

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2004 the Executive Council of the Modern Language Association of America created a task force to examine current standards and emerging trends in publication requirements for tenure and promotion in English and foreign language departments in the United States. The council's action came in response to widespread anxiety in the profession about ever-rising demands for research productivity and shrinking humanities lists by academic publishers, worries that forms of scholarship other than single-authored books were not being properly recognized, and fears that a generation of junior scholars would have a significantly reduced chance of being tenured. The task force was charged with investigating the factual basis behind such concerns and making recommendations to address the changing environment in which scholarship is being evaluated in tenure and promotion decisions.

To fulfill its charge, the task force reviewed numerous studies, reports, and documents; surveyed department chairs; interviewed deans and other senior administrators; solicited written comments from association members; and consulted with other committees and organizations. The most significant data-gathering instrument was a spring 2005 online survey of 1,339 departments in 734 institutions across the United States covering a range of doctorate, master's, and baccalaureate institutions. The response rate to the survey (51% of all departments and 67% of all institutions) provided a solid basis for the task force's analysis and recommendations.

The information gathered by the task force substantiates some worries and mitigates others. The results of the MLA survey, which covered the academic years from 1994-95 to 2003-04, initially seemed reassuring, since they suggested that there has been no perceptible lowering of tenure rates among those in the final stages of the tenure process, where the denial rate seems to be around 10%. But further research presented a more complex picture. The MLA survey showed that well over 20% of tenure-track faculty members leave the departments that originally hired them before they come up for tenure. Data from studies conducted by other groups suggest that fewer than 40% of the PhD recipients who make up the pool of applicants for tenure-track positions obtain such positions and go through the tenure process at the institutions where they are initially

hired, and a somewhat larger number of modern language doctorate recipients—more than 40%—never obtain tenure-track appointments. In the aggregate, then, PhDs in the fields represented by the MLA appear to have about a 35% chance of getting tenure.

The MLA survey further documents that the demands placed on candidates for tenure, especially demands for publication, have been expanding in kind and increasing in quantity. While rising expectations have been driven by the nation's most prestigious research universities, the effects ripple throughout all sectors of higher education, where greater emphasis has been placed on publication in tenure and promotion decisions even at institutions that assign heavy teaching loads. Over 62% of all departments report that publication has increased in importance in tenure decisions over the last ten years. The percentage of departments ranking scholarship of primary importance (over teaching) has more than doubled since the last comparable survey, conducted by Thomas Wilcox in 1968: from 35.4% to 75.7% (Comprehensive Survey 36).

Judging from the MLA's survey findings, junior faculty members are meeting these ever-growing demands even though this is a time when universities have lowered or eliminated subsidies for scholarly presses and libraries have dramatically reduced their purchases of books in the humanities. And despite a worsening climate for book publication, the monograph has become increasingly important in comparison with other forms of publication. Indeed, 88.9% of departments in Carnegie Doctorate-granting, 44.4% in Carnegie Master's, and 48% in Carnegie Baccalaureate institutions now rank publication of a monograph "very important" or "important" for tenure. The status of the monograph as a gold standard is confirmed by the expectation in almost one-third of all departments surveyed (32.9%) of progress toward completion of a second book for tenure. This expectation is even higher in doctorate-granting institutions, where 49.8% of departments now demand progress toward a second book.

While publication expectations for tenure and promotion have increased, the value that departments place on scholarly activity outside monograph publication remains within a fairly restricted range. Refereed journal articles continue to be valued in tenure evaluations; only 1.6% of responding departments rated refereed journal articles "not important" in tenure and promotion decisions. Other activities were more widely devalued. Translations were rated "not important" by 30.4% of departments (including

31.3% of foreign language departments), as were textbooks by 28.9% of departments, bibliographic scholarship by 28.8% of departments, scholarly editions by 20% of departments, and editing a scholarly journal by 20.7% of departments. Even more troubling is the state of evaluation for digital scholarship, now an extensively used resource for scholars across the humanities: 40.8% of departments in doctorate-granting institutions report no experience evaluating refereed articles in electronic format, and 65.7% report no experience evaluating monographs in electronic format.

Given the trends the task force has identified, we offer the following recommendations to address this complex situation before it becomes a crisis.

1. Departments and institutions should practice and promote transparency throughout the tenuring process.
2. Departments and institutions should calibrate expectations for achieving tenure and promotion with institutional values, mission, and practice.
3. The profession as a whole should develop a more capacious conception of scholarship by rethinking the dominance of the monograph, promoting the scholarly essay, establishing multiple pathways to tenure, and using scholarly portfolios.
4. Departments and institutions should recognize the legitimacy of scholarship produced in new media, whether by individuals or in collaboration, and create procedures for evaluating these forms of scholarship.
5. Departments should devise a letter of understanding that makes the expectations for new faculty members explicit. The letter should state what previous scholarship will count toward tenure and how evaluation of joint appointments will take place between departments or programs.
6. Departments and institutions should provide support commensurate with expectations for achieving tenure and promotion (start-up funds, subventions, research leaves, and so forth).
7. Departments and institutions should establish mentoring structures that provide guidance to new faculty members on scholarship and on the optimal balance of publication, teaching, and service.
8. Department chairs should receive guidance on the proper preparation of a tenure dossier.
9. Departments and institutions should construct and implement models for intermediate reviews that precede tenure reviews.
10. Departments should conduct an in-depth evaluation of candidates' dossiers for tenure or promotion at the departmental level. Presses or outside referees should not be the main arbitrators in tenure cases.
11. Scholarship, teaching, and service should be the three criteria for tenure. Those responsible for tenure reviews should not include collegiality as an additional criterion for tenure.
12. Departments and institutions should limit the number of outside letters (in general, to no more than six). Scholars should be chosen to write letters based primarily on their knowledge of the candidate's field(s). Letters should be limited to evaluating

scholarly work. Candidates should participate in selecting (or rejecting) some of their potential reviewers.

13. The profession as a whole should encourage scholars at all levels to write substantive book reviews.
14. Departments and institutions should facilitate collaboration among scholars and evaluate it fairly.
15. The task force encourages further study of the unfulfilled parts of its charge with respect to multiple submissions of manuscripts and comparisons of the number of books published by university presses between 1999 and 2005.
16. The task force recommends establishing concrete measures to support university presses.
17. The task force recognizes that work needs to be done on several questions not asked in its survey: salaries of junior and recently tenured faculty members, the role of unions, tenure appeals processes, and the lengthening of the pretenure period.
18. The task force recommends that a study of faculty members of color be conducted.
19. The task force encourages discussion of the current form of the dissertation (as a monograph-in-progress) and of the current trends in the graduate curriculum.
20. Departments should undertake a comprehensive review to ensure that their expectations for tenure are consistent with their institutions' values and mission and that each step in the process is fair and transparent.