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As the sun sets, the sky is a mix of orange and red. The birds are flying in the sky. The clouds are white and fluffy. The water is blue and calm. The trees are green and tall. The grass is green and short. The flowers are colorful and bright. The sky is a mix of orange and red. The birds are flying in the sky. The clouds are white and fluffy. The water is blue and calm. The trees are green and tall. The grass is green and short. The flowers are colorful and bright.

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*CATHARINA O'DONNELL*

# 1. WHAT IS ACADEMIC TENURE?

## 1.1 WHAT DOES TENURE MEAN?

Academic tenure is a type of job status for professors which guarantees substantial job security. When a professor has tenure, we call them "tenured professors." Professors in positions which are expected to lead to tenure are called "tenure track" professors and their positions are often referred to as "tenure track" from the beginning. About one third of all higher education faculty members [are](#) tenured in the United States.

Professors with tenure can be [viewed](#) as permanent faculty members whose positions cannot be taken away due to a lack of need, disagreement with university management, or other typical reasons for letting someone go in other industries. In the university context, having tenure differentiates one from contract.





## 1.4 IN GENERAL, WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR GETTING ACADEMIC TENURE?

In general, tenure is reserved for academic staff who complete both research and teaching. This means that faculty lecturers or other staff whose sole purpose is teaching are typically not eligible for tenure.

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# 2. WHAT DOES ACADEMIC TENURE AT MCGILL LOOK LIKE?

## 2.1 WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF ACADEMIC TENURE AT MCGILL?

In 1971, the president of Rice University in Houston [wrote](#) to the presidents of several prominent Canadian and American higher education institutions to ask what tenure processes looked like at their universities. 18 institutions responded, including McGill. Of the 18 universities who responded, 100 per cent had formal tenure processes. McGill was one of these. The other Canadian university included in the list, University of Toronto, also had formal tenure practices in place.

At the time, McGill was one of just a few universities that described academic freedom as the main objective of tenure policy. The principal and vice chancellor [wrote](#) that "security of tenure is the necessary basis of that liberty of speech which is the most precious and fundamental heritage of universities and places of higher learning." Rosenthal.

## 2.2 HOW IS ACADEMIC TENURE EVALUATED AT MCGILL?

According to McGill University, [granting](#) tenure is the most important decision we make. This was echoed by professors consulted for this report. At McGill, all tenure track faculty members are part of a tenure cohort and have a mandatory year of tenure consideration. Tenure-related policies are outlined in Section 10 of the *Regulations Relating to the Employment of Tenure Track and Tenured Academic Staff*.

For those who enter McGill as assistant professors or assistant librarians, tenure must be considered by the sixth year. [Regulations](#) For associate level professors and librarians, mandatory tenure consideration takes place in the fifth year. For those who enter McGill at the rank of full professor or librarian, tenure consideration must take place in the fourth year. For associate or full professors, early consideration of tenure can take place in any year. Assistant professors can apply for early consideration beginning in the third year. Faculty members may also request that their tenure be delayed by asking to not have any authorized leaves of longer than three months included in the time period. However, a maximum of two extensions are permitted before the faculty member is required to be considered for tenure.

For most tenure candidates who arrive at McGill at the rank of assistant professor and do not apply for early consideration at least one additional hurdle must be overcome before the tenure stage reappointment. Assistant professors are appointed on tenure track positions for an initial period of 5 years. Following the first appointment, if early tenure consideration has not been requested, the assistant professor must pursue reappointment to a second term of up to three years. The reappointment dossier is meant to mirror

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As indicated in the *Regulations Relating to the Employment of Tenure Track and Tenured Academic Staff* the DTC is generally chaired by the chair of the relevant department. The rest of the committee is made up of at least four tenured faculty members from that same department as well as two alternates. Similarly, the UTC is generally chaired by the dean of the relevant faculty. However, membership of the UTC is composed of faculty members who are not part of the same department as the tenure candidate. Again, the committee consists of five people including the chair. In both the DTC and the UTC, the chair can vote and participate in the discussion.

