

Tenure

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any spend a six-year probationary period teaching and researching at the University, said Karen Miksch, co-chairwoman of the University Senate Academic Freedom and Tenure Committee.

At the end of the period, the faculty member faces intensive review from within the department, and if approved, his or her application works its way up several levels of the University hierarchy. If it is approved at each step, it eventually goes before the Board of Regents, where a final vote takes place. If tenure is not granted, the professor is given one more year at the University before being forced to find a job elsewhere.

With tenure comes an indefinite contract to teach and research, which can only be revoked under extreme circumstances. The indefinite contract allows professors to take on long-term research projects and also allows for more freedom to cover controversial issues in classrooms, said Miksch, who is also a tenured professor in the College of Education and Human Development.

Although faculty at the University are protected by the Board of Regents' academic freedom policy, tenured faculty protect and strengthen academic freedom, she said.

"Tenure protects academic freedom in a way that a contractual employment relationship wouldn't," Miksch said. "It allows you to do something that is unpopular or to do something that is controversial, whether it's in your teaching or your research."

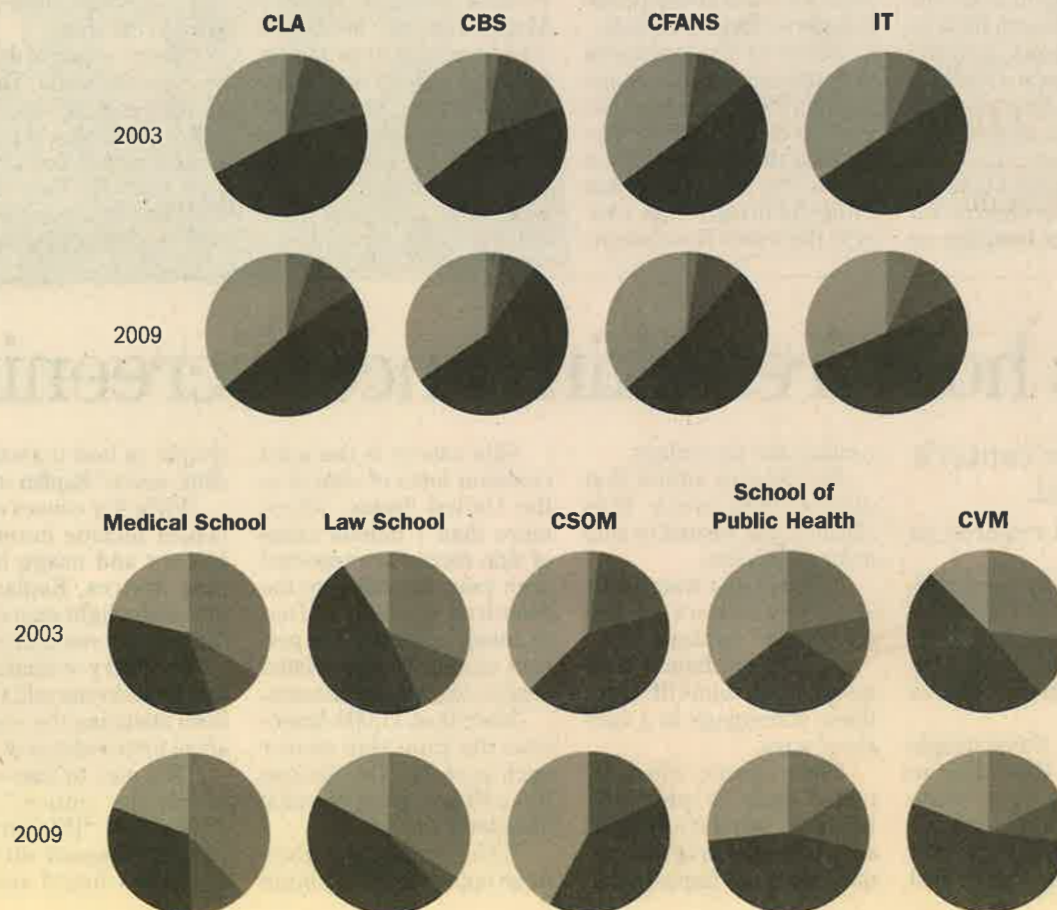
Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs Arlene Carney said tenure helps create a long-term faculty body that can form relationships with and mentor students. Faculty with tenure are better positioned to do the type of research that brings large grants and contributes to the University's prestige.

"If you have an institution that has too many people who have just a tenuous connection to the university, they can sort of come and go and it doesn't impact the institution," she said. "If you have a group of tenured and tenure-track faculty in a department, they're committed to the curriculum and growing the students."

For students, the difference between a tenured professor and a nontenured professor isn't always obvious, but Ryan Kennedy, a graduate student at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, said students benefit when a professor has years of experience working at the University.

