

Athletic Training Junior Faculty Experiences with Institutional Expectations for Tenure and Promotion

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Context: Tenure-earning faculty are evaluated in 3 primary areas including teaching, research and scholarship, and service. Struggles regarding earning tenure are not unique to the academe, but within the athletic training discipline concerns do exist.

Objective: We examined the organizational socialization process for junior athletic training faculty members as they learned about the tenure and promotion expectations at their institutions.

Design: Interpretative phenomenological approach.

Setting: Higher education institutions with an athletic training program.

Patients or Other Participants: Nineteen junior faculty members (13 women, 6 men) addressed their understanding of tenure guidelines. Our participants were 32 ± 3 years of age, averaged 2 ± 2 years as a full-time faculty member, and were all at the assistant rank.

Main Outcome Measure(s): All participants completed one-on-one phone interviews. We followed a stepwise approach to evaluating the data, which is described by the interpretative phenomenological approach. To ensure credibility of the interview protocol and to bracket some of our possible biases, a peer review and pilot study were conducted.

Results: There were 3 findings regarding the faculty members' understanding of the tenure process at their institutions: (1) vague expectations, (2) change in leadership, and (3) differing expectations in departments and college levels. The faculty believe improving understanding of promotion and tenure should include (1) formal, ongoing annual feedback, (2) informal communication with administrators, (3) informal institutional mentorship, and (4) instructional scaffolding.

Conclusions: Athletic training junior faculty experience challenges with understanding tenure and promotion expectations at their institutions, mainly due to changes in leadership and a dichotomy between departmental and institutional expectations. The vagueness is often overcome when the faculty member receives support and guidance from colleagues and supervisors who not only share past experiences in knowledge but also provide feedback for understanding.

Key Words: Role transition, inductance, professional development

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KEY POINTS

- Athletic training junior faculty perceive tenure and promotion guidelines at their institutions to be vague due to a variety of reasons.
- Formal review and feedback on an annual basis can benefit the athletic training junior faculty member because it can create improved understanding of the guidelines for tenure.
- Instructional scaffolding provides the athletic training junior faculty member with examples of successful tenure portfolios as a positive facilitator to tenure.

INTRODUCTION

Evaluating faculty performance is often done in 3 primary areas including teaching, research and scholarship, and service.¹ The 3 broad categories provide a benchmark for faculty to achieve success and, in many cases, earn tenure and promotion; yet, the guidelines for success may vary across institutions due to their mission and Carnegie classification.² For faculty in health care programs, administrative duties associated with accreditation standards as well as the need to remain clinically relevant add to the expectations of a faculty member.³ There is some discussion that doctoral education is the pipeline for role transition into higher education and that it should provide awareness of the responsibilities, expectations, climate, culture, and tenure process.^{4,5}

Doctoral education has been described as a series of stages designed to prepare the student to transition from dependence to independence as a future faculty member.^{1,6,7} Using the socialization framework to explain this systematic process, the doctoral education experience is one that provides structured learning activities designed to impart knowledge and skills for success, and as the student matriculates through training, the planned learning becomes more self-directed and about development of a professional identity.⁶ Rice⁸ contends that doctoral education should be a thoughtful experience that allows the future faculty member to appreciate the parts of the “complete scholar,” one who understands all the parts of the faculty role, including service and administrative tasks. Doctoral education has been proven valuable in training future faculty in regard to the basic aspects of the faculty role (ie, research, teaching), in that doctoral students and new faculty members feel ready to assume their faculty roles as a result of their doctoral education.^{9,10} However, this preparedness centers more on teaching and research and less on the service and administrative tasks faculty assume once hired.¹¹ Recently Nottingham et al¹² uncovered an incongruence with new faculty workloads and doctoral education, given that recently hired faculty were not aware of the time commitments associated with service and administrative tasks. The major contributor to the incongruence was insufficient time in doctoral education devoted to this area.¹²

Doctoral education, however, should not be the sole mechanism to introduce the basic information regarding the tenets of higher education, particularly as it relates to success for tenure and promotion. Recent evidence suggests that doctoral students are aware of the basic tenets, yet lack the knowledge to navigate institution-specific expectations for tenure and promotion.^{9,13,14} The socialization framework¹⁵ is often the platform used to understand the processes associated with organizational entry, particularly as the junior faculty members learn how to adapt and assimilate into their academic roles. The findings of past studies^{5,10,14} identify that faculty orientation sessions and institutional professional development activities support transition into higher education.

