

Spring 1995

The Academic Tenure-Review Process: An Asset or Liability to Collegiate Aviation?

Jeffrey A. Johnson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.erau.edu/jaaer>

Scholarly Commons Citation

Johnson, J. A. (1995). The Academic Tenure-Review Process: An Asset or Liability to Collegiate Aviation?. *Journal of Aviation/Aerospace Education & Research*, 5(3). Retrieved from <https://commons.erau.edu/jaaer/vol5/iss3/4>

This Editorial is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Aviation/Aerospace Education & Research* by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact commons@erau.edu.

EDITORIAL

THE ACADEMIC TENURE-REVIEW PROCESS: AN ASSET OR LIABILITY TO COLLEGIATE AVIATION?

Collegiate aviation educators need to take a hard look at the tenure-review process and ask, "Does the current process of reviewing and granting tenure need to be changed and, if so, why, and how can those changes be effectively implemented?" In a global economy, the aviation industry demands collegiate aviation graduates that are knowledgeable in their fields and have highly competitive skills. The current tenure-review process in American colleges and universities confronts present-day scholars with formidable challenges that John Dewey never may have envisioned during the early 20th century. In 1915, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) was founded by Dewey to develop and protect standards of academic freedom and tenure. In the course of 80 years, the tenure system has evolved so much that some scholars would argue that it no longer does what it is supposed to do—protect free speech.

If history repeats itself in an era when collegiate aviation is still gaining acceptability in the academic arena, the "publish or perish" syndrome will inevitably affect collegiate aviation scholars to the degree that scholars from traditional disciplines experience unless substantial changes are made in the tenure-review process. The current tenure-review process places collegiate aviation education at risk. Collegiate aviation education is at a critical juncture in which it cannot afford to lose a precious resource: faculty talent. In other traditional disciplines, Jay Parini, an English professor at Middlebury College, asserted that the academic tenure system is outdated, is a part of the problem, not the solution, and is in dire need of an overhaul:

Probably the worst aspect of the tenure status quo is that it divides the academic world into us and them, the tenured and the untenured. It also divides the us into factions, resulting in professors who often see their role as protecting certain people and making life difficult for others. I have watched the lynching of those who dared to point out institutional flaws or offer their own viewpoints too sharply, and it was not a pretty sight. I would certainly advise all my younger colleagues who care about getting

tenure to keep their mouths shut until the decision is made in their case. The problem is, those who keep their mouths shut for seven or eight years can get in the habit of remaining silent. The result of the system often is senior faculty members who are unwilling to challenge authority.

Parini made the assumption that some form of tenure probably will endure in the United States because the system is too deeply entrenched for complete dismantling to become a likely option. He argued for a dual-track system because few individuals excel in both teaching and scholarship. Non-tenured faculty members recently hired may wish to pursue a teaching tenure track to ease the burden of adjusting to college teaching while engaging in vigorous scholarly research. This suggestion would be well-founded in collegiate aviation to avoid terminating faculty who make promising teachers but are initially lackluster in their research endeavors.

Although most collegiate aviation faculty members bring a wealth of experience into the classroom, they do not typically start their teaching careers with a strong background in research and a high publication record. For newly hired collegiate aviation faculty members entering postsecondary education, this presents

Academic Tenure-Review Process

the dilemma of allocating more time for research at the expense of teaching. The paradigm that good researchers get tenure and good teachers do not is often foremost in the minds of non-tenured faculty members in their ongoing quest for tenure. In a highly competitive global economy, U.S. aviation employers expect high-quality graduates from collegiate aviation programs. Revamping the current tenure-review process to accommodate good

teaching in addition to good research is a win-win proposition that collegiate aviation cannot afford to miss. Will collegiate aviation succumb to the whims of the tenure-review process that so often punishes good teachers because of their mediocre research record? Only time will tell.

JAJ

Jeffrey A. Johnson is working toward a Ph.D. in the Higher Education Administration program at Bowling Green State University. He earned a Master of Aeronautical Science degree from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and a B.S. in Aeronautical Studies from the University of North Dakota.