Maintaining Momentum After Tenure, or Avoiding the “Now What?” Syndrome

Assorted Viewpoints Assembled by

Sheila Hemami
School of Electrical & Computer Engineering
Cornell University
Areas to Consider

• The standard 3:
  • Research
  • Teaching
  • Service

• Planning the sabbatic leave

• The other part of your life (you do have an other part of your life, don’t you?)
Research

• Research momentum is relatively easy to maintain.

• Shifting research areas:
  • I shifted in my 3rd-to-4th years from the thesis area to the next area.
  • Sabbatical leave is also useful for a shift.

• “I...had no problem maintaining research momentum...because research is the single most appealing task of my day...” Paulette Clancy, ChemE chair at Cornell.
Teaching

• Momentum is easy to maintain if you’re excited about what you’re doing.

• Design a new class, or

• Redesign the same-old-class that your department has been teaching for the last 50 years.

• Be proactive about your teaching assignments.
Service

• Service requirements go UP after tenure.

• Be proactive, not reactive: identify areas in which you want to contribute and notify the authorities.

• Take a leadership course if your university offers it.
Planning Sabbatic Leave

• Other people suggested things like:
  
  • Write proposals in a new area
  
  • Go elsewhere and learn something new, meet new people, do cool things ("going elsewhere" requires planning)
My Sabbatic Leave

- What I wanted to do: see previous slide.

- What I actually did:
  - Through minimal planning I got 2 1-semester non-teaching positions;
  - I worked a lot with my graduate students;
  - But I also vegetated a lot because I was completely exhausted.

- Result: I was ready to work when I got back. My sabbatical was a huge success!
They can’t fire you anymore, so...

- Think about rebalancing your life commitments with academic progress (e.g., partner, children, non-work-related interests).
  
  Does your kid/dog/plant recognize you?

- Consider “am I happy?” and adjust accordingly (but please don’t retire on the job...)