Despite mechanisms that may support initial entry and transition into the professoriate, concerns still exist among the athletic training professoriate regarding the level of understanding of the tenure and promotion process.^{3,5} For the tenure-track athletic training faculty member, understanding the expectations and criteria used to evaluate the pursuit of tenure is critical to ensure successful retention and achievement of tenure. Junior faculty have been encouraged to seek institutional resources to help them better understand the roles and expectations associated with their faculty positions, especially as it pertains to tenure and promotion.³ Mentorship, faculty orientations, and ongoing seminars often provide this knowledge to successfully navigate the early years of the faculty position.^{3,16}

Although previous studies^{17–19} have examined the tenure and promotion process of junior faculty and consistently report an ambiguous process that is dependent upon the junior faculty members’ institutional guidelines,² understanding of the process for athletic training faculty is currently lacking. Athletic training junior faculty likely encounter similar experiences to those of other junior faculty in similar disciplines as they learn about institutional promotion and tenure expectations; however, this is more speculation than conclusions founded on the evidence. The purpose of this study was to examine the organizational socialization process for the junior athletic training faculty members as they learned more about the tenure and promotion expectations at their institutions. We were guided by the following questions: (1) What methods were used to orient the faculty member on the tenure and promotion guidelines and expectations, and (2) What processes could benefit athletic training faculty to support the onboarding process related to tenure and promotion?

METHODS

Research Design

We used an interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) to better understand the experiences of junior faculty in athletic training as they transition to their faculty roles for the

Table 1. Individual Faculty Member Demographic Data

Participant Name	Age, y	Sex	ATC Experience, y	Faculty Experience, y	Current Title	Carnegie Classification	NATA District
Jane	32	F	10	2	Assistant professor & CEC	R2	4
Teresa	30	F	8	2	Assistant professor	R2	8
Sean	28	M	6	1.5	Assistant professor & CEC	M1	7
Sarah	36	F	14	4	Assistant professor & CEC	R1	9
Alan	32	M	8	3	Assistant professor & graduate program director	R1	4
Nancy	31	F	8	1.5	Assistant professor	R1	1
Chris	32	M	9	1	Assistant professor	R2	4
Nicholas	33	M	7	1.5	Assistant professor	R3	10
Sandra	37	F	15	6	Assistant professor	Baccalaureate Colleges: Arts & Sciences Focus	3
Maria	34	F	12	2	Assistant professor & CEC	M1	1
Rebecca	30	F	8	2	Assistant professor	Baccalaureate Colleges: Diverse Fields	1
Ashley	32	F	10	9	Assistant professor, director AT program	M1	3
Jennifer	34	F	12	1	Assistant professor	M1	2
Joan	29	F	7	1	Assistant professor	M1	3
Julia	32	F	9	3	Assistant professor & CEC	M1	9
Sharon	33	F	11	4	Assistant professor & CEC	M1	3
Paula	40	F	18	11 mo	Assistant professor	M1	8
Philip	32	M	9	7 mo	Assistant professor	R2	4
Louis	27	M	6	9 mo	Assistant professor	R3	4

Abbreviations: ATC, certified athletic trainer; CEC, clinical education coordinator; F, female; M, male; M (Carnegie Classification), master's; NATA, National Athletic Trainers' Association; R, research.

first time (ie, role inductance).^{12,14} The findings presented in this article are focused on participants' experiences related to tenure and promotion expectations at their respective institutions. The selection of an IPA was purposeful because the guiding research questions were founded on understanding how faculty make sense of their role transition into higher education and, for this article, particularly as it relates to tenure and promotion expectations.^{20,21} Following the guidelines of an IPA study, we guided our recruitment on the richness of the individual cases, which allowed us to obtain saturation of the data yet gain a full understanding of the tenure and promotion process of junior faculty members.

Sampling and Recruitment

We used a purposeful sampling strategy that included specific inclusion criteria including (1) full-time academic appointment in a Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education-accredited athletic training program, (2) completion of an academic degree (PhD, EdD), (3) holding a rank no higher than assistant professor, and (4) a hire date within the last 6 years. Inclusion criteria were based upon the role-inductance phase of organizational socialization, which indicated role learning could occur over several years, as well as the premise that within the first 6 years of hire the primary focus is on tenure and promotion.²²

After institutional review board approval, we reached out to individuals within our professional networks to identify potential participants who would meet our criteria. This process in addition to using a snowball sampling process yielded 19 (13 women, 6 men) junior faculty members meeting the inclusion criteria discussed previously.^{20,21} Our partici-

pants were 32 ± 3 years of age, averaged 2 ± 2 years as a full-time faculty member, and were all at the assistant rank. Participant demographics and pseudonyms are displayed in Table 1.

