

Tips for new librarians

What to know in the first year of a tenure-track position

by Priscilla K. Shontz and Jeffrey S. Bullington

If you are just beginning a tenure track position, you may be wondering, "Where do I begin?" How do you plan your work and pursue activities that will help you pass a tenure review several years down the road? Although tenure requirements vary by institution, most reviews will focus on three areas: librarianship, service (professional involvement), and scholarship (publication). As novice librarians, we offer the following tips for making the most of your first year on the job.

Familiarize yourself with the tenure process

Ask your supervisor and colleagues to explain your institution's tenure process. What are the expectations? What criteria will be used to evaluate your progress and qualifications for receiving tenure? Expectations can differ from place to place. Publication may outweigh service to the profession. Active professional involvement or the pursuit of an additional degree may replace publication expectations. Do non-refereed journal or newsletter articles, coauthored articles, or book and product reviews count? Are you expected to be active in the ALA, or does other professional involvement count as heavily? Ask about librarians who have been denied tenure in the past. Are there pitfalls to avoid? Are there periodic reviews throughout the process or a single review at the end of the process?

Read your institution's policy statement outlining the tenure process. Does the campus-wide tenure policy differ from the library's? In the tenure process, you will be evaluated not only by colleagues in the library but also by a college or campus-wide committee. Talk to teaching faculty about their expectations and experiences. Attend informational meetings to learn more about the process.

Maintain a calendar of your accomplishments and events. From day one, start a tenure file. Include a copy of the tenure policy, your own notes, and any supporting documents such as user aids, policy statements, memos, procedures, Web sites, etc. Keep thank-you notes that people send for things you do in your job.

Even if you do not use all the documents you keep, you will be glad you have them when you prepare your tenure documentation. Save e-mail or electronic files; print them out to place in your tenure folder. Having all of this information in one place will make it much easier for you to put together your dossier.

Learn your job well

Your first priority, naturally, will be to learn the new job—your daily routines and responsibilities. It often takes a year or more to feel comfortable in your new surroundings. You may feel overwhelmed by the variety or amount of work. Try setting

About the authors

Priscilla K. Shontz is head of access services and Jeffrey S. Bullington is social sciences librarian at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas; e-mail: Pshontz@trinity.edu; jbulling@trinity.edu

a schedule to learn different duties. For example, a new reference librarian might focus on learning collection development responsibilities one week and library instruction duties the next. Ask colleagues to orient you to their areas of responsibilities. Do not forget to ask classified staff to explain procedures or give background information.

Becoming proficient at your new job is your single most important ongoing task. If you are not doing your job well or pulling your own weight, no amount of publication or service will impress your colleagues at your tenure review.

Learn your organizational culture

Every workplace has a unique culture. Learn how to function effectively in your new environment. Watch how other librarians interact with each other, the library director, the teaching faculty, and the administration. How do classified staff members interact with librarians and the director? Is it a bureaucratic organization with a strict hierarchy, or is it more egalitarian? Watch how meetings are run and, more importantly, how decisions are made. Do tenured librarians and library administrators treat you as a peer? Are you able to speak out in meetings, or are new librarians expected to observe? Are you given freedom to change procedures and try new ideas, or should you submit all ideas to a supervisor for approval?

Use your first year to evaluate the work environment and decide how you fit into your new library. Being aware of the library and campus political environments can help you get things done and maintain good relationships with colleagues. Tenure is a political process. If your colleagues do not like your work style, they might be less inclined to evaluate you favorably.

Discuss your performance and progress with your supervisor

Talk with your supervisor regularly to keep him or her informed of your activities and to discuss problems or ideas. Even if your institution does not require a formal annual evaluation, set up a specific time with your supervisor to discuss your performance and progress towards tenure.

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Ask tenured colleagues to assess your progress. Provide your reviewer with a summary of your accomplishments for the past year; it is virtually impossible for your reviewer to know about all of your work activities. Do not be afraid to ask for guidance and feedback. Request clarification of review comments, suggestions for improvement, and an assessment of your progress towards tenure.

Seek out mentors

Seek guidance from experienced librarians or professionals. You could use a formal mentoring program such as the ALA-New Members Round Table's Mentoring Program. An NMRT Mentor will meet with you at the ALA Annual Conference, show you how to get the most from the conference, and may introduce you to other experienced librarians.

You may choose a less formal route for mentoring. Is there someone in your organization with whom you "connect?" Someone who gets things done? A mentor might be a library school professor, a supervisor, a colleague, someone at another library, or a faculty member at your institution. Find people who will encourage you and guide you. Talk with them when you have questions, ask them for their opinions, and thank them for their help. Maintain regular contact with them (without becoming a nuisance). Throughout your career you will need mentors, although those mentors will change with time. Remember to mentor others as you progress through your career.

