

University of Massachusetts Amherst

From the Selected Works of Dan Clawson

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Response-Tenure

Dan Clawson, *University of Massachusetts - Amherst*



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/dan_clawson/5/

Multifaceted experience
with birds

1501

Expanding roles
for D-amino acids

1505



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LETTERS

edited by Jennifer Sills

Tenure: Where to Draw the Line

THE ARGUMENT THAT UNIVERSITIES AREN'T BUSINESSES ("TENURE AND THE FUTURE OF THE UNIVERSITY," D. Clawson, Education Forum, 29 May, p. 1147) has a great deal of traction among faculty members. However, it is ludicrous to suggest that running a university efficiently is possible without applying some hard-nosed concern for maximizing revenue and minimizing costs. Perhaps those committed to the continuance of the tenure system should consider that the definition of academic freedom need not encompass academic inactivity. If personnel decisions are left in the hands of faculty members, surely the "professionalism" mentioned by Clawson is sufficient to ensure the free speech and creativity of the university even without a tenure system. Understood this way, it may be that faculty members should truly draw a line in the sand at the retention of the right to make appointment decisions for academic personnel, not at the continuation of tenure.

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Tenure: Expiration Time

IN THE EDUCATION FORUM "TENURE AND THE FUTURE OF THE UNIVERSITY" (29 May, p. 1147), D. Clawson used several statements as arguments for tenure that were in fact unfounded or unrelated to the issue of tenure.

Clawson proposed that when administrators cut costs by increasing the percentage of non-tenure-track and part-time faculty positions, the process of teaching becomes a process of content delivery, teaching to the test, and delivering a standard curriculum determined from above. There is no connection between these two scenarios. I have a full-time teaching position at a for-profit college

and a part-time teaching position at a community college. Neither position is tenure-track. Both colleges have programs in place to help all faculty develop teaching methods, creative lesson plans, and sensitivity to students' learning styles.

Content delivery and teaching to the test are unfortunately all too common, but they are unrelated to issues of tenure or employment status. Arguably, without the incentive of a need to prove themselves daily, tenured faculty may be more likely to resort to such practices.

Clawson's references to professionalism were also misdirected. The term "professional" applies as much to non-tenure-track and part-time faculty as to tenured faculty. It also applies equally to those engaged in many endeavors outside of academia. The term in no way implies an exclusive right to self-evaluate or self-police. All professionals, including all faculty, are accountable to others and therefore subject to outside evaluation.

Clawson pointed out that first-year students are less likely to return if their courses are taught by part-time faculty. This comparison between full-time and part-time faculty is unrelated to the issue of tenure. Clawson also noted that, given a choice, faculty prefer jobs

in the tenure system. The implication was that the tenure system is inherently superior. However, it is more likely that a preference for such a position simply reflects a preference for greater job security and comfort.

The elitist view that tenured faculty are somehow above scrutiny, have a more altruistic vision of a larger good than others, and are the exclusive champions of education, is a view whose time has expired. It is time for the tenure system to expire as well, and to move forward with a system in which all faculty must prove themselves daily. This system works efficiently and fairly in other professions and could work efficiently and fairly in the academic professions as well.

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Tenure: Incentivize Faculty

IN HIS EDUCATION FORUM "TENURE AND THE FUTURE OF THE UNIVERSITY" (29 May, p. 1147), D. Clawson makes salient points about the damaging effects of a permanent untenured faculty underclass, but he understates the role that many tenured and tenure-track faculty play in supporting this disturbing trend. When unprotected faculty teach and tenured faculty focus on research and departmental decision-making, students are less likely to be prioritized. This occurs despite national calls for greater scientific literacy and a broadening of participation in science.

Tenured and tenure-track faculty as well as university administrators need an incentive to meet student needs and to value those faculty who provide teaching services. A simple solution would be to tie a university's overhead rate on federal grants to the percentage of teaching services provided by tenured and tenure-track faculty. In such a system, a department delivering 75% of its teaching services with non-tenure-track faculty would receive only 25% of the normal overhead payment on the grants of its faculty.

Such a system would give both tenured and tenure-track faculty and administrators a financial incentive to extend tenure to more of their colleagues and to reevaluate departmen-

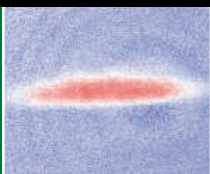
Letters to the Editor

Letters (~300 words) discuss material published in *Science* in the previous 3 months or issues of general interest. They can be submitted through the Web (www.submit2science.org) or by regular mail (1200 New York Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA). Letters are not acknowledged upon receipt, nor are authors generally consulted before publication. Whether published in full or in part, letters are subject to editing for clarity and space.



Microbe dispersal

1506



Ferromagnetic ordering
of cold atoms

1507

tal decisions to farm out large introductory courses to non-tenure-track faculty. The balance of funds could be placed in a national fund reserved for professional development and research for non-tenure-track faculty, fulfilling a serious need, as these faculty generally have no access to the regular research funds needed to remain active in research and to escape the academic underclass.

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Response

THE LETTERS BY GORDON AND MOOSAVI raise an important issue: Discussions about tenure can focus on either the tenure system

or the individuals who are and are not in tenure-system positions. My Education Forum focused on the larger system, with an emphasis on the reasons for, and consequences of, the continuing movement away from the tenure system. Gordon and Moosavi, in different ways, argue (correctly) that the dynamics for the larger system do not necessarily apply to each individual.

I argue that a strong tenure system is vital if universities want to emphasize free speech and creativity, and note that the tenure system is strongest at leading research universities and liberal arts colleges and weakest at for-profit colleges and community colleges. That certainly does not mean that all individuals with tenure-system positions promote and uphold the values and practices of student and

researcher creativity. Nor does it mean that non-tenure-system faculty abjure these values and happily engage in “content delivery” and teaching to the test.