Collection Procedures

To gain rich, detailed, first-person accounts of junior faculty members, we used a semistructured format with one-on-one phone interviews. The semistructured format is flexible, yet rigid enough to allow for consistency among the interview sessions and still retain the ability to dialogue in a natural, real-time format. The questions in the interview protocol were developed with the mindset to facilitate a recall of the junior faculty members' experiences with transition into their current positions and an explanation of how they were made aware of the promotion and tenure expectations. The organizational socialization framework²² provided the basis for the development of the questions, with specific research within athletic training and higher education^{5,10,15,16,22,23} to support the final structure of the protocol. The questions used in the interviews are included in Table 2. For purposes of this article, we present the findings from questions 10–17. Findings from the remaining questions have been published previously.^{12,14}

Data Analysis

We followed a stepwise approach to evaluating the data, which as described by IPA researchers is designed to assume the mindset of the participants.²⁰ The analyses began with multiple reads of the data as a means to become immersed in our participants' experiences and gain an appreciation of the primary findings. With open minds, but guided by our

Table 2. Interview Guide

1. During our last interview we discussed your doctoral training and preparation. Do you have anything to add related to that topic before we move forward?
2. What attracted you to this faculty position?
3. Please describe your current faculty position.
 - a. Specifically, how much of your position is dedicated to
 - i. Teaching
 - ii. Research
 - iii. Administration
 - iv. Service
4. Can you also describe the number of hours per week you engage in each of these areas, based upon a 40-hour workweek?
5. How do you determine how to allocate your time within each of these areas?
6. How long have you been in your current faculty position with these responsibilities?
 - a. If your responsibilities have changed over time, please describe.
7. How do your faculty roles and responsibilities align with your expectations of the position? Please describe.
8. Does your time spent on your faculty roles and responsibilities align with the criteria for your position? Why or why not?
9. Of the component(s) you listed above (insert participant's roles/responsibilities), which do you value the most?
 - a. How does this compare to your time allotted in your contract for that role?
 - b. How does this compare to your expectations coming into this faculty position?
10. How did you learn what was expected of you in your faculty role?
 - a. Did you participate in formal activities to learn more about your roles and responsibilities? (Ask to describe orientation sessions including length, information, mandated attendance—if mentioned)
 - b. Are there other ways you learned about the roles and responsibilities of your position?
 - c. Were you satisfied with the ways in which you learned about your roles and responsibilities?
11. Besides a faculty orientation, have you participated in any other faculty development activities at your institution?
 - a. Can you describe them? Can you discuss how you learned about them?
 - b. Can you share what motivated you to participate in them?
 - c. If you have not participated in any other faculty development activities, would you be interested in them? Explain.
12. Besides a faculty orientation, have you participated in any other faculty development activities external to your institution?
 - a. Can you describe them? Can you discuss how you learned about them?
 - b. Can you share what motivated you to participate in them?
 - c. If you have not participated in any other faculty development activities, would you be interested in them? Explain.

Table 2. Continued

13. Please describe your tenure and promotion guidelines at your institution.
 - a. How were you oriented to these expectations?
14. Please describe your progress toward promotion and tenure.
15. Are you satisfied with how you were oriented to your promotion and tenure expectations? Please describe.
16. Is there any way you could have been oriented to these expectations differently to better prepare you for promotion and tenure? If so, please describe.

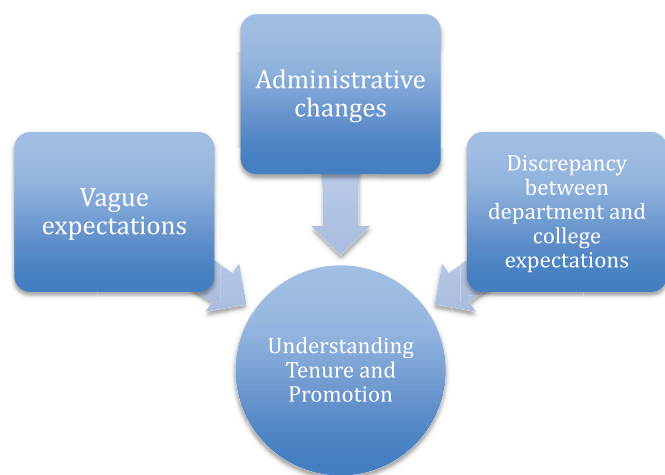
purpose in the forefront, we evaluated our transcripts for consistencies and emergent themes. This was done by initially writing notes that were focused on our observations and reflections about the main themes of the interviews. They were focused on the commonalities of the participants and those commonalities viewed as potentially significant. Using the notes within the individual transcripts, we were able to formulate the larger picture and conceptualize our participants' experiences related to learning more about the expectations of their respective institutions with regard to tenure and promotion. We were able to cluster our findings into major themes and did so by grouping like-minded thoughts and reflections together and then labeling them accordingly to illustrate the overall meaning.

Trustworthiness and Credibility of the Study

To ensure credibility of the interview protocol and to bracket some of our possible biases, a peer review and pilot study were conducted. The peer reviewed the interview protocol, specifically examining the questions for openness, nonleading questions that reflect the purpose of the study. The peer, a qualitative researcher with a background in the socialization literature, offered minor edits for clarity and flow to the protocol. The pilot study was performed with 1 junior faculty member who met our inclusion criteria; no edits or changes resulted from the pilot study, and therefore the data gained were included in our analyses. All interviews lasted about 45 minutes and were transcribed verbatim for purposes of analysis.

