

# „There are few guarantees on the tenure track“

## Questions to Cathy Trower

| **CATHY TROWER** | Tenure track is a part of the American universities for decades and still the great goal for most of the young scientists. How is the current situation in the light of severe budget-cuts? Questions to Cathy Trower of COACHE.

**Forschung & Lehre:** Tenure Track is still the great goal for most of young scientists. However, professors with tenure or on a tenure track seem to become a distinct minority on the country's campuses. What are the reasons?

**Cathy Trower:** There are two primary reasons. First, universities are hiring more faculty off of tenure-track lines because they can. In many fields, there are plenty of doctorally qualified candidates seeking academic employment. Institutions enjoy the benefit of hiring great people without making lifelong commitments to academic areas with unknown futures. Second, many young

scholars are ambivalent about the tenure-track. While they recognize the importance of job security and the status the tenured faculty enjoy, they also understand that the world has changed and, if they want to work in a university, doing exciting cutting edge research and working with great graduate students, there are plenty of opportunities for full-time non-tenure-track positions. My own past research showed that women especially are willing to accept non-tenure-track positions for quality of life reasons.

**F&L:** Tenure once was designed to guarantee academic freedom to professors. Do you think that the decrease of tenure at universities is a danger to the freedom and also the quality of research and teaching?

**Cathy Trower:** My personal view is no, I do not believe that academic freedom is in danger or that the quality of research and teaching are suffering. I believe that all who teach should have academic freedom – not just those with tenure. I believe that academic freedom can, and is, protected by contract not just tenure. I believe that the quality of research and teaching have little to do with academic freedom or tenure. There are plenty of great researchers and teaching faculty doing great work outside of the tenure process. One need only look at clinical faculty in academic medical schools as

proof of that.

**F&L:** Landing a tenure-track position is no easy task, achieving tenure is even more difficult. Why?

**Cathy Trower:** Primarily for the reasons stated above – there are fewer tenure track jobs available as institutions are hiring into, in some cases, a buyer's market. There is a glut of PhDs in many fields. So part of it has to do with market forces. Part of it has do with the fact that the very nature of academic work and

»Nachwuchswissenschaftler wissen zwar um die Vorteile einer sicheren Stelle, aber sie wissen auch, dass sich die Welt verändert hat.«

the expectations for faculty are changing with technological, societal, and economic realities. Tenure seems to be a bit of a relic of a bygone era. It had a place, certainly, in the early 1900s but seems less relevant today.

**F&L:** Is it more difficult for women to get tenure?

**Cathy Trower:** Despite the recent attention to gender equity in higher education, women continue to face barriers to achieving tenure and promotion due to organizational factors, work-life balance issues, unconscious bias and sex-role stereotypes, particularly in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields. The data show clearly that women are less likely than men to achieve tenure and less likely to get promoted to full professions, a situation especially pronounced at research universities and in STEM disciplines. The pipeline to tenure and full professorship leaks women



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every step of the way – from grad school into tenure-track lines, from assistant to associate professor, and from associate to full professor. Research has shown that part of this has to do with bias and barriers and part with the “choices” women are making about how they want to spend their lives and the quality of their lives, especially if they want to raise children.

**F&L:** One of the aims of your study is to improve the academic workplace. What is crucial for a faculty or a university to make it a better place to work?

**Cathy Trower:** Two things – leadership and commitment. Leaders need spend time understanding the factors that affect workplace satisfaction and faculty productivity. Our research shows that the following things matter to faculty: 1) support (resources, people) for excellence in research and teaching; 2) family-friendly policies and support for work-family integration or balance; 3) clarity about how to achieve tenure and promotion; 4) collegial departmental cultures; and 5)

mentoring and collaboration. Appreciation, respect, and recognition for all that faculty do are also nice.

**F&L:** Which advice would you give a young scientist for a successful career at university, is there a “golden rule”?

**Cathy Trower:** There are few guarantees on the tenure track, but those who succeed are deliberate and systematic in helping themselves and others, seeking help and advice, being self-aware without being self-absorbed, and making themselves indispensable as department citizens.

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