

Reviewed by Emily R. Sutcliffe
University of Pennsylvania

With so much attention on the decrease in tenure track positions and the bleak outlook for tenure hopefuls, Cathy Ann Trower opts instead to focus on the conditions that bring job clarity and satisfaction to tenured and pre-tenured faculty. Although primarily written as a tool for the college administrator’s toolkit, *Success on the Tenure Track* also reminds faculty members (at all stages in their careers) of the importance of seeking work environments that “create and sustain [cultures] of support and excellence…” (p. 3). As many young academics scramble to obtain *any* pre-tenure position, it’s important to be

reminded of the conditions that facilitate the most positive and enriching faculty experiences.

*Success on the Tenure Track* synthesizes and brings to life the extensive research performed by the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE), of which Trower is a member. The book is based on surveys of “…the job satisfaction of over 15,000 pre-tenure faculty members at more than 200 four-year colleges and universities in the United States and Canada.” (p. 1). The author quickly informs the reader that although issues like tenured minority rates and the growing fleet of adjunct faculty are extremely important, exploring them in detail is not the book’s motivation. While one can understand the need to employ a succinct scope and Trower’s desire to “…focus on all the ways that pre-tenure faculty are alike rather than how they are different” (p. 2), the question arises: Is it possible to truly explore matters of success, support, and security on the tenure path *without* directly addressing the tremendous inequalities that persist?

In its early incarnation as the Study of New Scholars (SNS), COACHE’s primary goals were “to make the academy more equitable and appealing…” and “to increase the recruitment, retention, status, satisfaction, and success of all faculty, and particularly women and faculty of color,” (p. 24). It’s interesting that a book based on research with such aims does not more prominently integrate gender or racial equity into its discussion. It is important to note, however, that Trower does at several points comment briefly on matters of both gender and race. For example, in her chapter on work-life integration, she mentions the gender gap and discusses some of the challenges faced by mothers pursuing tenure. In terms of making pre-tenure positions more attractive to applicants, *Success on the Tenure Track* could have addressed the tension between educating universities about how to attract the most talented faculty and the overarching messaging in academia that even the most gifted young academics are fighting tooth and nail for any position.

The book is tightly structured and Trower does a fine job of breaking down dense data into well-organized and engaging sections. Survey results are compiled into four categories: clarity of tenure process, work-life balance, research and teaching support, and the general culture,
climate, and collegiality. Each chapter closely examines the best practices of universities that ranked highest in the survey while also exploring some of the ways other institutions fell short. Aligned with the impressive overall organization of the book, each chapter contains a Policy and Practice Implications section that summarizes and synthesizes the survey results into specific recommendations for university administrators. Although these recommendations are not tremendously innovative, (provide new faculty orientation, have written policies, pay for travel, and the like), they offer university administrators concrete, actionable steps toward improving their faculty’s job satisfaction. The simplicity of the recommendations also shines a light on the sad nature of current institutional norms being navigated by so many faculty members.

The book’s final chapter, ‘The Future of the Tenure Track,’” is perhaps the most exciting. It’s here that Trower goes full-bore into the larger issues plaguing academia, not the least of which are matters like research being favored over teaching, university-corporations where tuition is more important than learning, and a higher education culture that, some argue, rewards mediocrity. Trower questions the common assumptions about tenure (the probationary period, competition’s superiority to collaboration, solo-authored papers carrying the most weight, etc.) and encourages people on all sides of the tenure debate to explore new possibilities – to “mend, not end” (p. 201).

While Success on the Tenure Track is informative, and at times inspiring, by the end its goal remains unclear. Described as a guide for university administrators, there is a disconnect between Trower’s desire to increase recruitment effectiveness by improving the employment experiences of young professors and the frequent reminders of how dismal the future is for tenure. Trower’s research does highlight many significant, often overlooked, pre-tenure conditions, encouraging academics and administrators to move beyond the academy’s ironclad status quo. As isnevident in the final chapter, Trower has critical insights about the kind of changes necessary to take tenure in important new directions. It is unfortunate that these pivotal, rebellious recommendations were not the book’s main focus.
About the Reviewer

Emily R. Sutcliffe is a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education where her research focuses on diaspora, religious identity, and critical pedagogy. In addition to her doctoral studies, Emily is Assistant Director of the University of Pennsylvania Law School’s Toll Public Interest Center.

Copyright is retained by the first or sole author, who grants right of first publication to the Education Review.

Education Review/Reseñas Educativas is a project of the College of Education and Human Services of the University of Delaware, The National Education Policy Center http://nepc.colorado.edu, and the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University

Editors
David J. Blacker
blacker@edrev.info
Gustavo Fischman
fischman@edrev.info
Melissa Cast-Brede
cast-brede@edrev.info
Gene V Glass
glass@edrev.info

Follow Education Review on Facebook and on Twitter: #EducReview