Start networking

It is never too early to start making contacts with other library professionals, even while still in library school. Your fellow students, professors, and work supervisors will soon become your professional peers; keep in touch with these people. Visit local librar-

ies to meet librarians, attend local, regional or state conferences and go to conference social events. Carry business cards to hand out when appropriate. Volunteer for organizational activities. Contact authors of articles that particularly interest you. Keep track of your contacts and work at remembering names and faces. The library world

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is smaller than you think, and chances are good that you will meet that person again. Who knows? He or she may be the key to a publication, a committee appointment, a great job lead, or a friendship.

Join professional, campus, and community organizations

You are expected to take part in professional organizations, campus committees, and community service activities. In addition to joining organizations, you must also demonstrate active involvement. Although it can be expensive, it is a good idea to join professional organizations such as the ALA, your state library organization, or special organizations such as the North American Serials Interest Group (NASIG). Some institutions value national professional service above local, university or community service. Ask your colleagues what types of service count most heavily towards tenure, but do choose activities that interest you.

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Web page (<http://www.ala.org>) has links to many division, section, and round table home pages. Use this information to identify committees you would enjoy.

An ALA New Members Round Table committee or state NMRT committee can be a fun, effective way to begin professional involvement. As ALA NMRT's mission is to help new ALA members develop leadership skills, NMRT guarantees a committee appointment to any volunteer. Chairing NMRT committees gives you leadership experience and contacts that can help you get onto other ALA division or section committees. Remember our networking advice? Being known as "someone who gets things done" can be a great way to get the committee appointment of your dreams.

On your campus, find out what university committees are available and volunteer to serve. This helps you meet people on campus and gives you the opportunity to promote a positive image of your library to the rest of the institution. Volunteer to help out with a pledge drive, graduation activities, and other events. Getting involved in student activities or organizations can increase your visibility. Identify community service opportunities by asking your colleagues what activities they engage in or by contacting your local United Way chapter, public broadcasting stations, or local churches.

Keep up with professional literature and discussion lists

Set up a system to monitor trends in librarianship. Whether you browse the current journals, read certain journals from cover to cover, or research specific subjects, it's important to keep up with the current literature. In addition to reading literature about your specific job or interests, consider reading *The Chronicle of Higher Education* to keep up with general developments in higher education.

For electronic communications, subscribe to discussion lists that appeal to you. Look at ALA's list of discussion lists (<http://www.ala.org/lists.html>) and ask colleagues and other librarians what lists they monitor. Discussion lists can keep you informed about hot topics and in touch with fellow librarians who share your interests. Posting messages on a discussion list may also increase your name recognition.

Develop research interests

During your first year, you may be too busy to write. Nevertheless, begin thinking about ideas for publication. Can you expand on a research idea from library school? Articles and lists you read or problems you notice may generate ideas. Consider researching one topic in depth to become an expert in that area. Discuss ideas with colleagues, mentors, and supervisors. They may provide helpful ideas or feedback. You may even find someone to coauthor an article with you. Once you have written an article for submission, let trusted colleagues proofread it. Ask them to suggest journals to which you could submit your article. Seek opportunities to present papers or poster sessions at professional meetings.

Plan or write articles for non-refereed publications

One way to begin publishing is to write a short article for a newsletter or a non-refereed journal. Investigate opportunities to cover ALA conference meetings, programs, or events for *Cognotes* or for section or roundtable newsletters. Offer to write book reviews for journals. Compile bibliographies as you begin your

research. Such publications help get your name into print and give you a publication to list on your resumé. Some begin working on a specific topic in this way, and later develop the same topic into a more in-depth article for a refereed journal. Others may use this opportunity to refresh their research and writing abilities as they begin thinking about publication.

Make the most of your first year

Don't let the tenure review process overwhelm you. Use this time to plan and start your progress towards your final tenure review. Learning your new job, beginning your professional involvement, and planning your publication ideas will put you well on your way towards a successful tenure track career.

Additional reading:

Cubberley, Carol W., *Tenure and Promotion for Academic Librarians: A Guidebook with Advice and Vignettes*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1996).

Park, Betsy and Robert Riggs, "Tenure and Promotion: A Study of Practices by Institutional Type" *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 19:2 (1995): 72-77. ■



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Toolkit Presenters

Michael Butler, Executive Director, OHIONET

Margo Crist, Director of Libraries, University of Massachusetts

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Questions? Contact Tanga Morris, (800) 545-2433 ext. 2514; e-mail tmorris@ala.org