At each stage, only the tenure dossier is meant to be considered. Consultation with professors indicated that this typically becomes only strictly enforced at the request of committee members when attempts to discuss negative reputations or rumours come into play. Committee members might discuss positively about things not included in the dossier, including what the tenure candidate is like as a colleague, but this is often shut down when conversation turns to criticism.

If either committee is tending to the negative, the tenure candidate must be notified in writing and given the opportunity to address the committee. If the principal is ultimately tending toward the negative in their final individual decision, the candidate is likewise afforded the opportunity to come and address the concerns of the principal.

Once a candidate is granted tenure, they are appointed for an indefinite term beginning on June 1st of the year in which tenure is granted. If tenure is denied, appointments can continue for up to a year in order to provide the necessary 90-weeks notice of dismissal. This means that a professor who is denied tenure may continue to hold their position for several months following this rejection. The candidate also has the option to appeal the tenure decision. The vast majority of tenure cases are approved. In a typical year at McGill, only one or two tenure candidates are [denied](#) tenure. With three to five dozen candidates considered

## 2.3 WHO GETS ACADEMIC TENURE AT MCGILL?

A key drawback of tenure processes is that they generally advantage already privileged groups in society while gatekeeping individuals from marginalized groups. White, male, able-bodied, straight academics are overrepresented in tenured and tenure track positions, while racialized, Indigenous, disabled, non-male, non-heterosexual professors are underrepresented among tenured positions.

The [Report on Employment Equity](#) showed that the number of women tenure stream faculty in 2017 was 31 per cent. Conversely, women made up 18 per cent of contract, non-tenured or tenure track academic staff and 12 per cent of administrative and support staff. From 2007 to 2017, the most recent year for which data were available at the initial time of release of this report, the proportion of women in tenured and tenure track positions at McGill increased from 28 per cent to 31 per cent, a total change of less than three percentage points. Looking back as far as 2007, women made up 28 per cent of all tenure stream staff, meaning that there has been a total shift of less than four percentage points in the faculty representation of women in the last decade.

When tenured and tenure track positions are broken down into their three ranks—assistant, associate, and full professor—further gender discrepancies emerge. Among assistant professors, women make up 38 per cent and men comprise 62 per cent. At the associate professor level, women make up only 21 per cent of faculty while men form 79 per cent. At the full professor level, women form only 12 per cent of faculty while men make up the remaining 88 per cent. This demonstrates that women are more represented among junior faculty versus senior ranks. Because the overall ratio of women to men among tenured and tenure track staff has not changed substantially over at least the last decade, it is unlikely that these differences are solely

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Conversely to their representation in academic staff positions, women are overrepresented among administrative and support staff positions which usually carry with them substantially lower status, salary, and benefits vis a vis tenured academic positions. Women [make up](#) around [redacted] percent of administrative and support staff, a number which has not substantially shifted in the last ten years; in [redacted] women made up [redacted] percent of administrative and support positions.

Individuals identifying as visible minorities are also [underrepresented](#) among McGill's staff at [redacted] percent of all staff, academic and non-academic, in [redacted] up only one percentage point from [redacted] percent in [redacted]. While finding accurate numbers on representation of specific marginalized groups is difficult, the Black Students Network estimates that there are fewer than half a dozen tenured Black faculty at McGill. With regards to recruitment and promotion, statistics are also difficult to come by. That said, consultations provided indication of sentiments among the McGill community that racialized teaching staff are sometimes passed over in favour of lesser qualified white teaching staff. As the Black Students Network stated in consultations for this report, there is no shortage of highly qualified Black doctors, as in people with PhDs, from which McGill can recruit, and the notion of such a shortage is a racist narrative put forth when equity hiring is discussed as a solution. Although Black folks may be underrepresented among PhD holders in general, the academic job market is so tight that far more qualified candidates from all marginalized groups exist than do the number of positions needed to bring these groups to equal representation with their proportion of the general population. Moreover, as exemplified by the differentiation of tenure track and contract academic staff, not all positions are created equally, and the recruitment of racialized staff into precarious positions, such as contract teaching positions, does not have the same effect as recruiting racialized individuals into tenure track positions.

