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## Women, Students, and Tenure

Why are there so few women on university faculties? The usual answer to this question is that women are victims of prejudice at every step from the cradle to the postdoctoral fellowship. Though this allegation is correct, it is not a complete answer. Beyond the doctorate, the major barrier to the female scholar is the tenure system. According to the hallowed rules, made by men for men, the aspirant has about 5 years in which to establish himself as worthy of guaranteed employment to the age of 65 at least. No provision is made for the typical "herself," for whom the critical 5 years coincide with the period when the care of small children is most demanding.

To prevent the consequent wastage of potentially useful careers, some sort of maternity or family leave has been suggested, or half-time appointments with correspondingly prolonged pretenure periods. Such palliatives may be useful in specific cases, but applied generally, they are likely to do little more than reinforce the impression that women are not fit to compete in the real world. The way to solve the problem is to abolish the tenure system as it stands today.

If this drastic solution were to injure the university community as a whole for the benefit of an underprivileged minority, it would not deserve to be considered. But it is not only women who are victims of the tenure system—the most important victims are the students. After being patient too long, students are at last speaking out against inadequate and indifferent and incompetent teaching. It is time for students to realize to what extent poor teaching is permitted and even encouraged by the tenure system. They should demand that this sacrosanct instrument of a privileged caste be subjected to the overdue reforms that will make it responsive to student interests and needs.

As matters stand now, a man aged 32 who has made himself acceptable to the Establishment for the prescribed period is guaranteed a job for the next 35 years. That these may be years of hard work and devotion, as well as of growth, is beside the point. The point is that once a man has received tenure he need do nothing more to deserve it. He may fall behind in his own field or lose interest in it, he may neglect and avoid teaching, he may exasperate his colleagues and defraud his students—yet he is unreachable. If the university's function were manufacturing soap or shoes, this way of doing things would be merely absurd. But the university's function is the promotion of learning. In the armed forces, men who do not continue to meet standards may be retired in their forties or fifties. Shouldn't competence in educating people be taken as seriously as competence in killing them?

The tenure system was an acceptable means of protecting the academic freedom of teachers in an era when colleges and universities were generally small and self-contained. The system has become increasingly anachronistic as once-unified institutions have grown into great multiversities, with their untidy sprawl of grants, contracts, centers, and institutes employing a host of quasi-academic camp followers. To devise a procedure to protect the interests of teachers and scholars in the last quarter of the 20th century will require hard thinking and hard work. If the new procedure is to be a just one, it will need to embody two principles: it will have to take into account the logical priority of interests within the university; and it will have to avoid penalizing able scholars who do not fit a precut pattern.

That reform of the tenure system will benefit women is important, but incidental. The righting of injustice is seldom a matter of merely favoring a disadvantaged group. Rather, it is a step toward a more just, a more open, and a more responsive society.—FLORENCE MOOG, *Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri 63130*