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Our excellent adventure

A somewhat irreverent look at how three tenure track librarians prepared their dossiers and lived to tell about it

We are tenure track librarians at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) University Library who formed a Dossier Support Group to help 1) streamline the intensive tenure dossier writing process, 2) navigate the convoluted and constantly changing dossier preparation guidelines and routing procedures, and 3) provide mutual support during the months leading up to the submission of our final documentation in the summer of 2007.

We also bought weekly lottery tickets because, well, everybody needs a backup plan.

Come together, right now

We began the tenure track at the IUPUI University Library at approximately the same time and, as classmates discovered, we often had similar questions about writing our annual reviews, the third-year review (a sort of mini tenure dossier), and facets of the promotion and tenure (P&T) processes. Our informal discussions evolved into a more organized support group that met over lunch several times in the months leading up to our third-year reviews; we found that our combined strengths were beneficial to all of us. We noted questions needing clarification, pooled our information resources (people, documents, etc.), and compared notes. Also, we found that just getting together created a supportive, encouraging environment. We reconstituted the support group in February 2007 as we prepared to tackle our tenure dossiers.

Pros, cons

Getting together gave us a chance to vent our frustrations and anxieties, and humor in

the midst of stress, and just plain socialize. We decided right from the start to buy lottery tickets, contributing a dollar once or twice a week (the Hoosier Lottery has twice-weekly drawings). We were giddy with visions of striking it rich, being profiled in the local media as that group of librarians who won millions, and retiring before having to complete and submit our dossiers. Being somewhat mathematically challenged, we knew our hopes for wealth were slim, especially since Kevin Petsche volunteered to purchase tickets and he'd never played the lottery in his life.

The support group did have its drawbacks. We were sometimes intimidated because everyone else's accomplishments sounded so much more impressive than our own and, although we could share information and experiences, we could not actively collaborate on the actual writing of our dossiers. Sadly, we also lost one of our classmates to another academic library by mid-summer. We thought this a rather extreme measure to take to avoid completing a dossier.

If you can keep your wits about you

Tenure-seeking librarians on the IUPUI campus are required to adhere to the *In-*

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diana University Purdue University Indianapolis Dean of the Faculties' Guidelines for Preparing and Reviewing Promotion and Tenure Dossiers, reviewed and updated annually by a campus committee, which normally has at least one librarian as a member. Due to the appointment of a new dean of faculties and multiple inconsistencies in the guidelines, the document was in continual flux during the months we were preparing our dossiers.

The *Guidelines* attempt to separate criteria for teaching faculty and librarians, but inadequately addresses the very real distinctions between them. For example, teaching faculty are evaluated on research, scholarship, and creative activity versus the librarians' professional development activities. Also, the format for the *curriculum vitae* for librarians turned out to be our best guess as to how to satisfy the P&T committee's requirements and still represent the complexity of a librarian's accomplishments and contributions.

In a sharp departure from previous procedures, the new IUPUI dean of faculties wanted all dossiers to include solicited letters from external reviewers from comparable institutions—a practice that is becoming routine, although generally these reviewers are paid an honorarium. Letters were also solicited from the deans of schools on the IUPUI campus to whom we three act as liaisons. The deans needed to pass this chore along to their colleagues, since we normally work with the teaching faculty of schools and departments, rather than the deans.

To add to our shock and awe, the IUPUI librarians were debating whether to change dossier routing procedures to end the practice of sending our dossiers to an all-campus librarian review committee at the main campus in Bloomington (we're tenured on our own campus only and not IU system wide). The routing procedure finally ended up as:

University Library Primary Peer Review Committee

Team Leader (immediate supervisor)
IUPUI Librarians Promotion and Tenure Committee
Dean of University Library

Continued by the usual routing of all faculty dossiers:

Campus Promotion and Tenure Committee
IUPUI Dean of Faculties
IUPUI Vice President/Chancellor
IU Office of the President
IU Board of Trustees

We did have the option of submitting our dossiers under the Guidelines in effect at the time we received our appointment, but no one could find them.

It was at this point the Dossier Support Group decided it would hold its meetings across the street at the sports bar.

One associate dean offered more helpful advice: focus on the content of the dossier that we could control and deal with formatting and other specific issues later.

You can hide, but you can't run

All three of us have multiple team responsibilities—which include instruction, supervision, technology, and special projects—so writing and compiling our dossiers was not an urgent to do item until we could no longer avoid it. The daily workload doesn't grind to a halt simply because you have just one more thing to do.

Our coping strategies included:

Understanding from the outset that this is by nature a drawn out, stressful, and *normal* event in a tenure-track librarian's career. It's important to maintain (or adopt) positive habits that facilitate riding it out with health and humor intact.

Pooling questions about the dossier process, preparation guidelines and protocols, and designating one group member to seek out the answers and report back at the next meeting or via e-mail.

Investing heavily in prewriting preparation time to gather documentation (often

scattered in folders and electronic files) and reread annual reviews from the past five years. This often resulted in mutterings such as, "I don't remember giving that conference presentation in '02"

Obtaining permission to read the successful dossiers of previously tenured librarians to get a feel for how people with varied position descriptions highlighted different aspects of their careers.

Chunking dossier content into smaller sections and tackling the easiest parts first. This allowed us to work on some areas of our dossiers during short spans of time, as our schedules permitted. It proved especially helpful while writing our vitae and during the polishing phase of writing.

Temporarily cutting back on some service or professional development activities, such as meetings or conferences that required out-of-state travel. This proved fairly easy to do during the summer months.

Sequestering ourselves in our offices by blocking out full or half days on our calendars and selectively declining meetings, allowing phone calls to go to voice mail, and closing Outlook e-mail. We were a tad miffed to discover that no one really seemed to notice we were missing.

Working from home. (Kevin Petsche excelled in this environment in which he communed with nature from his back porch, drank unlimited cups of coffee, and worked in his jammies.)

Thank you for your support

IUPUI libraries provide several support structures for newly appointed librarians as they begin their careers and move through the P&T process.

We begin by identifying a mentor, who can be someone within our team/department or library, or from outside our unit. Some of us found that a mentor outside our immediate team was more helpful in that we were continuously challenged to explain the choices we made for our activities along our career path. This helped to keep us focused on our professional visions.

We are required to submit a formal annual review and a third-year cumulative review, which are immensely helpful in providing peer feedback and direction. It also allows us to stay in sync with our supervisor's expectation of excellence in performance.

The chairs of the University Library Primary Peer Review Committee and IUPUI Librarians Promotion and Tenure Committee are always available to answer questions on dossier content and formatting and the review process.

Moreover, at least once a year, the IUPUI Librarians Promotion and Tenure Committee gives presentations on the P&T process and structuring the dossier. These workshops help keep us informed about changing expectations requirements as well as campus and university trends for our dossiers.

That group of librarians: lessons learned

Don't get so caught up in the requirements of daily job performance that you lose track of professional goals. It's important to begin thinking about career direction and the dossier that will result at the end of the probationary period starting from Day One.

Take advantage of opportunities for feedback from colleagues. It's natural for this evaluative process to feel intimidating, especially with so much riding on the outcome, but view the process as helpful, rather than punitive. Ask that such feedback be in writing. (This is also a professional courtesy that candidates should offer others.)

Don't be shy about asking for feedback from teaching faculty in the form of letters and e-mails. Letters that specifically address the librarian's contribution or a measurable impact are most useful.

Save all documentation that might be even remotely useful in building your case and keep it organized in one location. Anything having to do with job performance is obvious, but messages highlighting specific exemplary work or appreciation of professional service activities are also important.

Buy lottery tickets, because, well, you never know! ♪