Two additional credibility strategies, researcher triangulation and peer review, were used with careful planning of the IPA study.²⁰ We used a systematic, rigorous plan for analysis, which 2 researchers followed independently and then compared their analyses before finalizing them. Both researchers were in agreement in terms of the analyses; negotiations were focused on labels for themes, not the content of those themes. The analyses were then shared with a peer, the same individual who completed the review of the interview protocol. The peer was given several coded transcripts and the narrative write-up of the results to review. The peer confirmed the findings as presented next. As described in the methods, we also followed several prescriptions of an IPA study,²⁰ including developing a semistructured interview protocol that reflected the construct under study, purposefully sampling from those who were living the construct under investigation, and bracketing our preconceptions by developing a study that allowed for organic emergence of the key findings through an inductive process.

Figure 1. Challenges surrounding junior faculty understanding of tenure and promotion.



RESULTS

We identified 2 themes regarding junior faculty members' understanding of promotion and tenure guidelines: (1) understanding of tenure and promotion and (2) strategies for navigating tenure and promotion expectations. The first theme is described by (1) vague expectations, (2) change in leadership impact on expectations, (3) differing expectations in department and college levels. Four subthemes described the strategies for navigating the promotion and tenure process: (1) formal, ongoing annual feedback, (2) informal communication with administrators, (3) informal institutional mentorship, and (4) instructional scaffolding. Themes with supporting quotes are described below. Figure 1 highlights these findings.

Understanding of Promotion and Tenure Guidelines

Vague Expectations. Despite a general awareness of the criteria used to assess faculty performance at their institutions (teaching, research, and service), our participants acknowledged that although these principles are clear, the components are not quantifiable. For example, Julia shared, "Yeah, well I mean the guidelines are not really set in stone, but we have 3 areas that we as faculty are evaluated in: service, research and scholarship, and then teaching." All participants shared a clear understanding that teaching, research, and service were the platform for evaluation and success; however, there was ambiguity to those guidelines. When asked about the promotion and tenure process, Sean shared,

I guess, either that idea of equal parts to teaching, service, and research is kind of just the textbook answer, but I don't think I ever expected it to truly be like that. I don't think I ever heard or was told by anybody that that's actually how things go. I think it's just kind of in an ideal world that's kind of the breakdown that this university hopes would happen.

Our participants consistently used the term *vague* to describe the guidelines related to faculty evaluation procedures and guidelines for tenure and promotion. Joan shared, "It's hard

to summarize exactly what those guidelines are, and the criteria is a little vague." Julia said, "The guidelines are not really set in stone"; whereas, Paula said, "I honestly don't know how the guidelines are specified." Nancy's reflections regarding promotion and tenure at her institution highlight the vagueness experienced by all of our participants. She explained, "The way the PTR [promotion, tenure, and reappointment] documents are written at [her institution] are pretty vague, and [she] would prefer that they were more discreet because [she] thinks if you know your guidelines, it's easier to identify whether you're meeting something or not." Junior athletic training faculty members understand that promotion and tenure is based upon 3 basic tenets, yet they are unable to quantify the effort and emphasis required to be successful.

Impact of Leadership Changes on Expectations.

Several participants noted that changes in leadership, either within their department or at the university level, caused shifts in expectations for promotion and tenure. These shifts can cause further uncertainty in the quest for promotion and tenure. Teresa's experiences highlight this struggle with a change in leadership. She shared, "We did get a new dean this year so the dean that hired me is not the dean that I currently have. And the new dean has a higher expectation for research productivity than when I was hired with. So, there is a little bit of bump in that." Maria shared her experiences related to leadership change, which directly affected her expectations and quest to fulfill them. She shared,

We [as an institution] are more of a focus on teaching, but in the past few years, things have kind of evolved a little more. We have a new provost, which to me I am all about change and making myself, my department, and my university better. . . . And so, with him coming in, he wants a little bit more of a research load, or he wants that to be a little bit more developed for faculty, and so with promotion and tenure, they want to see that even if you're not doing like a peer review journal article from a research perspective, that you are at least attempting to do things.

Comparable with other participants, Paula discussed how the changes at her university and within her department have caused shifts in the expectations of promotion and tenure, making them harder to understand. She said,

We have a new dean and a new department head. We are having a change of the guard; a lot of the people who have been there for 30 years are leaving, and then there's a bunch of us new people coming in [to our department]. So, there's a little bit of confusion. Just as a whole. There's . . . a set format for how your promotion and tenure is supposed to go. But we don't adhere to that format, which is a little confusing. Because when you compare what we do versus what's stuck on the university website, it's not the same.

Changes in leadership can influence the expectations associated with tenure and promotion, as it can increase ambiguity for the faculty member.

