Option for Flexible Management of the Tenure Probationary Period for Faculty in LSU Health Sciences Center-Shreveport (LSUHSC-S)

The current LSUHSC-S policy on the tenure probationary period, which has been in place for over 40 years, sets the sixth year of service as the period for mandatory tenure review. This policy in effect allows a 5-year period for new faculty to distinguish themselves as scholars and teachers. While institutional expectations of faculty performance and achievement that justify the granting of tenure have not changed, a rapidly evolving environment in the field of biomedicine has made it far more difficult to meet these expectations. The reimbursement rates from clinical practice have fallen and the size of the clinical faculty has shrunk, placing more pressure on clinician-scientists to devote a larger effort to revenue generating activities for the institution. While essential for the financial health and stability of the medical center, increased clinical work by tenure track faculty is less frequently rewarded by academic advancement, yet it deprives the faculty of time for scholarly pursuits. Placing more clinical faculty on the non-tenure track helps to relieve the clinical burden placed on the clinician-scientists, but it fails to grow the academic reputation of the medical center.

The research activities of faculty in both clinical and basic science departments have also been impacted in recent years by dramatic reductions in funding rates for grants submitted to agencies such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Science Foundation (NSF). Although the probability of grant funding by the NIH has fallen by more than 50% in the past decade and the average age of a first time recipient of an NIH grant is now 42 years (longer for clinician-scientists), successful competition for an NIH grant remains the “gold standard” for tenure and promotion of research faculty. The additional time devoted to writing and rewriting grant applications is often taken at the expense of publishing papers and generating the research data needed to establish a nationally competitive program. Therefore, the constrained and unpredictable funding environment makes it far more difficult for junior faculty to develop a strong bid for tenure in their 6th year. The current tenure clock also renders the institution vulnerable to making lifelong career decisions about its faculty with inadequate information about their potential for long-term research success and before it can recover the large initial investment in expensive startup packages.

A recent survey by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) has revealed a national trend by medical schools to adopt longer and/or more flexible tenure probationary periods. Indeed, nearly half of US medical schools have extended the tenure clock to 8 or more years for both clinical and basic science faculty. A related national trend is the allowance of different tenure clock policies for different components of a university system, which enables colleges or schools within a university to establish their own probationary periods. Medical schools adopting the longer or more flexible tenure clocks have based the decision on factors such as: 1) the longer time needed to gain independent NIH funding and a national reputation, 2) increasing pressure on the clinical faculty to generate revenue, 3) increased competition to recruit and retain outstanding faculty, 4) enhancing the recovery of large initial investments made in faculty recruits, 5) increased teaching commitments associated with the implementation of problem based learning in the medical curriculum, and 6) producing a more supportive environment for women and dual career couples with young families. These considerations are consistent with the emerging consensus that traditional tenure policies have not kept pace with the rapidly evolving work environment in academic medicine.

The compelling reasons that have led to the adoption of an extended tenure probationary period in medical schools across the US have equal or more relevance to LSUHSC-S. Significant and
growing financial pressures on the state-funded medical school have increased the urgency for new approaches to facilitate the recruitment and retention of excellent faculty. New faculty positions and funding for competitive startup packages are scarce. Tenure decisions are becoming increasingly difficult and often must be made before young faculty members have had an adequate opportunity to fully develop. More flexibility in management of the tenure clock and the option of extending the probationary period would enable the institution to make a more informed decision about the long-term potential of junior faculty and would help to ensure that high standards of excellence are associated with the granting of tenure. Therefore, we recommend that LSUHSC-S adopt a more flexible tenure policy that offers the opportunity to stop the tenure clock for a period of up to two years for Assistant Professors with a perceived high potential for success in at least two mission areas, but who require additional time to meet the criteria required for nomination for tenure and/or promotion.

