Faculty Understanding and Perceptions of the Tenure Process

Purpose & Research Questions
Our purpose in this study was to gather information about faculty experiences and perceptions of the tenure process, particularly with regard to mentoring and aspects of satisfaction.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. To what extent were faculty advised and mentored about the tenure process?
   a. How does this advising and mentoring relate to faculty satisfaction?
2. To what extent did faculty perceive the tenure process to be reasonable, fair, work-life balanced, and satisfying?
   a. How do these perceptions vary by institutional characteristics and faculty demographics?

Background
Recent studies suggest that perceived difficulties in the tenure process persist, notably among women and junior faculty of color (Ackers, Webb, & Smyth, 2012; Barnes, 2017). A variety of issues and problems contribute to these recognized difficulties: concerns regarding gender equity, evaluation criteria, lack of clarity and alienation through generational gaps, heavy faculty workloads, division of academic labor, family and personal responsibilities, and lack of support in the tenure process (and the stress related to it), all contribute to perceptions of unfairness and inequity in the tenure process and contribute to faculty stress levels (Ackers et al., 2011; Olsen, 2013; Pribnowtenko et al., 2010; Verrier, 1994).

Several studies suggest ways to mitigate and correct these notions. Faculty mentoring is a widely supported method to socialize junior faculty and provide a support network during the tenure process (Oken, 1993; Sanders, Parson, & Duane, 1991; Schrodt, Cawley & Sanders, 2003). Additionally, researchers also recommend the easing of junior faculty administrative responsibilities to alleviate stress (Ober, 2013). This literature also recommends adopting a “consensually validated code of ethics” which will provide expectation for standards and behaviors and act as the foundation for a departmental sense of “community and common purpose” to guide the tenure process (Verrier, 1994; Wolfe et al., 1996).

Methods
To answer the first research question, simple frequencies were used to examine to what extent faculty were advised or mentored about the tenure process. To answer the second research question, the four satisfaction-related items were used to construct an internally consistent scale (α = .94) which served as the measure for satisfaction in both subquestions of this study. Pearson’s correlations were computed between the scale measure of satisfaction and the two items about having been advised about the tenure process and having developed an understanding of the tenure process. A Heise and Cohen’s d effect size calculation were used to determine satisfaction by whether or not faculty had received mentoring from a senior faculty member.

Agreem semples were used to examine to what extent faculty found the tenure process to be reasonable, fair, work-life balanced, and satisfying. To answer the third subquestion about how these perceptions of satisfaction varied by institutional characteristics and faculty demographics, an OLS regression model was examined. The satisfaction measure described above served as the dependent measure for this model. This dependent measure was regressed on faculty characteristics (age, gender, citizenship, race, disciplinary area, rank, earned doctorate, years of teaching experience, and course load) and institutional characteristics (Carragee classification and control). All continuous measures were standardized before entry into the models.

Conclusions
This study provides a general overview of faculty perceptions of the tenure process. Overall, our results corroborate other studies that found a positive relationship with academic mentoring and career satisfaction (Olsen, 1993; Sands, Parson, & Duane, 1991; Schrodt, Stringer Cawley & Sanders, 2003). Specifically, we found if faculty received mentoring from a senior colleague and was advised on the tenure process, they generally felt more satisfied with the process itself, contrary to the positive findings in the literature. It is questionable whether or not faculty receiving the support they need to achieve tenure status. Only about 1 in 2 in this faculty study felt they had a substantiative understanding of the tenure process, and less than half reported being advised adequately on the process.

We conclude there is great room for improvement. Senior faculty and campus leaders should, first, closely examine formal and informal efforts to support junior faculty through the tenure process, and, second, seek to better understand who is being left unsatisfied. It is possible many may have the desire to seek tenure status. It is also quite possible certain groups of faculty are being left unsatisfied due to organizational factors. Also, while significant differences in satisfaction were found by rank, age, and institutional characteristics, faculty perceptions were similar by race/ethnicity, gender, and discipline. This finding is inconsistent with recent studies by Ackers (2011) and Barnes (2012). More research is needed to better understand why this is the case in our study.

Future Research
Important next steps for this research study include: differentiating between faculty that are tenured, on the tenure-track, and not on the tenure track. Additional analyses looking at the individual aspects of satisfaction by various faculty and institutional characteristics may help to explain why we did not find satisfaction differences by race/ethnicity, gender, and discipline when other studies have. We also did not closely examine what types of faculty and faculty at what types of institutions were being mentored or advised about the tenure process. This information may add to the complexity of our satisfaction findings. It would also be beneficial to study satisfaction differences while controlling for whether or not faculty have received advising or mentoring as there may be important differences between these two groups of faculty.

Table 1: FSSE 2013 Extra Items: Satisfaction and Mentoring

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<th>At your current institution, did you have the following happened?</th>
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<td>(Very much, Quite a bit, Some, Very little)</td>
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<td>a. You have been advised about the tenure process, including standards and criteria</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. You have developed an understanding of the tenure process</td>
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At your current institution, have you received mentoring from a senior faculty member that helped you navigate aspects of the tenure process? |
| No |
| a. The expectations of the tenure process are reasonable |
| The tenure review process is fair |
| The tenure process allowed me to balance work with my other responsibilities |
| I am satisfied with the tenure process |

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Allison Bricka-Lorenz
FSSE Project Manager & Research Analyst, CI Center for Postsecondary Education (CPR) abrickal@indiana.edu
Amy Ribera
Research Analyst, CPR aribera@indiana.edu
Leah Peck
FSSE Project Associate, CPR leahpeck@indiana.edu
Tony Ribera
Director of Program Evaluation, Undergraduate Medical Education, IU School of Medicine, aribera@iupui.edu

Figure 1. Faculty Perceptions of Advising and Understanding of the Tenure Process

Figure 2. Faculty Perceptions of Satisfaction with the Tenure Process

Looking in more depth at what types of faculty were more or less satisfied and at what types of institutions faculty were more or less satisfied, few significant differences were found by faculty and institutional characteristics. Associate professors (β = .27, p = .008), assistant (β = .49, p < .001), and full-time lecturers (β = .55, p < .001) were all less satisfied with the tenure process than full professors. Older faculty were slightly less satisfied (β = .22, p < .001) than younger faculty less than 55 years old. Faculty at bachelor’s-granting institutions were more satisfied (β = .47, p < .001) than faculty at doctorate-granting institutions. Faculty at privately controlled institutions were slightly less satisfied (β = .24, p < .001) than faculty at publicly controlled institutions. There were no differences found between faculty in different disciplinary areas, by gender, or by race.