

ACHIEVING ACADEMIC PROMOTION

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ACHIEVING ACADEMIC PROMOTION

BY

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Jennifer Tatebe and Marian Mahat

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FOREWORD

I first met Marian Mahat and Jennifer Tatebe several years ago in Chicago at the American Educational Research Association conference. Both could be described then as Early Career Researchers. What struck me then was their enthusiasm for working in higher education and their desire to support doctoral students and early career academics to find spaces to share ideas, strategies, and network. This book is therefore a natural next step to put into print some of the key takeaways from enigmatic conversations that have taken place over different years and across different continents. I wish when I started in the Academy, someone had provided me with a book like this to read.

The strength of this book is that it draws from international voices. There are chapters which are highly personal, authentic, and honest, charting the journey and lessons learnt for these individuals. These chapters provide ideas and good counsel for those wishing to navigate a route map for promotion in higher education. Other chapters provide an informative guide on how higher education institutions might approach recruitment, promotion, and progression from different country perspectives. These contextual chapters are fascinating as they largely demonstrate that there is no “one size fits all.”

There are, however, some common themes emerging. The first is the importance of doing your homework. I have read hundreds of job applications and sat on many interview panels

over my years in senior management in higher education. It is clear when an applicant has not prepared sufficiently. These applications look like you are recycling an application which had been prepared for another institution. No surprise then that these are quickly sifted out. Coming to interview without doing your homework of the institution you wish to join leaves a panel wondering why you bothered applying. The lack of preparation loses you traction, particularly if another candidate can demonstrate that they have gone that extra mile.

The second point is to be proactive. There will be routine aspects that a selection panel will look for such as the ability to write for publication, to write grant applications and to teach but what is more needed is for you to “stand out.” The chapters in the book provide a range of suggestions such as the importance of networking internationally, taking opportunities to give talks, to use conference opportunities to look for potential collaborators, to volunteer to teach, and in general to become a good citizen and provide service. If you have a robust curriculum vitae and you have taken time to do your homework and prepare for the vacancy, those letters of recommendation (your references) are vital. You will be joining a community when you enter the Academy and many who select or promote you will not question how smart you are but they will want to know whether you work well with others and will be a collegiate member of the team. At the end of the day, do you pull together or are you likely to be a selfish academic? This book gives practical advice on how you can position yourself to get good letters of reference as well as to prepare for your promotion case.

Another theme is the ability to be flexible. Universities offer many career opportunities and it may be that your immediate chosen pathway is not available. Many of the individual stories in the book tell about the need to keep an open mind, to be creative, flexible, and to seize opportunities. The Academy

is a fabulous place to be. It provides a never-ending calendar of events to stimulate your thinking, opens up a range of cultural and community offerings and where honestly, the job satisfaction is more than just the paycheck.

Mahat and Tatebe have pulled together a combination of the personal and the institutional. This book is a smorgasbord of ideas, roadmaps, and tips for those considering promotion and progression in higher education.

Professor Rowena Arshad OBE
Dean of the Moray House School of Education
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PART I

SCHOLARS' EXPERIENCES AND PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON ACADEMIC PROMOTION

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DEMYSTIFYING THE ACADEMIC PROMOTION PROCESS

Marian Mahat and Jennifer Tatebe

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most important tasks for a university is capability building for the future. Academic promotion remains one of the most tangible indicators of the status of an academic. The appointment and development of successful academics and their promotion into leadership positions within the department and institution create a positive academic environment and strong departmental image.

Academic promotion is defined as a process of advancement in rank whereby a university rewards academics for their accomplishments, usually in the form of additional salary and increased roles and influence (Hardré & Cox, 2009). Put simply, it is a movement from one academic rank to a higher rank or the transition from one classification level to another. A promotion for any academic is a result of

demonstrated scholarly performance in teaching, research, and other criteria at the level specified within the promotion and performance assessment of each university. To be promoted, academic staff must be able to demonstrate that they satisfy the criteria for promotion by providing a cumulative body of evidence that is at a standard of performance relevant to achieving the academic level for which promotion is sought (Parker, 2008).

For the individual academic, it is important to recognize that the backbone of the academic reward system is promotion and tenure. Individuals who have chosen a career in academia need to be well informed of the sequence of promotion up the academic ladder. It is equally important to have a fundamental knowledge of specific academic career tracks, the criteria and steps required for promotion, and what tenure provides and truly means.

This chapter provides a broad overview of specific academic career tracks and pathways, and defines the process of promotion and tenure as a guideline to those who choose a career in academia. Familiarity with these issues will help aspiring academics choose an appropriate faculty position that meets their academic as well as personal goals. This chapter concludes with some tips to prepare for an academic promotion application.

