for the application process. MVSU has a section in their handbook on tenure and discusses the information needed decently well, but does not go into detail and provides no additional documentation to aid with the application process. ASU has a section in their handbook on tenure with very general

information as well as a tenure application form with nothing to describe what each item is.

Finally, MUW was the only university marked as a "1", as there was not a lot of information present about the application process. MUW has a section in their handbook that briefly mentions tenure and two policy documents that very generally describe tenure and promotion.

Sixth Best Practice

The sixth and final best practice of the list of best practices is that any standards that exist for the tenure application process on a departmental basis should be adopted. However, due to a lack of generally accepted tenure standards for each department type, and the numerous differences between how departments are structured at each university, I was unable to determine if the eight state funded Mississippi universities followed this best practice or not. There is no common standard for the tenure application process for any department, so I did not have a basis from which to judge how each of the universities and their departments handled the process. Each department has their own procedure for the tenure application process, and while they do share some points in the application process in common they do not discuss adherence to any known standards.

Chapter 4 : Summary of Results by University

The results that I have gathered determining whether each university follows the six best practices are summarized in the tables below:

Best Practices	Alcorn State University (ASU)
Probationary appointments no longer than 7 years; maximum of 6 years preferred	YES
Made known # of publications/places to be published + whether teaching, research, or service is more important	Does not state # of publications, or where they should be published. States excellence should be demonstrable in two areas (teaching, research, or service).
Applicants made aware of special circumstances/changes	NO – Proof not found
Requires evidence of professional achievement (see table 1 for detail)	YES
Clarity in application process (5 = best, 1 = worst)	Marked as 2
Existing tenure standards adopted in full	UNABLE TO BE DETERMINED

Table 9: Results for Alcorn State University (ASU)

Best Practices	Delta State University (DSU)
Probationary appointments no longer than 7 years; maximum of 6 years preferred	YES
Made known # of publications/places to be published + whether teaching, research, or service is more important	Does not state # of publications, or where they should be published. States that teaching will be given the greatest weight (unless stated otherwise within specific departments).
Applicants made aware of special circumstances/changes	NO – Proof not found
Requires evidence of professional achievement (see table 2 for detail)	YES
Clarity in application process (5 = best, 1 = worst)	Marked as 4
Existing tenure standards adopted in full	UNABLE TO BE DETERMINED

Table 10: Results for Delta State University (DSU)

Best Practices	Jackson State University (JSU)
Probationary appointments no longer than 7 years; maximum of 6 years	YES

preferred	
Made known # of publications/places to be published + whether teaching, research, or service is more important	General faculty must submit a minimum of three peer reviewed publications must be made with at least one as a senior author. Fine arts applicants must participate in three major exhibitions. Graduate faculty must submit a minimum of four peer reviewed publications with at least one as a senior author. Graduate fine arts applicants must participate in four major exhibitions. Does not state where publications must be published. Emphasis on teaching, research, or service will be determined by department.
Applicants made aware of special circumstances/changes	YES
Requires evidence of professional achievement (see table 3 for detail)	YES
Clarity in application process (5 = best, 1 = worst)	Marked as 5
Existing tenure standards adopted in full	UNABLE TO BE DETERMINED

Table 11: Results for Jackson State University (JSU)

Best Practices	Mississippi State University (MSU)
Probationary appointments no longer than 7 years; maximum of 6 years preferred	YES
Made known # of publications/places to be published + whether teaching, research, or service is more important	Does not state # of publications, or where they should be published. States excellence should be demonstrable in one area with satisfactory performance in others (teaching, research, or service).
Applicants made aware of special circumstances/changes	YES
Requires evidence of professional achievement (see table 4 for detail)	YES
Clarity in application process (5 = best, 1 = worst)	Marked as 4
Existing tenure standards adopted in full	UNABLE TO BE DETERMINED

Table 12: Results for Mississippi State University (MSU)

Best Practices	The Mississippi University for Women (MUW)
Probationary appointments no longer than 7 years; maximum of 6 years preferred	YES
Made known # of publications/places to be published + whether teaching, research, or service is more important	Does not state # of publications, or where they should be published. States excellence should be demonstrable in all areas (teaching, research, and service) but that teaching will be given the greatest weight.
Applicants made aware of special circumstances/changes	NO – Proof not found
Requires evidence of professional achievement (see table 5 for detail)	YES
Clarity in application process (5 = best, 1 = worst)	Marked as 1
Existing tenure standards adopted in full	UNABLE TO BE DETERMINED

Table 13: Results for The Mississippi University for Women (MUW)