Differing Expectations Between Department and College Levels. Junior faculty members perceive that promotion and tenure guidelines across departments and colleges lack congruency, and the conflicting expectations lead to uncertainty and difficulty in navigating the process. Several of our participants noted that it is challenging to determine how they

will be evaluated as faculty due to the lack of standard guidelines for promotion and tenure across their campuses. Joan's experiences underscore the conflicting expectations at the various levels at her university. She shared,

There are different guidelines we have at our institutional level, and then college and then departmental guidelines [exist as well], which I would say are one of the challenges in determining what the promotion and tenure guidelines are [because there are] slightly different criteria that we get evaluated on at the various levels.

Teresa also noted that at her university, "each department is a little different in what their expectations are across campus" and that due to her university becoming a Tier 1 research institution, "my university is in flux right now . . . so there's a lot of things that are changing and that does play a role in identifying what our expectations are."

Like the other participants, Alan's experiences further emphasize how the discrepancies in the expectations across the institution can cause confusion:

So, we've got university-based tenure and promotion guidelines and then we've got college-based tenure and promotion guidelines. It's a bit of a challenge. We're a kinesiology department housed within a department . . . or school of education, so the expectations for someone in kinesiology are slightly different than someone who's in education, and so the guidelines have a lot of areas where it sort of defers to "this will be specialty dependent" or "this will be department dependent."

In addition, our participants discussed that they recognize the difficulty in standardizing promotion and tenure guidelines across disciplines. Specifically, Nancy noted that some of the discrepancy in standardizing promotion and tenure guidelines comes from the fact that "everybody has such a unique faculty position that it's difficult to identify [comprehensive guidelines], but it would be helpful to have a little bit more direction." Nancy's statement acknowledges that there are strategies to determining promotion and tenure guidelines that can be used across departments and that improvements can be made in the availability and dissemination of the information so as to reduce the ambiguity of the process.

Sarah also shared her experience with navigating the promotion and tenure process, indicating that her college has different expectations from other colleges within the university. She said,

Being in the college of medicine, the research expectation is much different than it is for some other colleges. . . . We don't align with anyone else in the college of medicine, so our faculty's ability to meet those expectations, particularly from a research perspective, makes it very, very difficult. On the flip side, our program director of course knows what is valuable to the profession. So, those expectations are markedly different.

A lack of congruency in promotion and tenure guidelines across the various department and university levels can contribute to the ambiguity that junior athletic training faculty members' experience throughout the process.

Strategies for Navigating Promotion and Tenure

Formal Annual Feedback. Our participants acknowledged the importance of having formal annual feedback. This message was clear from those who were receiving the formal feedback and from those who identified formal feedback as deficient yet necessary for their success. Several participants, like Sharon, acknowledged receiving feedback on their promotion and tenure documents. The review process that our participants described allowed them to quantify how they are doing in relation to the expectations for achieving promotion and tenure, which could allow for modifications along the way as a means to promote success. Sean disclosed that at his university, "we have yearly reviews that we do with our department chairs, and then every 2 years, we have a different requirement, [including] a mini-tenure document during the third year." Chris shared similar information from his university: "Every year, we submit a proposal for review. So, we get feedback every year on how we're doing. So we kind of get to submit a minidossier, so we get a good idea of how we're doing." Ashley explained that the annual feedback she receives on her documents allows her to know if she is on track for tenure or if she needs to make improvements in the next year.

Ashley, who was not receiving feedback annually, recognized its impact and the frustrations it gave her. She shared, "Zero feedback was given [to me by the department chair or faculty members reviewing the documents]. I've submitted 2 binders and received zero feedback. All it states is that I've met merit." Both Teresa and Nancy appeared to have experiences similar to Ashley's, explaining that in their departments the formal communication is deficient and they would benefit from more direction. Teresa said, "There is no formal communication in my department [about my portfolio for tenure]," whereas Nancy verbalized that she thinks "a bit more guidance [in the tenure process] would be helpful. . . . I kind of like knowing tangibly what bar do [I] need to meet." In contrast, Sharon's experiences illustrate the importance of regularly receiving feedback. She described her experiences as positive: "I just had a meeting with the dean of our school this week to get her feedback as well. It was a chance to discuss whether she felt I was a good fit and a good hire and vice versa."

Formal feedback was identified as an important reinforcement for the expectations for promotion and tenure that junior faculty members receive during the onboarding process at their institutions.

Informal Communication with Administrators. Our participants articulated that informal interactions with administrators (ie, deans, department chairs) were meaningful to orient them to the tenure and promotion guidelines. The meetings were often initiated during the interview process (pre-entry) but continued once hired and as they matriculated the review process (post-entry).

Pre-Entry. Sarah's and Alan's experiences highlight the importance of the informality of the discussions during the interview process for understanding. Alan shared that he asked a lot of questions [during his interview]:

Not things like "what is the number of publications that I'm required to get per year?" as those questions are unanswerable in most cases, but more sort of "What is the average division

[of responsibilities] for an assistant-level professor?" and "What is the service load?" Give me some concrete example of what something expected would be.

