



# An Overview of Tenure

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## Introduction

Tenure is an employment status that university faculty earn following a rigorous evaluation by their peers relative to teaching, scholarly/creative accomplishments, and service to the institution, community, and academic discipline. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) and the Association of College and University Professors (AAUP) formally established the concept of tenure through the *1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*<sup>1</sup>. The AACU and AAUP originally established tenure to ensure academic freedom, foster broad intellectual pursuits, and promote constructive educational and learning environments.

## The Tenure Process

Typically, universities hire “tenure-track” faculty as assistant professors and place them on a six-year probationary period. During this period, candidates undergo a rigorous evaluation of their overall performance. These comprehensive evaluations consider all teaching-related activities; scholarly/creative accomplishments; and service to the institution, discipline, and community. Universities require faculty to provide substantive contributions to teaching and scholarly/creative endeavors, as defined by the university and clarified by each college and department. A key part of this evaluation is an assessment of the faculty member’s scholarship by external peer reviewers who can provide an informed appraisal of the tenure candidate’s contribution to their field. Like other employers, universities require candidates to comply with university policies and state and federal laws. At the end of the probationary period, the candidate may become tenured and promoted to associate professor; become a non-tenured instructor, often for a limited period; or be dismissed from the university.

Other academic positions such as instructor, lecturer, adjunct professor, research professor, and others are not typically eligible for tenure status.

## Post-Tenure Reviews

Tenured faculty are subject to two types of reviews to correspond to the expectation of continued professional growth and productivity relative to scholarly and creative work, teaching, leadership, and service. Annual reviews consider the performance of assigned duties and responsibilities and compliance with university policies as well as state and federal laws, similar to the annual reviews conducted by other types of employers.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aaup.org/file/1940%20Statement.pdf>

Comprehensive post-tenure reviews, typically conducted every five or six years, are similar to the review used to determine eligibility for tenure.

The comprehensive reviews look deeper at performance documented in the annual reviews. Similar to common practices in business and industry, the determination of a satisfactory review requires faculty to sustain an acceptable level of performance over the previous five years, as documented in the annual reviews and portfolio. Faculty must demonstrate continued effectiveness in teaching and student engagement; service to the institution, profession, and community; continued academic achievement and growth, and compliance with university policies and state and federal laws.

Together, the annual and comprehensive post-tenure reviews should provide professional accountability to university leadership, academic colleagues, students, and the public. Like in businesses and other industries, successive years of unsatisfactory performance should lead to sanctions, performance improvement plans, and dismissal from the university.

### **The Role of Collective Bargaining**

Collective bargaining is the negotiation process between an employer and employees' representatives who establish the terms and conditions of employment. The two parties exchange proposals, share ideas, mutually identify and resolve differences, and reach a written contractual agreement. The contract legally binds both parties to the terms and conditions outlined within. Collective bargaining agreements cannot conflict with state or federal laws or Board of Governors regulations.

Although the roots of collective bargaining for university faculty date back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, unionization on university campuses took a firm hold during the 1960s. The AAUP formulated and advanced a framework for academic collective bargaining during this period. The AAUP's position was that collective bargaining reinforced and secured the principles of academic freedom, faculty governance, and appropriate workplace conditions.

### **The Changing Composition of the Academic Workforce**

The composition of the academic workforce has been gradually shifting since the early 1990s. In addition to tenure-track and tenured faculty, other types of academic positions not eligible for tenure also provide instruction (e.g., instructor, lecturer). The balance between tenured faculty and non-tenured instructional staff has shifted over time.

Nationally 63% of full-time instructional staff at public four-year institutions were tenured in 1990, compared to 47% in 2020. The State University System's percentage of tenured faculty has consistently been below the national average and has seen a similar decline. In 1990, 59% of full-time instructional staff in the State University System were tenured, compared to 45% in 2020. See Table 1 below for details.

**Table 1: Number of Full-Time Faculty with Tenure as a Percent of All Full-Time Instructional Staff by State University System Institution and for All Public Four-Year Institutions in the United States**

University	1990			2020		
	Total # Full-Time Instructional Staff	# of Full-Time Faculty with Tenure	% of Faculty with Tenure	Total # Full-Time Instructional Staff	# of Full-Time Faculty with Tenure	% of Faculty with Tenure
FAMU	364	188	52%	577	292	51%
FAU	419	253	60%	877	454	52%
FIU	732	308	42%	1,401	529	38%
FSU	1,064	749	70%	1,631	835	51%
NCF**	n/a	n/a	n/a	108	55	51%
UCF	600	352	59%	1,577	712	45%
UF	2,993	1,715	57%	2,912	1,500	52%
UNF	221	148	67%	544	256	47%
USF	1,097	682	62%	2,046	853	42%
UWF	235	161	69%	339	148	44%
<b>SUS Total</b>	<b>7,725</b>	<b>4,556</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>12,599</b>	<b>5,637</b>	<b>45%</b>
<b>All Public Four-Year Institutions in the U.S.</b>	<b>215,170</b>	<b>136,020</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>355,073</b>	<b>164,994</b>	<b>47%</b>

Source: Board of Governors, Office of Data & Analytics analysis of IPEDS Human Resources data.

\*Florida Gulf Coast University and Florida Polytechnic University do not utilize a tenure system.

\*\*New College of Florida became an autonomous member of the State University System in 2001.