

411 Connection 2: Tenure – The Good. The Bad. The Ugly.

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Academia presents itself as one of the most complex systems to navigate for students. Over the past two weeks, we set out to learn a little bit more about the advancements that black professors are making in an area we knew little about, tenure. Broadly, what does tenure mean for people of color and, more specifically, how does it aid college students of African descent?

It is no exaggeration to declare that there simply are not enough black professors. But how many actually have the benefit of being tenured professors at DePaul University and what message does that send? We first looked into the purported purpose for tenure. Since 1915, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has assumed responsibility for developing standards and practices, sometimes in cooperation with other organizations, to give a concrete meaning to the concept. The association's 1940's Statement of Principles in Academic Freedom reinforces the fact that tenure exists to protect academic freedom. Sandra Jackson, Ph.D., Director of the Center for Black Diaspora, asserts that "tenure was historically designed as a way to protect faculty in the professoriate— in terms of free speech, choice of research, nature of scholarship—from external forces such as the church, the state and other powerful interests, against suppression of competing if not challenging views to the status-quo." As a powerful message to aid the university's ambitions to truly epitomize diversity, the tenure process is essentially one of the tools used to further implement the diversity initiative of Vision 2010.

A faculty member can only be eligible for tenure once, after completing a probationary period of six years and must demonstrate excellence in classroom facilitation, service to the university, and evidence of potential growth. In an interview with Kelly Johnson, Assistant Vice President of Academic Administration, we dissected the layers of procedure that DePaul University has in place for the year-long "consultative, deliberative process." She says that the development begins with a formal recommendation that is to be supported or denied by the professor's specific academic department. If supported, the college level determines if the professor can contribute to the mission of the university. Next, the dean of the respective college articulates his or her stance on the prospect and, if supportive of the department's decision, proceeds to introduce the decision at the university level.

The University Board, which consists of seven tenured professors from seven disciplines, then reviews the each candidates credentials and departmental evaluations to come to a resolution. The standards within the university differ amongst the departments and colleges. "Trumping all is the overarching university standards, with which departmental and program policies, procedures and standards, must be in compliance," says Jackson.

Just as DePaul invests in black students as potential leaders in their chosen fields, it invests a great amount into its professors through the tenure process. Johnson suggests that this is not solely a financial investment but a quality investment. Tenured professors are expected to uphold and promote the values of the university. However, what happens when the values of the black community are disproportionately underrepresented?

A review of the data suggests that the purported diverse values of the university are not reflective in the numbers of professors who identify as black. To date, approximately 60% of all DePaul University professors, excluding part-time educators, are tenured. There are 937 full time professors, 547 of which are tenured. According to Johnson's data, only 32 are black faculty, and 4 are on a tenure-track (meaning they have some time before they go through the process). That is only 5.8% of all full-time faculty members and some departments have no tenured black faculty. When asked why the numbers of non-Black tenured professors far outnumber the sum of black tenured professors, Johnson responded, "I do not think it is a low number of professors becoming tenured, but a low number of African-Americans applying", resting heavily on the 76-80% success rate of those who are eligible for tenure.

As a result of our work, our next step should be to request data that is representative of not only people who have become eligible for tenure, but how many blacks are applying to the university for employment, how many get hired, and how many are kept as professors for the entire probationary period which, as stated above, dictates your eligibility to complete the tenure-track. Conscious and strategic advancements towards diversity must be made in order for DePaul to fully become an advocate for racial diversity. What can be agreed on is that this is a complicated issue that needs the support and partnership of both faculty members and administration to facilitate change. Gregory Haynes stresses that what is crucial for the black student body is the acknowledgment of our power as students to demand what we wish to see. If students care about education, they care about our tenured professors. The two are indistinguishable and the ensured academic freedom can only force DePaul University to challenge others to invest in diversity as well.

There is a special need right now for all Americans to at some point be able to secure employment in their careers. However, I could not say it better than *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, which features an article called, "Parents: Your Children Need Teachers With Tenure". This commentary delves into why students should be concerned, declaring, "If your children are going to be taught to think rigorously and creatively—which is their best route to success—they need to be taught by teachers who can be rigorous, creative, and courageous as well. Tenure doesn't guarantee that college teachers will be courageous. But it protects those who are." Black professors who have the courage to challenge ideas of white male patriarchy should not risk losing their job. Black professors who have the courage to voice opinions on the university's bias course work should not fear unemployment.

As students at the university we can work to better the current dismal numbers of black tenured professors by demanding the abovementioned numbers and exposing the inconsistencies between DePaul's intentions and DePaul's actions. It is imperative that as a collective we gather and begin to document all of what we feel is necessary in order to keep black professors at the university. Remember those black professors make a positive impact in your education.

This should be a concern of all students because it contributes to the overall atmosphere of DePaul University. Take quarterly evaluations seriously and commit to exposing injustices. Always remember that we are paying for a service and the university is more obliged to listen to our demands if we are united and organized. As we sit in our classrooms and engage in

conversations under numerous disciplines, we must consider the views that are being represented as well as those that are not. It is not enough to have a large number of non-black faculty whose attempts at being socially conscious do nothing more than alienate students in classrooms and ignore important dialogues on race and representation. What is at stake is our awareness and acknowledgement of bias. We must always defend what is a reflection of us and uplift all of those who are scholars in their fields so that the goal of tenure, to create, protect and unify a faculty of diverse interests, can be a reality.

For more information on tenure and why students need it please go to <http://chronicle.com/article/Parents-Your-Children-Need/124776/>.