Sarah indicated that she felt comfortable with the expectations of her role due to her interview. She stated, "I asked all the appropriate questions in my interview and I had a good feeling about the setup of the programs and the department before I accepted the position." Rebecca and Louis mentioned that during their interviews they were able to speak directly with administrators and those opportunities allowed them to prepare themselves for the expectations of their faculty roles as well as the expectations for promotion and tenure. When asked about how he was oriented to the promotion and tenure guidelines at his university, Louis said, "I specifically asked about them [during my interview], and they gave me the document. So, they showed it to me, and they were like these are our expectations. I also met with the dean and he went over them as well." In addition, Rebecca indicated that she used the interview process to ask about the guidelines for promotion and tenure. She shared, "I was able to obtain most of the information directly from our department chair, and she was very open with it during the interview process."

Post-Entry. After being hired, our participants noted that the informal communication with administrators (ie, department chairs, deans) continued to be a source of support in navigating expectations throughout the promotion and tenure process. Alan, who previously described his experience in asking appropriate questions during his interview, mentioned that where he was hired, his department chair has an informal meeting where "he tries to get at least the new hires in a room together to have just sort of a clear discussion about sort of how to get off on the right foot and what expectations are," and that it was very helpful. Ashley had a similar experience at her institution when a new dean was hired. She shared,

I would say last year with the new dean, she decided it would be advantageous to get each of the groups together. So, [get] all the lecturers, tenure-track, and tenured folk together and have a meeting. Kind of like a "lunch with the dean" kind of thing. Like, "What are your questions?" "Let me go over some stuff." And what was really nice is she actually put together this pamphlet to help us in doing the annual reports and our binders and kind of what they're looking for. So, that was really, really helpful.

Informal communications with administrators can serve as a supplement to the review process for promotion and tenure. It provides junior faculty members with informal opportunities to orient themselves to the expectations of promotion and tenure without the restrictions of a formal process.

Informal Institutional Mentorship. Informal institutional mentorship served as a platform for support and understanding that was given through informal relationships developed with key faculty members within the institution itself. Junior faculty members were able to gain information and additional resources by asking questions about tenure and promotion that were not accessible or clear within the more formal methods. The informants were often senior faculty members who had knowledge of or past experiences with the process. Louis shared,

Anything I did have questions on [related to tenure], I asked my colleagues that had been there [already]. One has tenure.

One went up for tenure this year. And then I asked my friend that had come in as well because her documents were due a month before mine. So, there were quite a few resources to go and find when I did have questions.

Philip described a great opportunity where new faculty meet with the dean, and the informal nature of the meetings with the dean afforded time to gather additional information for success. Philip shared,

We did have a meeting with our dean for all new faculty members where he sat us down and went through the tenure and promotion concepts. So, we had an informal meeting, it was both with him and the associate dean for academic affairs. And they provided us a notebook with all the sections that are required during our time here for all those submissions. It goes through what's expected for each of the components to be eligible for promotion, to be eligible for tenure, what type of information goes into each section.

Having a resource where junior faculty members could ask informal questions, gather information as needed, and determine the expectations for their position is an important strategy for improving the navigation of the promotion and tenure process.

Instructional Scaffolding. Several of our participants identified the importance of having examples of previous promotion and tenure documents as a model for creating their own documents for submission. Discussions were centered on peers sharing their previously submitted portfolios as a means to illustrate the presentation of materials for promotion and tenure. Sean described his experience reviewing his program director's documents, saying, "She kind of shared her document with me to give me kind of a little bit of a template to work off of [for my materials for tenure]." Louis had an experience similar to Sean's and noted, "One of my colleagues gave me their old binder. They were like, 'Here's my binder. Here are the things I put in it, and here's how I format it. Let me know if you have any questions.' So, it was nice to have an example." Our participants' reflections revealed the willingness of colleagues to share their materials as a means to increase understanding around tenure and promotion—instructional scaffolding, so to speak.

Rebecca shared that at her institution, junior faculty members have the opportunity to review previously submitted documents. She said, "Other faculty who have been targeted as ones who have done well or have submitted really good files, you can ask for permission to look at their files . . . if you're looking for an idea of how to organize it or what other people have done in the past." The chance to review materials of past faculty who were successful in seeking tenure provided a platform for learning and comprehension of a portfolio leading to tenure. The importance of this idea of scaffolding was evident in responses of other participants who craved examples on which to model their own portfolios. Philip expressed his desire for examples:

I think examples probably would have been helpful for some things. So, as I applied for jobs, there were requirements for writing a research statement, there were requirements for writing a personal statement or a teaching statement. Here we're required to write a service statement, which I hadn't heard of before. And speaking with other people that I graduated with, they have not had to do a document like that.

So, I kind of was able to gather basic information from searching online, but I think a couple of examples that are acceptable would be good.