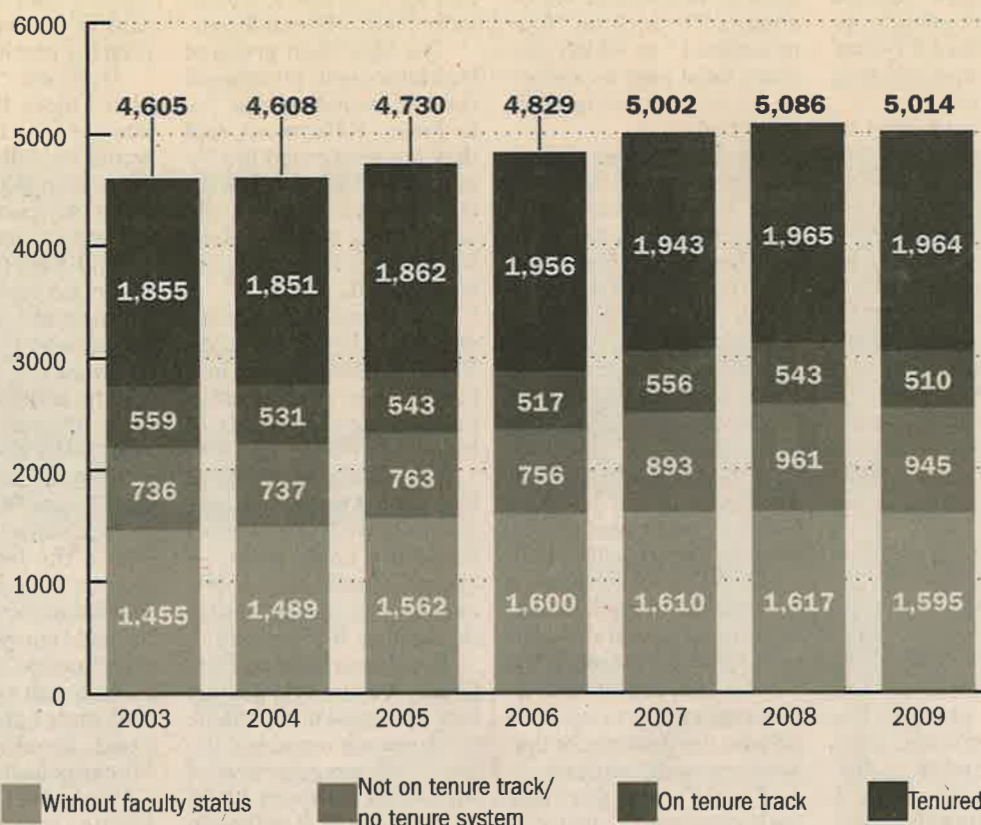
Kennedy, who is the incoming president for the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly, said it's apparent when a professor has been teaching a subject for a long time. It's also easier to build relationships with faculty who are around for the student's entire stay at the University, Kennedy said.

FACULTY MAKEUP BY COLLEGE



*The College of Education and Human Development and the College of Design underwent major restructuring between 2003 and 2009. Because of this, an accurate depiction of the change in their faculty bodies could not be made.

U OF M FACULTY MAKEUP 2003-2009



SOURCE: UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

extra level of academic freedom afforded by tenure allows professors to research and teach ideas that may not be accepted in the mainstream. But he thinks one of the biggest advantages to tenure is the commitment tenured professors are able to make to the University.

"You're fully vested in the University and can be fully participatory and contribute to the positive direction of the University," he said.

For nontenured faculty, fully committing to a university they may not be working at the next year can be difficult, Edsall said.

"You are doing the research and trying to excel as a professor, but it's primarily for your own career advancement," Edsall said.

Working on a contractual basis increases the pressure for researchers to do projects and write articles in a shorter time frame to prove their productivity.

"I'm working on projects that are shorter term," he said. "It's not ideal, for sure. It limits my choices. I can't do five- or seven-year projects."

Ken Kozak, a tenure-track professor in CFANS' Department of Fisheries, Wildlife and Conservation Biology, said he feels a similar pressure when doing research.

Kozak, who is also a curator at the Bell Museum, still has a few years before he can be granted tenure, but he thinks having tenure will allow him to pursue research that may be riskier or may not produce results as quickly.

"When people don't have to worry about taking risks, from a research perspective, that's often where some of the greatest breakthroughs are made," he said.

NO SIMPLE SOLUTIONS

There is no end in sight for the budget crisis and the decline in tenured and tenure-track faculty that comes with it.

All administrators can do is stay aware of how the faculty body is changing and plan around those changes in order to minimize the effects, Carney said.

"I think what we have the opportunity to do when we hire contract faculty for a couple of years ... is we don't make a long-term commitment to an area," she said.

She said the University can still offer quality programs with slightly fewer faculty, and with planning, colleges will be well-positioned to act quickly and grow programs when the financial situation stabilizes.

Bell also sees similar positives to the financial struggles his college and others are going through.

"I think, historically, these contraction periods are actually opportunities, because you sort of shrink down, and when it comes back up, you figure out where to invest and you can be