

Resolution of the UTHSC Faculty Senate
Approved April 11, 2023
Increase Flexibility of the Tenure Clock Suspension Clause of Board of Trustees Policies

Whereas, the Board of Trustees Policies have a very defined policy addressing temporary suspension of the tenure clock; and

Whereas, “Except as otherwise provided in this policy, the probationary period shall be six years” (UT Board of Trustees Policy BOT0006 Article III Section E.1); and

Whereas, by Board policy only three conditions permit suspension of the tenure clock, “a. accepts a part time faculty position; b. accepts an administrative position; or c. is granted a leave of absence or modified duties assignment” (UT Board of Trustees Policy BOT0006 Article III Section E..3a, 3b, 3c); and

Whereas, the acceptable justifications cited above do not cover many of the real-world reasons for which a temporary suspension of the tenure clock would be justified; and

Whereas, a more flexible temporary, tenure clock suspension policy will afford significant benefits to UT faculty in that it will

- Provide opportunities for faculty to fully develop their work despite undergoing challenging life circumstances, e.g., dual careers, births, catastrophic illnesses, immediate family deaths, etc.; and
- Provide opportunities, in rare cases, for young faculty to make midcourse corrections in their research focus and direction when there is clear advantage to doing so; and
- Afford faculty with high potential, pursuing long lead-time projects, the ability to succeed at UT rather than missing the 6-year probationary period, not receiving tenure, and moving to another university where their potential for success is later realized, but at a loss of valuable time incurred by the need to relocate reducing their personal competitiveness; and

Whereas, the University of Tennessee will derive significant benefits from a more flexible, temporary tenure clock suspension policy in that it will

- Provide increased diversity potential, e.g., under-represented minorities, dual-career couples, or faculty who do not always follow traditional career tracks; and
- When needed, provide higher quality evaluative information for faculty departmental promotion and tenure committees, deans and chancellors; and
- Afford competitive recruiting advantages for new faculty relative to institutions with “rigid” 6-year tenure clocks; and

- Avoids the loss of initial University investment (setup and salary) when the policy retains high potential faculty who would otherwise generate significant institutional income following a move in response to a failed tenure decision; and
- Increase University faculty morale, loyalty, and willingness to reach out to potential collaborators; and

Whereas, the Board of Trustees and/or Faculty Handbooks of our peer and aspirational institutions contain the recommended flexibility in policies for temporary tenure clock suspension for demonstrably good cause;

Now Therefore, the UTHSC Faculty Senate recommends that the University of Tennessee Board of Trustees revise Board of Trustees Policy BT0006 Article III, Section E.3. to yield a more flexible policy that permits temporary suspension of the six-year tenure clock for demonstrably good causes.