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# Top 10 Tips for a Newly Tenured Professor

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## Top 10 Tips for a Newly Tenured Professor

By Eric Goldman\*

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Prospective and junior professors can find lots of advice in blogs about key milestones in a junior professor's life cycle: how to get the first academic job, how to lateral from one institution to another, and how to get tenure.

In contrast, tenured professors don't get a lot of guidance about what to do with the rest of their career. It's tempting to assume that if you're good enough to get tenure, you'll know what to do with it. However, it turns out my pre-tenure experiences hadn't fully prepared me for what I encountered post-tenure. Based on my experiences, I prepared my top 10 recommendations for newly tenured professors:

**1. Celebrate!** Undoubtedly you've worked hard to achieve this milestone — and what a grand milestone it is! It surely ranks as one of the biggest career highlights you'll ever have. You deserve to reward yourself for the sacrifices you made along the way. In my case, I took a two-week river rafting trip in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.<sup>1</sup>

**2. Dream big and take risks.** While hustling for tenure, you probably had a number of scholarship ideas that you thought to yourself “not until after tenure.” Well, that time has arrived. In particular, because you now aren't obligated to crank out a certain number of articles per year (or, in the legal field, to prepare articles for the semi-annual submission windows), you can now take on projects with higher risks of failure (such as empirical projects) or those with longer gestation periods.

In my case, post-tenure I've co-authored an advertising law casebook,<sup>2</sup> a multiyear project that would have been folly pre-tenure. I've also got several works in process that have been incubating for a year or two. The ability to wait to publish an article gives me the time and space to get it right. In contrast, I routinely see junior faculty rushing to publish a promising paper before it's fully developed (I plead guilty to doing this myself in my pre-tenure years). These papers underperform compared to what they could have been if they had proper incubation time.

**3. Do good.** Now that you don't need to crank out articles on a set schedule, you can consider other ways to advance your research goals. Academic articles are not the only way for us to contribute to the discourse, and — being realistic — they typically are not even a very effective way given their low readership. So you should consider alternatives to traditional academic scholarship.

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\* Professor and Director, High Tech Law Institute, Santa Clara University School of Law. Email: [egoldman@gmail.com](mailto:egoldman@gmail.com). Website: <http://www.ericgoldman.org>. I earned tenure and was promoted to Associate Professor in 2008, and I was promoted to (full) Professor in 2012. This essay was first published as *Congratulations! Now What?*, INSIDE HIGHER ED, May 31, 2013, <http://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2013/05/31/essay-advice-newly-tenured>.

<sup>1</sup> See Posting of Eric Goldman to Goldman's Observations Blog, *Arctic National Wildlife Refuge/Hulahula River Trip Quick FAQs*, June 24, 2008, [http://blog.ericgoldman.org/personal/archives/2008/06/arctic\\_national.html](http://blog.ericgoldman.org/personal/archives/2008/06/arctic_national.html).

<sup>2</sup> REBECCA TUSHNET & ERIC GOLDMAN, *ADVERTISING & MARKETING LAW: CASES AND MATERIALS* (July 2012 ed.), <https://gumroad.com/l/zPsX>.

For example, in the course of my research on consumer reviews,<sup>3</sup> I discovered a company was encouraging doctors to use contracts to suppress their patients' online reviews. I could have written a scholarly article criticizing these practices, but what good would that have done? Instead, I spent about the same amount of time helping to prepare a website<sup>4</sup> advocating against these practices. This ended up being a successful project. Within six months of the site's launch, the advocacy website helped cause the company to give up its insidious practice.<sup>5</sup>

**4. Make each project count.** I earned tenure when I was 40. Assuming I write one article a year (a typical rate for law professors) through age 70, I will make "only" 30 more scholarly contributions to my lifetime oeuvre. Thirty papers may sound like plenty of remaining runway to achieve my research agenda, but to me, it's not enough. I already have at least that many topics I'd like to write about, and undoubtedly I'll identify more topics over the years. Thus, even though my career after tenure should continue for decades, I already know that I can't finish my writing list. That means I need to allocate my remaining writing slots wisely to ensure their maximum long-term impact.