2. ACADEMIC PROMOTION ACROSS GLOBAL CONTEXTS

Each chapter in this book provides a unique perspective on academic promotion from different global contexts. Tatebe provides an account of some of the opportunities and

challenges moving from a fixed term contract to securing a tenure track position in the New Zealand context. Drawing on her experience as a female academic at an Australian university, Mahat reflects on her own personal journey as a female early career academic and her recent experience in applying for an academic promotion. Izard and Moss provide a compelling narrative on pursuing a tenure track faculty position in the US higher education system, viewed from the perspective of a graduate student.

Drawing on her professional experience at a UK university, Cawkwell explores the influence of external drivers on academic promotion policies and practices in the UK context. She argues that an individual academic must understand and exploit these influences in order to achieve personal success. Kivistö, Pekkola, and Pausits provide an institutional and system perspective of academic promotion in Europe, with particular focus in Finnish and Austrian higher education systems. On the other hand, Balbachevsky illustrates some of the challenges for an early career scholar navigating the academic market in Latin America. In the final chapter, Aitken offers both reflections and thought-provoking questions about the complexities of current academic promotion processes within the academy.

Acknowledging the challenge of contextual differences, this section provides a broad overview of each geographic area. While many of the academic processes are similar across contexts, the varied use of promotion terminology can make navigating the landscape confusing and bewildering. As an example, [Table 1](#) provides the broad academic ranks that are typically used in each region. For consistency, terms such as early career academic or scholar have been used throughout the book. Early career scholar refers to academics in the first few years (between five and eight years depending

on institutions) post-PhD. Acknowledging the complexities of terminology and processes across regional contexts, the recommendations provided in this chapter remain generic. Readers are strongly encouraged to familiarize themselves with the promotion application procedures of each individual institution.

2.1. North America

The academic promotion process in North American universities, particularly research-intensive ones, typically involves: a formal application, submission of a curriculum vitae, and a dossier or portfolio of supporting evidence demonstrating excellence across and within all relevant scholarly activity, and referee reports. The reference to scholarly activity is made in recognition of a growing number of universities adopting multiple academic tracks. For example, many universities offer a “traditional” research, teaching, and service track where promotion applicants must provide evidence of their engagement in research projects and corresponding publications, teaching, and relevant academic service. Some universities are adopting a “teaching” or “educational leadership” track where academic promotion criteria is more focused on teaching, involvement in the scholarship of teaching, and educational leadership and relevant academic service. A research-only track is a third, arguably less common, academic pathway. Academics in this track are more likely to be funded through research grants or philanthropic means and are often located in research centers. In this case, academic promotion criteria are more heavily weighted on research and corresponding outputs.

Table 1. Academic Ranks across Regions.

Region	Australia and New Zealand	North America	Europe	Latin America	Asia
Classification of academic titles	Level A – Tutor/ Associate Lecturer/ Research Associate	Research Associate	Assistant Lecturer		
	Level B – Lecturer/ Research Fellow	Assistant Professor	Lecturer	Asistente	Lecturers
	Level C – Senior Lecturer/Senior Research Fellow	Associate Professor	Senior Lecturer	Auxiliary/ adjunto/doutor	Assistant Professor
	Level D – Associate Professor/ Reader	Associate Professor	Associate Professor/Reader	Asociado	Associate Professor
	Level E – Professor	(Full) Professor	Professor	Catedrático/ Titular	Professor

Once the relevant application documents and supporting evidence have been completed, the process of evaluating the applications may require approval from the Head of Department, review from an academic promotions committee, and approval by the Dean with the formal promotion outcome often written by the President or Vice Chancellor of the University.

2.2. Australia and New Zealand

Academic positions in Australia and New Zealand can be either continuing (permanent) or fixed-term (contract) appointments. Continuing appointments at the Lecturer level and above generally involve a three- to five-year probationary period. There are five levels of classification of academic titles of Levels A–E (see [Table 1](#)). These titles and corresponding salary levels may differ between institutions. At each level, the prospective academic must pass each university's minimum standards and promotion policies. Appointments at level A are usually for new academics, post-doctoral fellowships, and those with extensive industry experience relevant to teaching and research but who do not possess a PhD. Academics who are appointed to Levels D and E are developing (Level D) or have an outstanding (Level E) international profile and have demonstrated sustained high competence in both teaching and research. Other titles bestowed to academics may include Adjunct professor, which are honorary titles to formally recognize an academic's close association with, and significant contribution to, the academic activities of the University. Emeritus professor is a title bestowed upon a retired academic who has rendered distinguished service to the university.