

UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

Office of Academic Affairs

Dept. 3302, 1000 E. University Ave.
Laramie, WY 82071 USA
voice: 307 766 4286 fax: 307 766 2606

Myron B. Allen
Provost and Vice President
312 Old Main
allen@uwyo.edu

Stopping the Tenure or Extended Term Clock

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Tenure-track faculty members and extended-term-track academic employees normally have a probationary period between the time they start working at UW and the tenure or extended-term decision. Normally, the job offer letter defines this period. In exceptional cases, it is possible to increase the length of the probationary period from that specified in the offer letter, via a *clock stop*. A clock stop postpones, by one year, (1) the next scheduled reappointment review and (2) the latest date for the tenure or extended-term decision. This memo outlines the reasons and process for clock stops and their implications for reappointment, tenure, and extended term reviews.

Reasons for stopping the clock

There are two acceptable reasons for stopping the clock:

1. *Childbirth or adoption.* Women and men may stop the clock, whether or not they are the biological parents. Normally, the time to make this decision is within one year before or after the birth or adoption.
2. *Other factors beyond the employee's control that significantly detract from the employee's academic record.* A few examples include (a) severe illness or disability, (b) unavoidable delays in the completion of a research facility, (c) natural disasters such as floods or fires that destroy research materials, and (d) the unexpected bankruptcy of a publishing company after a book has been formally accepted for publication. The possibilities are too various to enumerate. The determining factors are whether the events critically affect the employee's work and lie beyond the employee's control. Assessing these factors necessarily requires judgment.

Failure to make adequate progress toward tenure, promotion, or an extended-term appointment is not *per se* an adequate justification for stopping the clock, nor is failure to complete a degree required for the job.

Process

In the case of childbirth or adoption in the employee's immediate family, the Office of Academic Affairs will stop the clock automatically for one year, regardless of the employee's gender and whether or not the employee requests a stop. Two caveats apply:

- The clock will not stop unless someone in Academic Affairs knows about the addition to the family. Employees who want the clock to stop for this reason should inform the Office of Academic Affairs of the childbirth or adoption. The notification may be private, but it is impractical to stop the clock without informing the affected dean and department head.
- Employees who wish not to stop the clock may so request, in writing, to the Office of Academic Affairs. In this case, the tenure or extended term decision will revert to a date no later than that specified in the offer letter or, where appropriate, in previous clock stop agreements.

In all other cases, stopping a clock requires an explicit, written request from the affected employee to the department head. The request must specify the reason for stopping the clock. The written request need not reveal highly personal details; however, the employee should be willing to provide enough information, either in writing or verbally, to make a persuasive case under one of the criteria listed above. The department head must then forward the request, with a recommendation, to the college dean. The college dean then forwards the request, with a recommendation, to the Office of Academic Affairs. After review at that level, the employee will receive written notice of the decision, copied to the dean and department head.

In no case will the clock stop without the Office of Academic Affairs informing the affected employee and her or his department head and dean in writing. In the absence of such notification, the clock has not stopped.

Academic Affairs will not approve requests to stop the clock retroactively. A clock stop postpones the *next* scheduled review. It is not a device for nullifying reviews already completed or under way.

Implications for tenure and extended term decisions

Questions sometimes arise about how a clock stop should affect the peer review for a reappointment, tenure, or extended term decision. Since the purpose of clock stops is to ensure that employees in certain circumstances have a fair chance at meeting the university's expectations, *peers and administrators at all levels should take special care not to attach negative implications to clock stops.*

Many specific questions are easier to answer if one begins with a sound fundamental premise about tenure and extended term decisions.

Fundamental premise: A tenure or extended term decision is a prediction about the likelihood that an employee will make sustained future contributions to significant scholarship, versatile and effective teaching, and a high level of professionalism in other duties.

An assessment of this nature requires an integrative examination of many factors, some of which are inherently subjective. They include the rate and impact of scholarly production, evidence of growth as a teacher in the classroom and more broadly, and aspects of character that enable the employee to advance the university's mission in less self-centered dimensions. Highly quantitative criteria, such as average number of refereed journal articles published per year, may help inform the examination. But they do not suffice to answer the real question, nor are they as "objective" as some people think.

The tenure or extended term clock defines a probationary period, the purpose of which is to give the employee adequate opportunity to convince peers and academic leaders that the likelihood of sustained future contributions is high. A clock stop simply extends the probationary period.

Question 1: Since the candidate has a longer probationary period, should he or she have published proportionately more papers by the time of the tenure decision?

This apparent conundrum arises only when one abandons the fundamental premise in favor of a more cramped, reductionist view. Instead of trying to answer this question as posed, faculty members, department heads, and deans should redirect the discussion toward the real question: what evidence supports a prediction that the candidate will make high-level professional contributions and will continue growing, in all career dimensions, for decades to come?

Question 2: Should we encourage employees to seek clock stops?

Department heads and deans should notify employees of the university's policy and may remind individual employees that stopping the clock is an option in cases fitting one of the criteria listed above. For example, it is reasonable to remind an employee who is expecting a child that that she or he is eligible for an automatic stop to the tenure clock, that she or he need only inform the Office of Academic Affairs of the expected arrival, and that it is possible to request that the tenure clock not stop. No

employee should feel pressured to stop the clock, and no employee should feel that there is any penalty for requesting or accepting a clock stop on reasonable grounds.

Question 3: Can clock stops postpone tenure or promotion decisions indefinitely?

Clock stops that extend the probationary period beyond a total of eight years from the hiring date are exceedingly rare. Exceptions are possible in cases where (a) child care is an issue of unusually profound magnitude and (b) the employee has a written career plan to maintain currency with the discipline and continuous contributions to the university's mission, even if these contributions must be at a less intensive level. In every case, there must be a definite deadline for the tenure or extended term decision.

Question 4: Does the clock stop during a leave without pay?

The clock does not automatically stop during a leave of absence without pay. An employee taking leave without pay may request a clock stop, provided at least one of the criteria listed above applies. In this case the normal procedure is to request the clock stop before the leave of absence begins.

Question 5: Is a clock stop reversible?

An employee who accepts a clock stop may request to be reviewed for tenure or extended term on the schedule identified in the original offer letter, provided the request comes early enough to allow for the required preparation and review. In this instance, the case will not be treated as early.