**5. Say "no" to symposium papers more frequently.** We are often asked to contribute a paper as a book chapter or to a themed periodical issue collecting papers from a conference. I'll call these "symposium papers." There are good reasons to write a symposium paper; for example, it may be the admission price to an important conference, or the symposium issue will increase awareness for your paper compared to other publication venues. At the same time, there are good reasons not to write a symposium paper, such as the risk of overcommitment (and the associated guilt of missing deadlines) and the possibility that writing isn't as much fun when we do it on someone else's timetable or preferred topic.

Most importantly, a symposium paper typically consumes one of the scarce writing slots remaining in your career. If the paper is something you really want to write anyway, by all means go for it. However, if the writing obligation takes you away from your own writing agenda, then it's not a good deal. In those cases, you should quickly say no — and say it without guilt or reservation, even if a close colleague made the request.

**6. Watch out for service obligations.** While you were untenured, your tenured colleagues should have been shielding you from being assigned more service work. (I know it may not have felt like it). Now that you're tenured, it's your turn to shoulder extra service responsibilities to offload work from the untenured professors. Plus, you will need to do service work that is assigned only to tenured professors, such as chairing committees, serving on tenure committees, etc. As you already know, service work can prevent you from making headway on your big projects discussed above. So your goal is to strike a balance between shielding the untenured

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<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Eric Goldman, *Regulating Reputation*, in *THE REPUTATION SOCIETY: HOW ONLINE OPINIONS ARE RESHAPING THE OFFLINE WORLD* 51 (Hassan Masum and Mark Tovey eds.) (MIT Press, 2011), available at <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1754628>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.doctoredreviews.com>.

<sup>5</sup> Posting of Eric Goldman to Technology & Marketing Law Blog, *Medical Justice Capitulates by "Retiring" Its Anti-Patient Review Contracts*, Dec. 1, 2011, [http://blog.ericgoldman.org/archives/2011/12/medical\\_justice.htm](http://blog.ericgoldman.org/archives/2011/12/medical_justice.htm).

professors from onerous service work and being swamped with service work that inhibits your progress toward your other professional goals.

**7. Try new teaching techniques.** While you should never sacrifice the quality of your classroom experience, you're free to experiment with your pedagogy without fearing student retribution on their evaluations. Create more opportunities to give students direct feedback on their work (especially in legal academia, where often courses are graded 100 percent on a final exam). Try more in-class group exercises, or go further and "flip" your course. Take a class field trip. Not every experiment will work, but odds are good that you can do even more to help your students than the techniques you mastered pre-tenure.

**8. Mentor others.** Mentors probably helped you get over the tenure hurdle. Now you should pay it forward by mentoring untenured professors. Some specific suggestions:

- Share your teaching notes and slide deck with professors teaching the course for the first time.
- Sit in on untenured professors' classes outside of official evaluation visits and offer constructive feedback.
- Offer to provide feedback on draft versions of new professors' exams.
- Comment on paper drafts.
- Initiate career development conversations with untenured professors, and offer to be a mentor to them.
- When allocating good exposure opportunities such as speaking slots, professional association leadership roles and media interview requests, make a point to favor untenured professors over the "usual suspects."
- Always agree to do tenure review requests, unless you can't do them fairly.

**9. Speak up for the voiceless.** When you were untenured, you probably silently suffered numerous administrative or institutional indignities because you lacked the leverage or confidence to push back. You should fix those problems so that your future untenured colleagues won't experience them. Also, offer to act as a spokesperson for the untenured faculty; by voicing concerns on their behalf, you can keep the heat off them.

**10. Take charge of any further promotions.** If you have a remaining post-tenure promotion, such as promotion from associate professor to full professor, don't expect the institution to provide you with much support for that promotion. Instead, assume you bear the responsibility to decide when you'd like to seek promotion and to satisfy the promotion standards. Ask for the promotion standards now and then calendar a date for a few years when you'll want to revisit the issue. Just remember: even if you never seek the promotion, or you ask and are denied, what's the worst that can happen? You will still have tenure!

**BONUS Tip 11:** "No" is Your Best Friend. I previously mentioned that you should say "no" to symposium papers more often and without guilt, but that suggestion applies to all facets of your professional life. As an untenured professor, you were socialized to say "yes" when asked to do things. It's time to reprogram yourself. You can say "no" ... so do it! If at any point your workload feels overwhelming, there is only one guaranteed fix — say "no" to new requests,

work through your backlog of projects, and eventually your workload will become more manageable. Then, once you reach a happier place, don't revert to your old ways of saying "yes"; keep saying "no" aggressively to avoid future crises.