The proposed policy change would apply to all tenure-track Assistant Professors without tenure. Adoption of this flexible tenure clock policy will not change the current/existing expectations and criteria for promotion and tenure (P & T). Under the proposed policy, an assessment of faculty performance and achievement will take place near the end (10th month) of third year on the tenure track. Assistant Professors who have met or exceeded the institutional performance expectations, and whose performance is judged to rank in the top 30% nationally for this peer group will remain on the normal tenure track (no clock stoppage) and would be expected to be nominated for P & T in the 5th year of service. Individuals with a performance level that does not predict success could be terminated in the 4th year. However, if faculty performance is judged not to be at a level that would predict successful consideration for P & T at the end of their 5th year but the individual has demonstrated sufficient promise to justify allocating more time to reach the 30% performance threshold, then the tenure clock can be stopped (at the end of year 3) for a period of up to two years. In this instance, consideration for promotion would be given in the 7th year. Clock stoppage would be justified on the basis of national or institutional (local) factors that impede the ability of the faculty member to meet the expectations for P & T, such as record low approval rates for research grants, substantial clinical commitment, and inadequate opportunity to demonstrate teaching skills and participation. Faculty that request the tenure clock stoppage option and have the approval of the Department Head, are expected, along with the Department Head and Dean, to sign a “Stop the Clock” agreement that details the terms for the delay in mandatory tenure review. An Assistant Professor whose performance at the end of year 3 on the tenure track is judged to rank in the top 10% nationally would be eligible to be nominated for promotion in the 4th year of service, as per current policy.

The proposed modification of the tenure clock policy is consistent with the national trend in academic medicine. More importantly, this option would afford some flexibility to the institution for dealing with the granting of tenure when conditions exist (e.g., poor research funding environment, increasing clinical obligations) that impede normal progress toward tenure, while maintaining the traditional probationary period for tenure review that rewards those faculty who continue to excel despite the changing environment. The long-term benefit to the institution would be the retention of talented faculty and the recovery of large initial investments in new faculty. The LSUHSC-S faculty and its leadership enthusiastically endorse this policy revision because it will advance the academic mission of the institution. Accordingly, we request approval for the policy modification with the provision that it be considered as a 3-year pilot program to ensure that the intended goals and outcomes are achieved. In addition, we request that, on an interim basis, some faculty who have already completed more than 3 years of service on the tenure track be considered, on a case-by-case basis, for tenure clock stoppage.
I hereby request that my mandatory tenure review be delayed for a period of up to two years. If approved by LSUHSC-S, I understand and agree that my mandatory tenure review will take place during the **BLANK (month)** of **BLANK (academic year)** if I am employed full-time and continuously through that date. I further understand and agree that the delay of my tenure review will result in one of the following three outcomes:

1. My current term appointment on the tenure track will resume on **BLANK**. If I meet the performance expectations of the institution, consideration for promotion and tenure will be given in the 8th year of service on the tenure track.

2. If the level of my performance at the end of the tenure clock stoppage period is not consistent with a likelihood of success in gaining promotion and tenure in the 8th year, I will be given a one-year terminal reappointment that will end on **BLANK**. I acknowledge and agree that if this occurs I will not be entitled to any further notice of non-reappointment and waive any right to further notice.

3. If my performance level at the end of the tenure clock stoppage period is not consistent with a likelihood of success in gaining promotion and tenure, but my contribution(s) to the Department warrants continuing employment I can be considered for an alternate (non-tenure) track appointment, with an annual renewable appointment. I understand that placement in the alternate track is not reversible (no re-entry into the tenure track) and that such a change occurs rarely.

If I elect to be considered for mandatory review according to my previous tenure timeline, I will inform my department head of this intent by filing a Revocation Agreement prior to April 1st of the previous mandatory tenure year. If the Revocation Agreement is approved, this Stop the Tenure Clock Agreement will be null and void. If I am not awarded tenure, I will be given a one-year terminal reappointment.

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND the terms of this Agreement and understand it is effective upon approval of the University.

Signed: **BLANK**, Assistant Professor  Date  **BLANK**

Approved: **BLANK**, Department Head  Date  **BLANK**

Approved: **BLANK**, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs  Date  **BLANK**

Approved: **BLANK**, Dean  Date  **BLANK**

Approved: **BLANK**, Chancellor  Date  **BLANK**