Indigenous academics are especially underrepresented among McGill's faculty. As stated in the [Final Report](#) submitted by the Task Force on Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Education, Indigenous Persons are the most underrepresented of all marginalized groups. As of that report, only [redacted] of McGill's [redacted] tenured and tenure track professors and librarians self-identified as Indigenous. This represents just [redacted] percent of McGill professors. For perspective, around [\[redacted\] per cent](#) of Canada's population is Indigenous, and the Indigenous population continues to grow at a rate that is [much higher](#) than Canada's non-Indigenous population.

## 2.4 WHAT IS THE CURRENT INVOLVEMENT OF STUDENTS IN MCGILL'S ACADEMIC TENURE PROCESS?

**Note** This section includes mention of sexual violence. To avoid this content, skip to Section 2.5 which begins on page 10. The [Sexual Assault Centre of the McGill Students Society](#) (SACOMSS) operates a support hotline from noon to midnight, Monday to Friday at 514-393-2121. Up-to-date information about drop-in hours is available [here](#).

Currently, there is virtually zero formal involvement of students in the academic tenure process. Teaching evaluations may be included in the tenure dossier, but this is up to the professor. If teaching evaluations are to be included, it must be in the form of [one intact set](#) of written comments, meaning that both good and bad comments for a course must be shown. That said, the professor may choose which course to include course evaluations for. If a professor believes that sharing their teaching evaluations will help convince the committee that they have achieved the appropriate standard of teaching required for tenure, then the professor can include them. Professors may also include unsolicited notes or student feedback in the tenure dossier. Again, it is not required that the professor include all unsolicited feedback, and so only the best feedback is included when the professor wants it to be. Formal involvement is therefore still rather informal. If it helps the professor, student feedback might be included. Moreover, the professor may choose to include teaching awards in their portfolio, which means that they can list BT Awards in their portfolio.





# 3. HOW DOES MCGILL'S TENURE PROCESS COMPARE TO TENURE AT OTHER UNIVERSITIES?

McGill's tenure process largely resembles that of other North American universities, however there are some key differences.

Speaking in broad strokes, McGill tends to consider a smaller sampling of work than other universities. While McGill asks only for a sample of published work, the University of Toronto requests that all publications, including those in progress, be included in the dossier. Furthermore, the [University of Toronto](#) considers activities by the professor at prior institutions, whereas McGill only considers activity in the tenure track position. There are both benefits and drawbacks to McGill's tenure process in this regard. While it raises the bar for continued high performance, it also erases any red flags occurring prior to a professor's time at McGill.

Another key difference when compared to other universities is that McGill does not require a letter of recommendation from all previous institutions.

Generally speaking elite universities in the United States have less transparent tenure processes than

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# 4. HOW CAN TENURE AT MCGILL BE IMPROVED?

## 4.1 WHAT ARE SOME WAYS TO ADDRESS ISSUES RAISED IN THIS REPORT?

While professors are often viewed as the main beneficiaries of tenure, they are far from the only stakeholders. The general public, university administration, policymakers, graduate students, and undergraduate students are also groups impacted by the research and teaching produced by universities, and in turn by the institutions that govern who produces this research and teaching. Because the Students' Society of McGill University represents undergraduate students, this report has focussed on the impacts of tenure processes on undergraduate students. **Undergraduate students like professors draw benefits and harms from existing tenure processes at McGill**

Undergraduate students like professors benefit from tenure in many ways. The advantages for students at McGill largely mirror the benefits of tenure to students in general. Tenure allows students to be taught by professors who can focus energy on teaching and research rather than on employment logistics. It allows students to find faculty mentors who wholeheartedly support them and are not worried about the student becoming the master. It also allows students to be taught about potentially controversial topics and to pursue research on potentially controversial topics under tenured professors. Furthermore, tenure provides professors protection from government pressures, strengthening the opportunity for professors to practice academic honesty and thus allow students to be taught by academically honest faculty.

Overall, tenure has huge benefits to students. As a word of warning, **students should be wary of attacking tenure in its entirety, particularly given the recent trend toward precarious employment in academia. This disproportionately impacts marginalized academics, including women and professors of colour.** Given the importance of diverse representation in faculty, students should be careful not to attack tenure in a way that works counter to marginalized academics working to slow the decline of tenure track positions. A better approach is to identify elements of the tenure process that are not working as well as they could, and to focus on improving these.