Jennifer identified that at her institution there were current faculty members who did not achieve promotion and tenure and that “it would have been nice to see examples so that I’m able to meet the objectives of the annual review process, because . . . I’m not sure why they didn’t meet the objectives.”

DISCUSSION

The American Association of University Professors²⁴ developed standards to guide higher education in regard to the evaluation of faculty members’ performance as it pertains to their appointments. At the core of the tenured faculty appointment is a demonstration of success and productivity in several areas including research, teaching, and service. Preliminary data suggest that allied health and athletic training faculty²⁵ demonstrate a limited understanding of tenure guidelines and criteria, something that manifests from their doctoral education and might extend into their entry into their faculty appointment.⁵ In addition, Dewald and Walsh³ along with Mazerolle et al²⁶ noted that athletic training tenure-track faculty face challenges earning tenure due to high administrative loads and lack of preparation for some aspects of their faculty positions. Because guidelines and expectations can vary across institutional type and doctoral education occurs within institutions with a higher research expectation, it is important to understand how tenure guidelines are communicated. Our results provide a better understanding of the initial role transition for junior faculty as it focuses on tenure and promotion and illustrate that junior athletic training faculty perceive the expectations of tenure to be vague, given that they believe the expectations are not quantifiable and can vary between institutions as well as levels within a university setting (ie, department, college). Despite the lack of clarity, junior athletic training faculty had several strategies to effectively navigate the tenure process, relying heavily on feedback, communication, and the use of role modeling.

Understanding of Promotion and Tenure Guidelines

Our participants shared a general understanding of the tenure and promotion process as it pertains to the tripod of tenets, yet demonstrated uncertainty with the weight each tenet had on the evaluation. Past research, which has focused on the knowledge of the tenure process, reveals a similar level of comfort with the evaluation components.^{5,10} Tenure has been a long-standing tradition in higher education as measurement of a faculty member’s performance and contributions to their institutions through research, teaching, and service. Therefore, general awareness of those expectations is likely, given that current data suggest that junior faculty are comfortable with the understanding of faculty responsibilities¹⁶ because the information often conveyed during doctoral education is on the basics of those expectations.^{4,5,10} The ambiguity in regard to the merit placed upon each individual aspect of the tenets, however, was the concern for our participants. A limited understanding of the tenure and promotion guidelines due to an academic climate that was vague in communication has been reported previously.²⁵ New faculty, as well as those faculty in the infancy of their pursuit for tenure, are encouraged to qualify the expectations from their supervisors

regarding the tenure process. Not only can verbal communication assist in the process, but having a written contract or documentation of these expectations can facilitate the successful navigation of the process.

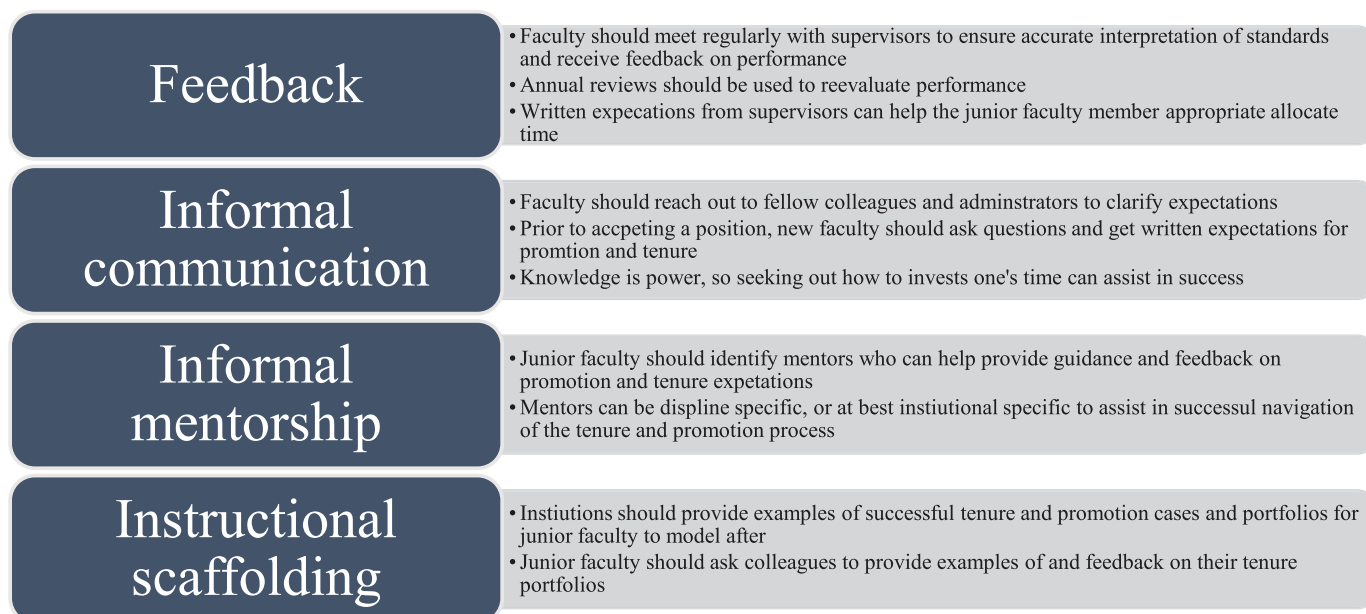
Contributing to the uncertainty about the promotion and tenure guidelines was a change in leadership, which often altered the expectations, as well as dissonance between the various levels within the organizational hierarchy in higher education (ie, department, college, and university). Faculty socialization often occurs during faculty orientations or seminars and, in some cases, formal mentoring,^{16,25,27} programming that often offers direct communication regarding promotion and tenure guidelines and expectations. Despite this, however, it appears that in some cases there is some fluidity surrounding the guidelines as shared and published for the faculty member because leadership and administration expectations can vary. Junior athletic training faculty are encouraged to proactively seek feedback and document tenure expectations as shared with them by their supervisors, and when leadership changes occur, one-on-one meetings with the new supervisor are encouraged for continued success toward tenure.

