

TENURE

Tenure is essential to the protection of academic freedom, which is necessary for all who teach and conduct research in higher education. A tenured appointment is an indefinite appointment—that is, an appointment that is not subject to annual renewal and that can be terminated only for adequate cause or under extraordinary circumstances, such as financial exigency or program elimination.

Without the protections of tenure, faculty members can lose their positions because their speech inside or outside of the classroom, their publications, or their research findings offend accepted moral views, contradict common beliefs, or run counter to powerful interests. Under such conditions, faculty members cannot properly fulfill their core responsibilities to advance and transmit knowledge.

At most institutions of higher education, tenure is granted after a lengthy probationary period that concludes with an extensive review of a faculty member's performance. At many institutions, that review focuses on research accomplishments. It is, however, important not to confuse how tenure is acquired with the purpose that tenure serves. As the AAUP's *Tenure and Teaching-Intensive Appointments* observes, "Tenure was not designed as a merit badge for research-intensive faculty." Tenure, in the words of the 1940 *Statement on Principles of Academic Freedom and Tenure*, "is a means to an end." The end that tenure serves is the protection of academic freedom.

Today, tenure protects a decreasing minority of faculty members. In 2016, across all institutions of higher education in the United States, 73 percent of faculty members served on contingent appointments—that is, full-time non-tenure-track and part-time faculty positions or graduate student teaching assistantships.

It is sometimes argued that the contingency crisis in US higher education requires a new conception of tenure. In fact, the AAUP's conception of tenure was originally designed to address an earlier contingency crisis of similar proportions that occurred during the Great Depression. The 1940 *Statement* insists that tenure, as defined above, is acquired once a full-time faculty member of any rank is reappointed beyond the maximum length of the probationary period, which is seven years. Sometimes referred to as "de facto tenure," the AAUP's conception is one of automatic tenure based on length of service. It applies to all full-time faculty members, regardless of whether their institutions designate their appointments as "tenure track."

In addition, the AAUP recommends as best practice that faculty members who wish to remain in the profession on a part-time basis over the long term be afforded fractional positions, including fully proportional pay, that are eligible for tenure and benefits, with proportional expectations for service and professional development.

Tenure and Teaching-Intensive Appointments concludes as follows: "Tenure was conceived as a right rather than a privilege. As the 1940 *Statement of Principles* observed, the intellectual and economic securities of the tenure system must be the bedrock of any effort by higher education to fulfill its obligations to students and society."

Learn more at www.aaup.org/tenure.