While students certainly benefit from many of the general advantages of tenure they are also in many ways underserved by the institution. Many issues hurt multiple stakeholders beyond just students. The underrepresentation of marginalized faculty in tenured and tenure track positions hurts not only these groups and their colleagues but also students. **All students benefit from a more diverse faculty, but this is especially important for marginalized students and students from marginalized and or disadvantaged communities who can substantially benefit from the mentorship and representation of faculty from these respective marginalized groups.** As SSMU Indigenous Affairs stated during consultations for this report

Indigenous students will benefit directly in an academic sense by increased opportunities to engage in explicit land based courses but also through the opportunity to study in culturally safe academic opportunities offered by Indigenous tenured professors

Beyond direct benefits to academic experiences of students an increase in Indigenous faculty representation will benefit Indigenous students because Indigenous professors and knowledge holders serve in unofficial roles as support systems for Indigenous students within the urban Indigenous community according to the SSMU Indigenous Affairs statement. Cultural exchanges between Indigenous students and Indigenous faculty are extremely important in cultivating a safe social and cultural environment for Indigenous students within a broader space that is often hostile to these students and experiences.

Similar issues were identified by the Black Students Network who in consultation for this report explained that

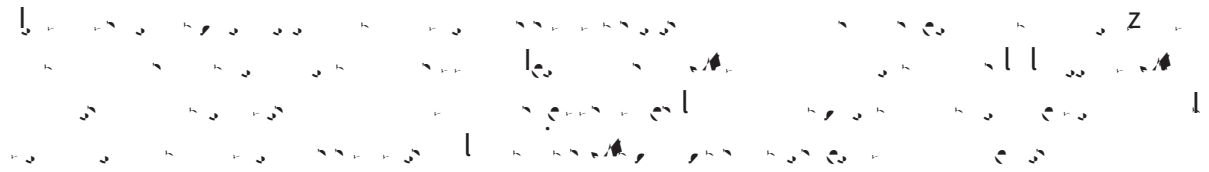
**Currently, the limited Black professors that exist at McGill have to carry an exceptional load of emotional labour and labour as a whole whether that be through supporting Black Students taking on multiple research students and often times being the only ones calling out the institution on their racism.**

Advocating for the immediate and continued recruitment of Indigenous Black and other racialized faculty into tenure track positions is one important step that can and should be taken by student representatives. As stated by SSMU Indigenous Affairs, SSMU has an obligation and mandate to advocate for an expansion of academic tenureship offered to Indigenous knowledge holders. Concretely, this might be accomplished through general advocacy by the SSMU University Affairs portfolio. Moreover, workshops surrounding hiring equity might be held by the SSMU for student representatives on hiring committees across the community. Although students may have little direct input in recruiting applicants to tenure track positions, they do have a direct voice at the interviewing and hiring table. This could be utilized both in facilitating marginalized students sitting on hiring committees and in providing resources and training to student representatives on the barriers facing certain marginalized groups as it relates to hiring for tenure track positions.

One pitfall of the current tenure process is that **teaching takes a backseat in the tenure assessment process relative to research**. There are very specific ways in which this happens. As one professor told SSMU during the research process for this report, teaching materials are not considered in the external evaluation portion of the tenure assessment process. The professor who spoke to us on this issue described teaching as central to their identity as teacher-scholar and found it dismaying. Because of the reduced weight given to teaching due to this omission in the external package, professors are less incentivized to develop excellence in teaching, which in turn underserves students.

Further, teachers who spend substantial time considering pedagogy and developing their teaching are not rewarded to the same extent as those who spend less time teaching and mentoring and devote this energy to research and university service instead. As one professor told us, teaching and supervision can be a reflection of research excellence and are also a way to impact who ends up working in a professor's field in the future. Because teaching is not considered by external reviewers, the key portion of tenure that impacts students is omitted from a substantial stage of the assessment process. This hurts professors who take on large teaching loads, which tend to disproportionately be younger women and racialized, along with students. Allowing at least the option to include teaching and supervision in the external portfolio is one potential avenue of improvement for students and other tenure stakeholders.