Strategies for Navigating the Promotion and Tenure

Notwithstanding the ambiguity of the tenure guidelines at their institutions, our participants recognized some strategies that were helpful during their development of an understanding of the tenure and promotion guidelines. Three of the 4 strategies were founded on informalities and collegiality within their departments and institutions. Our results speak to the importance of unplanned learning during the organizational socialization process for the junior faculty member. Mentoring has been described as a key aspect to entry into higher education for a faculty member,^{13,16} and often the mentoring relationship is informal and used to facilitate knowledge acquisition.²⁸ Previous literature demonstrates the importance of mentoring because it allows for awareness of the academic expectations within the faculty member’s university system.¹³ Junior faculty members find it valuable to identify mentors within their institution to provide guidance on the tenure and promotion process and seek out mentors beyond their institution to provide support in other areas, such as research.^{12,29} Mentoring also continues to be identified as a staple in role transition and the organizational socialization process, given that a mentor appears to communicate the institutional nuances that may accompany tenure and promotion that may not be universal.¹³

The formal feedback described by our participants speaks to the need to gain legitimation,³⁰ as well as a bearing on their performance toward tenure and promotion. The formality of the annual review process provided the faculty member with an awareness of their individual performance as it pertains to tenure and promotion. The feedback communicated during this process was a means to promote understanding of the process and provide clarity on the faculty member’s success. A unique aspect to the formal feedback is a concept described as instructional scaffolding. The concept of instructional scaffolding is an educational technique used to promote learning through facilitation of knowledge by modeling.³¹ Simply, the educator (in this case a mentor, department chair, or the like) models the appropriate way to “do something” and the

Figure 2. Strategies for navigating tenure and promotion.



student can model their actions after the educator. So, in the realm of tenure and promotion portfolios, the use of past successful dossiers can be used to demonstrate the expectations for the faculty member.

Limitations and Future Directions

We present our findings from the perspective of athletic training faculty members, and thus we can only make conclusions from a discipline-specific mindset. Future research should include a more heterogeneous sample of faculty members from a variety of disciplines. We also share findings from a pretenure perspective, and thus future studies can follow up with faculty members and success as it pertains to earning tenure and the organizational support provided to achieve tenure. Our focus was exploratory, and we took a general snapshot of the tenure and promotion process. Therefore, our results speak globally to the process, rather than to each of the specific components of tenure and promotion within higher education. Administrative expectations are an expectation of an athletic training faculty member, and they may not be specifically parceled out in our study regarding promotion and tenure. This is a unique aspect for athletic training and other health care fields, and therefore future research may want to better understand how each aspect (ie, service, teaching, scholarship, administration) can influence success related to tenure and how these expectations can be communicated to the faculty member.

CONCLUSIONS

Junior faculty in athletic training experience challenges with understanding tenure and promotion expectations at their institutions, a finding that may not be any different in other disciplines, given that tenure and promotion guidelines can be ambiguous or at best vary institution by institution. For junior athletic training faculty the challenges with understanding tenure and promotion guidelines were mainly due to changes in leadership and a dichotomy between departmental and institutional expectations. The vagueness is often

overcome when the faculty member receives support and guidance from colleagues and supervisors who not only share their past experiences in knowledge but also provide feedback for understanding. Considering athletic training faculty experience challenges navigating the tenure and promotion process, junior faculty should put forth efforts to meet regularly with administrators and colleagues to gain understanding of expectations. Likewise, identifying mentors and asking for feedback can help solidify newfound understanding of tenure and promotion expectations. Administrators, mentors, and experienced faculty should keep in mind that junior faculty often face challenges learning their job expectations and should try to support these individuals as they enter academia. We summarize and apply our findings in Figure 2.

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