

THE CHALLENGE OF HIGH RISK



Tenure as an institution has been shrinking for years. Today, tenured

The Chronicle taps 16 scholars and authors to address tough questions about tenure.

78 Are Tenure and Social Justice Compatible?
Corey Miles

SECTION 1



New Tenure Mode for Changing Time

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still, the rest of the world is imitating it.

The pandemic has highlighted inequities in the tenure process, exacerbating family responsibilities for female faculty members especially. Extending the tenure clock is often mentioned as a partial remedy, but it's a problematic one, says the AAUP's Tiede, because it delays the end of junior professors' probationary period and their promotions, resulting in net losses to cumulative lifetime income. Instead, he suggests a more straightforward, immediate solution: Faculty-governance bodies could lower the bar. Instead of requiring three journal articles as part of the tenure portfolio, for instance, ask for two.

Alternatively, institutions can acknowledge lost time and income and directly compensate for it, as did the University of Denver. It granted "retroactive pay raises and retirement-fund contributions to ensure faculty don't suffer lifelong financial consequences for the delay in achieving their career milestones."

Denver's percentage of tenured faculty, at more than half, is higher than average, but the university is also trying to improve conditions for its non-tenure-track teaching and professional faculty members. A policy shift made six years ago converted 222 full-time lecturer positions to longer

contract positions (up to seven years) with greater employment stability, a defined role in faculty governance, and a clear pathway to promotion.

At Denver, non-tenure-track faculty have, if anything, played an outsized role in the Faculty Senate, says Kate Willink, vice provost for faculty affairs. The next step is to standardize promotion opportunities for the nontenured in more than 20 departments across 11 schools, finding the right balance between fairness and programs' autonomy.

Business, law, pharmacy, and other professional programs have long relied on professors of practice, who work outside the tenure system. They have fresh real-world experience, aren't necessarily trying to build a long-term academic career, and want to help nurture the next generation in their field. The Tobin College of Business at St. John's University, in New York, for example, is actively hiring more such professors — although there is currently a cap that allows a maximum of 10 percent of Tobin's 95 full-time faculty members to be in that category, says Noreen Sharpe, the college's dean.