Besides the lack of emphasis on teaching quality, **students are also underserved by tenure's capacity to protect abusive faculty members**. With the way that tenure is currently set up, this happens both before and after tenure is granted. Because disciplinary records are not necessarily included in the tenure dossier because only what is in the dossier can be discussed, and because no student representatives are consulted in the tenure consideration process, tenure candidates with abusive pasts at McGill and elsewhere can be assessed without any regard for these situations. This was a concern echoed broadly across the group consulted, including student representatives as well as professors. As a statement from the SSMU executive committee read:



**Including disciplinary records in the tenure dossier is one important potential avenue for improvement** This is also something that was recommended in the report of the Ad Hoc Senate Committee on Teaching Staff-Student Relationships. One associate professor consulted in the making of this report pointed to this recommendation as key. Student groups, including the Sexual Assault Centre of the McGill Students Society (SACOMSS), similarly viewed the inclusion of disciplinary records as an important step. According to SACOMSS, the fact that the disciplinary records are not considered in one's tenure dossier is an absence that maliciously disregards a professor's capacity to adhere to the Policy Against Harassment and Sexual Violence Policy. At [Ryerson University](#), tenure policies explicitly state that disciplinary records may be included in the dossier by the departmental tenure committee chair. Explicating that chairs can include disciplinary records is one potential avenue for improvement at McGill.

Allowing student representatives to provide meaningful input is another appropriate method. Several avenues for student involvement will be discussed in the next section, but an especially relevant and already accessible one here might be the direct delivery of student input to the Provost by the relevant faculty and/or departmental societies. A more formal change might be that the departmental students' association be allowed to submit one letter as part of the tenure dossier. The students' association could then undertake appropriate means of consultation with affected students and compile this feedback into a letter submitted to the tenure committee. Student representatives at the tenure committee would also be an excellent route to pursue. Consultations with student departmental associations indicated that both choosing representatives and/or gathering feedback for a letter would be feasible for many departmental organizations, especially if SSMU were to play a coordinating/training role.

Following tenure, there are also pitfalls that hurt students. There does not seem to be convincing evidence that teaching quality or research output declines because of tenure, and so students should not focus their efforts here. What does seem to hurt students is the difficulty in getting abusive professors removed from their posts or seriously disciplined in any real way, given the rigidity of tenure. This was emphasized by both students and professors consulted for this report. As one professor said, "tenure should not protect professors who abuse their power over students by subjecting them to sexual harassment or other forms of sexual violence." SACOMSS likewise addressed this issue, stating that **"another issue with the Regulations Relating to the Employment of Tenure Track and Tenured Academic Staff is the absence of a clear procedure for losing tenure. This poses the absence of a clear procedure for losing tenure."**

McGill like other universities already claims that tenure is not absolute and that tenured professors can still be removed with cause. The best avenue for addressing this is likely through concrete cases. If student advocates with access to administrative levels (i.e. student Senators and the SSMU VP University Affairs) can push for removal of specific abusive professors, this is likely to be more effective in furthering the conversation.





## 4.2 WHAT ACTIONS CAN STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES TAKE NOW AND IN THE FUTURE TO IMPROVE TENURE?

Consider pushing administration to **restructure tenure consideration processes in ways that place more emphasis on teaching and interaction with students**. Like U of T McGill could consider having separate committees to consider teaching performance and research performance with each providing a decision independently of the other committee. A student could be included on each committee. While including a student on the teaching committee is most immediately relevant, consultation for this report indicated that students may also have a stake in professor's research being interested in the kinds of research that are given space on campus.

Frequently **remind administration of the underrepresentation of marginalized groups in tenured and tenure track positions**. Use results of McGill's own taskforces to press these points. Demand that McGill actively recruit in equity seeking communities. Emphasize the importance of expanding Indigenous representation particularly given McGill's historical position and the continued underrepresentation of Indigenous students in McGill's student body.

