



Recommendations for Navigating Separation

The Candidate

Faculty members will process this difficult news in many stages, and they may need to have several conversations with their department chair. In preparation for these meetings, the department chair should think about who may need to be part of those conversations. Some considerations may include:

- How will you share the difficult news in an empathetic, yet definitive manner? Have you practiced your talking points? Be sure to separate your personal views from the information you need to share in your capacity as the chair.
- During the meeting take notes, and make sure that you strictly adhere to the institution's confidentiality guidelines.
- Do you need to consult with your institution's legal counsel or a member of the Office of Academic Affairs?
- Are you well-versed on the appeals process? If not, are you prepared to point the faculty member to the appropriate on-campus resources?
- Is safety a concern? If so, be sure to consider the setting in which your meeting takes place and whether to include another person in the meeting.
- You may want to invite a representative from your college's Human Resources Office and/or have a member of the Employee Assistance Program on hand.
- During a later conversation you may consider pointing the faculty member in the direction of career resources offered by the college to help them with their upcoming transitions as they work to envision the next steps for their career.

The Department

In the lead-up to any review process, you want to be sure that your department and/or institution has clear guidelines and performance standards for tenure in place. You should regularly remind all tenure-track candidates of these standards throughout the course of their probationary periods. Also, continue to document all issues and attempts to help the candidate, as discussed in section (3) above. Once the review process has commenced it's important that department chairs do the following:

- Chairs should regularly remind all faculty colleagues that this process is confidential.
- Once a determination has been made, the chair should reassure other pre-tenure faculty about the tenure guidelines, without breaching confidentiality concerning the specific case.
- The chair may also communicate to concerned faculty members that concrete steps are being taken to help the candidate.
- Given that candidates may discuss details of their own tenure case on social media, chairs may want to consult with the Chief Academic Officer, the institution's communications team, and/or Human Resources about proactively creating a communications strategy.
- If the situation leads to an ongoing tension within the department, chairs could consider whether Human Resources or other outside entities could help mediate discussions.

The Institution

The department chair and all tenured faculty should aspire to share consistent messaging across the institution that a fair process was followed and concrete steps are being offered to help the departing faculty member. Also, the institution should ensure that your appeals processes are revisited periodically.

What can we learn?

When a tenure-track colleague is not awarded tenure or is otherwise managed out of their position, the department could be encouraged to reflect on the experience and whether they can envision any improving changes that might decrease the likelihood of such an event happening again. Areas for consideration include:

- the search process
- early career mentoring
- annual and mid-probationary evaluation processes
- alignment of department and institution values and expectations for tenure
- communication of standards for tenure
- alignment of department and institution practices with respect to these values and standards

The goal of these conversations is to identify helpful changes, whether incremental or substantive. A challenging element of these conversations might be temptations to assign blame or responsibility for a decision to separate, which should be avoided as best possible.