Best Practices	Mississippi Valley State University (MVSU)
Probationary appointments no longer than 7 years; maximum of 6 years preferred	YES
Made known # of publications/places to be published + whether teaching, research, or service is more important	Does not state # of publications, or where they should be published. States that teaching will be given the greatest weight.
Applicants made aware of special circumstances/changes	UNCERTAIN – Does not explicitly state that applicants will receive notice of change in policy.
Requires evidence of professional achievement (see table 6 for detail)	YES
Clarity in application process (5 = best, 1 = worst)	Marked as 2
Existing tenure standards adopted in full	UNABLE TO BE DETERMINED

Table 14: Results for Mississippi Valley State University (MVSU)

Best Practices	The University of Mississippi (Ole Miss)
Probationary appointments no longer than 7 years; maximum of 6 years preferred	YES
Made known # of publications/places to	Does not state # of publications, or where

be published + whether teaching, research, or service is more important	they should be published. States that teaching will be given the greatest weight.
Applicants made aware of special circumstances/changes	UNCERTAIN – Does not explicitly state that applicants will receive notice of change in policy.
Requires evidence of professional achievement (see table 7 for detail)	UNCERTAIN – Four of the five requirements were met and marked as YES, one of the five requirements could not be proven and marked as NO.
Clarity in application process (5 = best, 1 = worst)	Marked as 3
Existing tenure standards adopted in full	UNABLE TO BE DETERMINED

Table 15: Results for The University of Mississippi (Ole Miss)

Best Practices	The University of Southern Mississippi (USM)
Probationary appointments no longer than 7 years; maximum of 6 years preferred	YES
Made known # of publications/places to be published + whether teaching, research, or service is more important	Does not state # of publications, or where they should be published. Does not state whether teaching, research, or service will be given the most weight.
Applicants made aware of special circumstances/changes	YES
Requires evidence of professional achievement (see table 8 for detail)	YES
Clarity in application process (5 = best, 1 = worst)	Marked as 5
Existing tenure standards adopted in full	UNABLE TO BE DETERMINED

Table 16: Results for The University of Southern Mississippi (USM)

Chapter 5 : Discussion

The tenure application process is a major capstone in any university professor's career, as the results of this application determine whether they will continue their employment at their current university. Management of this process and all associated documentation and ensuring that applicants not only have all of the information they need but can access it easily and clearly, is highly important. Professors and the courses they take the time to develop are providing a crucial service to students working towards their degrees and future careers, so not providing these professors with the resources they need to advance their careers within that institution reflects poorly on the university and conveys a lack of respect for their work.

Overall, through my research I was able to develop a list of six best practices and determine which of the eight state-funded Mississippi universities currently operate according to these best practices, as well as which ones do not. A set of tables that detail each university and the practices they followed is available in the results section. There were two primary issues I found among the eight universities in Mississippi regarding the tenure application process, which were the fact that what each university wants in regards to publications, teaching, research, and service was generally not made clear, and half of them did not explicitly state that they would make applicants aware of changes to their application process. It is important to make applicants aware of what is required from them, as some universities may require publications in specific kinds of journals or may require a certain number of publications before an applicant may be considered for tenure. By not stating the number of publications needed and where they should be published, this creates a risk of an applicant reaching the end of their probationary period

and beginning their tenure dossier to then discover that they have not published to the standards of the university. It is also important for applicants to know whether teaching, research, or service is more important to the university so they know what areas they need to devote extra care and time to in order to align with the values of the university. Finally, any changes made to the application process should be immediately shared with all applicants to reduce the risk of an applicant being rejected for not having all the required pieces of the application.

Due to the lack of generally accepted and disseminated standards for tenure, I was unable to determine whether the eight state-funded Mississippi universities followed the sixth best practice. Perhaps with more in-depth research, a set of general standards could be assembled, but this would likely require looking at the tenure application processes of universities across the United States. There may be differences in the tenure application process between schools with more competitive hiring processes and others, and there may be a purposeful vagueness in some application processes to weed out only the faculty members who understand the university deeply enough to properly achieve tenure.

This analysis has set out to address some common issues and complaints within the realm of tenure and the application process that must be completed to achieve it. Achieving tenured status is a highly important milestone in any faculty member's career, and while it may be a time-consuming process, it should not be a frustrating process due to lack of information or poorly defined standards. I believe that these eight universities in Mississippi should focus on making it very clear what their expectations are and what

they want for applicants to achieve and be certain to let applicants know of any changes to their application process.

However, there were limitations on what I could accomplish with my research. Since I could not find evidence of accepted tenure application standards on a departmental basis, I could not determine whether the eight Mississippi universities followed the sixth best practice. Additionally, since I only looked at tenure procedures in Mississippi, I don't have a very wide view of the state of the tenure application process throughout the United States. Further research into this area would benefit from focusing more on determining tenure application standards on a departmental basis, as well as taking a broader look at the tenure application procedures around the United States and how they vary.

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