The issue here is not moral values but structural position. You can be moderately well paid, teach two courses a semester, know that you can stay for your lifetime and expect to do so, have full control over the syllabus and readings for your courses, be encouraged to develop new course offerings, and be actively involved in the governance of your institution. Alternatively, you can be teaching eight courses a semester scattered over three different institutions, never know where (or if) you will be teaching the next semester, not have an office, not be involved in decisions about the institution, have to use a syllabus and readings selected by someone else, and be earning far less than the average holder of a bachelor’s degree. You will most likely develop a different set of attitudes and behaviors as the result of occupying a different place in the system. The practice will necessarily be different even if the goals and values start out the same. The point is to develop systems that encourage and protect all faculty.

Gordon reports that in both of his teaching situations, the college predetermines his course syllabi. That is rarely the case at highly selective research universities and liberal arts colleges. Gordon also reports that he nonetheless exercises creativity and encourages it in his students. I absolutely believe that faculty in non-tenure-system positions seek to be creative, but the structural conditions limit that creativity, as in the imposition of a standard syllabus.

Moosavi looks at the other side of the coin: Tenure-system faculty often cooperate in this process, seeking to guarantee their future advancement by shunning low-status activities and embracing high-status activities. In many cases, that means that they avoid teaching introductory students, or avoid teaching altogether. Moosavi points to an important problem, but I believe that it is not a consequence of the moral failures of tenured faculty, nor of the tenure system, but rather of the attack on the tenure system and the emergence of a two-tier faculty. The structural conditions encourage and reward this behavior. Moosavi suggests a structural change—tying university grant overhead rates to the percent of students taught

by tenure-system faculty—to address the problem. I applaud the effort to develop such structural solutions.

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Increase Grants, Too

THE NEWS FOCUS STORY “RESHUFFLING graduate training” (J. Mervis, 31 July, p. 528) suggests that a change in graduate student funding from grants to fellowships and traineeships will increase the independence of young scientists and boost U.S. science. We agree, but caution that shifting resources to fellowship programs could fail to produce desired results without additional increases in direct support for graduate student research.

Our graduate educations are funded by a U.S. Department of Agriculture National Needs Traineeship and a U.S. Department of Energy Graduate Research Environmental Fellowship. Similar to fellowship programs funded by NSF, NIH, or the EPA, these training programs are prestigious but provide little or no research funding. Accordingly, recipients often work on ideas that are closely affiliated with

existing grants rather than developing independent research. Moreover, the effectiveness of NSF Graduate Research Fellowships may also be limited by eligibility requirements that exclude students with master’s degrees. Students with a master’s degree may be more prepared for independent research compared to counterparts with a bachelor’s degree.

Nonetheless, training and fellowship programs can spur independence. We used our fellowships as a platform to compete for research grants. Research grants that we received from NSF and NOAA provide independence to develop our own ideas and experiments. An increase in research fellowships together with a substantial increase in research grants would be a more effective way to encourage graduate student creativity, autonomy, and success.

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Stable Funding Is Key

IN THE NEWS FOCUS STORY "RESHUFFLING graduate training" (31 July, p. 528), J. Mervis describes Roald Hoffmann's proposal to dramatically shift U.S. federal research funding from principal investigator (PI)-controlled grants to graduate student fellowships. However, Mervis does not mention an important argument for Hoffman's proposal: the importance of funding continuity during the entirety of a student's Ph.D. education.

As a former graduate program director, I have observed first-hand that stable funding for the duration of a student's Ph.D. studies can affect both the timely completion of the Ph.D. and the student's likelihood of remaining in graduate school. When students (and their PIs) experience funding gaps, responses vary dramatically, even within a given university campus. Some programs leave the student entirely without funding. Other programs provide bridge funding or a teaching assistantship, possibly of finite duration or with strings attached. Even if the student obtains support from another sponsored research grant, such a switch can have serious implications for the

content and direction of the student's studies.

As a PI, I would gladly give up some amount of funding in return for a secure 5 years of funding for a promising new Ph.D. student to pursue his or her Ph.D. studies. I was pleased to read that senior NSF officials at least consid-

ered such proposals in the past and would encourage both NIH and NSF to explore such mechanisms in the future. **ROBERT J. BUTERA**

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TECHNICAL COMMENT ABSTRACTS

COMMENT ON "The Dynamic Control of Kiss-And-Run and Vesicular Reuse Probed with Single Nanoparticles"

Björn Granseth, Benjamin Odermatt, Stephen J. Royle, Leon Lagnado

Zhang *et al.* (Research Articles, 13 March 2009, p. 1448) reported that synaptic vesicles usually release neurotransmitter through a kiss-and-run mechanism occurring within 1 second but that full collapse of the vesicles becomes more prevalent with repeated stimuli. We report that the kinetics of vesicle retrieval do not change during a stimulus train, with endocytosis occurring in 10 to 15 seconds.

Full text at www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/full/325/5947/1499-b

RESPONSE TO COMMENT ON "The Dynamic Control of Kiss-And-Run and Vesicular Reuse Probed with Single Nanoparticles"

Qi Zhang, Yulong Li, Richard W. Tsien

Granseth *et al.* argue that vesicle retrieval at hippocampal synapses is fully accounted for by a single mode of endocytosis. However, their assay focused on readily releasable pool vesicles (RRP), not RRP + reserve pool vesicles in tandem, and therefore cannot detect pool-dependent changes in vesicle-retrieval kinetics during a stimulus train. Using a probe similar to theirs, we observed rapid vesicle retrieval consistent with kiss-and-run fusion.

Full text at www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/full/325/5947/1499-c