Push administration to **allow student representatives to sit on tenure committees**. Allowing at least one student representative to sit on at least one of the tenure committees would allow for student input to be considered at the table. The best place to start is likely asking for a seat at the departmental tenure committee as this is where the candidate is considered by peers from their own department and students from the same department as the professor are most likely to have the most in depth and valuable insights to provide. This student representative could be chosen in a variety of ways. Consultation with student groups indicated that perhaps SSMU could coordinate and provide training for this but could allow departmental associations to ultimately choose the student representatives either from their executive or through another means applications from department at large etc. As was raised by departmental and faculty student representatives consulted in the making of this report it would be important that this student bring with them input from a wider consultation e.g. from a survey disseminated by the departmental association or from focus groups in order for this representation to be effective rather than simply symbolic.

Lobby administration to **allow** **Timicus** **Span** **enub** **laenur** **ran** **e** **choose the** **TEMC**

Lobby the McGill administration to implement the recommendation of the report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Teaching Staff-Student Relationships which called for the university to ensure that official records that include discipline for breaching the policy against sexual violence are communicated to the Dean of the Faculty prior to a decision being made about tenure. As came through in consultations for this report, faculty deans are made aware of any faculty members who are deemed

# 5. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## EQUITY IN HIRING

Huang, Carolin and Molly Korab. Equity in the Hiring of McGill Academic Staff: An Investigation. Students' Society of McGill University. [https://ua.ssmu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/SSMU\\_Research\\_Report\\_Equity\\_in\\_the\\_Hiring\\_of\\_McGill\\_Academic\\_Staff.pdf](https://ua.ssmu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/SSMU_Research_Report_Equity_in_the_Hiring_of_McGill_Academic_Staff.pdf)

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Wong, Jackie. Equitable campuses, but for whom? University Affairs. [https://www.universityaffairs.ca/features/feature\\_article/equitable\\_campuses\\_but\\_for\\_whom/](https://www.universityaffairs.ca/features/feature_article/equitable_campuses_but_for_whom/)

## TENURE'S HISTORY

Dea, Shannon. A brief history of academic tenure. University Affairs. [https://www.universityaffairs.ca/opinion/dispatches/academic\\_freedom/a\\_brief\\_history\\_of\\_academic\\_freedom/](https://www.universityaffairs.ca/opinion/dispatches/academic_freedom/a_brief_history_of_academic_freedom/)

Higher Ed Professor. History of Tenure. <http://higheredprofessor.com/2017/07/history-of-tenure/>

Kaplan, Karen. Academia: The changing face of tenure. Nature. <https://www.nature.com/nature-jobs/science/articles/2017/nj17001a>

## IMPROVING OUR CAMPUS COMMUNITY

Sexual Assault Centre of McGill University      Creating Safer Classrooms [https://ua.ssmu.ca/wp-content/uploads/\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_/\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_/sv\\_tool\\_kit.pdf](https://ua.ssmu.ca/wp-content/uploads/_____/_____/sv_tool_kit.pdf)

## DEFENSES OF TENURE PRACTICES

Greenwald Richard A      Protecting Tenure Inside Higher Ed [https://www.insidehighered.com/views/\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_/\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_/overlooked\\_administrative\\_and\\_financial\\_benefits\\_tenure\\_opinion](https://www.insidehighered.com/views/_____/_____/overlooked_administrative_and_financial_benefits_tenure_opinion)

Cox Lois and Katherine Tachau      reasons tenure benefits students and iowans Iowa City Press Citizen [https://www.press-citizen.com/story/opinion/contributors/guest\\_editorials/\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_/\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_/reasons\\_tenure\\_benefits\\_students\\_and\\_iowans/\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_/](https://www.press-citizen.com/story/opinion/contributors/guest_editorials/_____/_____/reasons_tenure_benefits_students_and_iowans/_____/)

## CRITIQUES OF TENURE PRACTICES

Nisbet Robert A      The Permanent Professors A Modest Proposal The Public Interest [https://www.nationalaffairs.com/storage/app/uploads/public/\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_/\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_/e\\_a\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_/ec\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_/e\\_a\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_/ec\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_.pdf](https://www.nationalaffairs.com/storage/app/uploads/public/_____/_____/e_a_____/ec_____/e_a_____/ec_____.pdf)

Wetherbe James C      It's Time for Tenure to Lose Tenure Harvard Business Review [https://hbr.org/\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_/\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_/its\\_time\\_for\\_tenure\\_to\\_lose\\_te](https://hbr.org/_____/_____/its_time_for_tenure_to_lose_te)

