

American Academy of Teachers of Singing

(Target audience: deans and directors of academic music programs, singing teachers on the tenure track, and the profession at large.)

Research and Creative Accomplishment in Promotion and Tenure: A Realistic Look at Expectations for Teachers of Singing in Academia

The American Academy of Teachers of Singing takes the position that it is time to move away from a “one size fits all” approach in evaluating the research and creative activities of voice faculty toward a model that acknowledges and validates the full range of creative contributions of the teacher of singing.

A careful look at tenure-track job listings for applied classical voice teaching from the past several years reveals a consistent trend in both requirements and expectations.

(1) Overwhelmingly, the first requirement is a doctoral degree. (2) A smaller number of schools acknowledge the value of equivalent high-level professional performance experience. (3) Successful college teaching experience is also a consistently important requirement.

Both advanced music study and performance experience are appropriate prerequisites for professors of voice, but neither is a guarantee of successful teaching skills. An earned doctorate may be a logical trend that responds to the market, and for many in our profession, pursuit of a terminal degree is an excellent way to receive training and preparation, especially when the job includes teaching subjects like pedagogy and vocal literature. However, one coming into a university teaching position without the benefit of significant professional experience likely brings very little to students in terms of artistic mentorship. There are diverse paths to excellence, and because we work in a highly creative field, we advocate continuing to honor performing and teaching experience beyond the earning of degrees.

A prestigious performance profile can bring much to the student and institution. Still, having had a career to qualify for a university position is one matter, but having to maintain a career in order to advance in it is quite another. It is typical that performance faculty are expected to maintain a calendar of off-campus creative activities to gain credit toward promotion and tenure, and faculty in their prime singing years should be encouraged to pursue opportunities to perform. Performance is at the core of our creative and scholarly accomplishments. A vibrant artistic life is to be supported by the entire voice community at any college or university.

Many singers, however, come to academia as a second career after years of notable performing experience, and it is unreasonable to ask them to continue the same level of performance into middle age and beyond. The singer’s instrument often declines with

advancing age, and therefore presents challenges not faced by instrumentalists. The voice is part of the human body and is subject to illness, injury, and the natural incursions of the aging process. These very teachers, however, have a wealth of knowledge to share, and are at a point when they are fully ready to give back. Universities, by expecting older singers to continue high-profile performance, may in essence be forcing them to create singing opportunities to give the illusion of active careers. AATS recognizes that such pursuits may not be the most productive use of their energies. They will need to replace performing with other activities that share the breadth of their experience with students and the profession at large (see sample activities).

It bears mentioning that a clear measure of a professional performance profile can include the significance of the producing organization, the venue, and the co-artists with whom one is engaged to sing. Differences in these from performer to performer can point to unique and meritorious expertise in specific areas. Such affiliations would be effective criteria to consider, particularly when journalistic reviews are not available. Likewise, it is important to understand the significance of featured teaching engagements at workshops sponsored by organizations like the National Association of Teachers of Singing, the International Congress of Voice Teachers, the Voice Foundation, and others, as well as such engagements at peer institutions.

Most job listings require not only applied teaching, but also the teaching of related courses. While it is reasonable to expect that faculty in our field can effectively teach courses related to the singer's art, being responsible for such academic courses gives less flexibility to fulfill off-campus performance expectations. When the listing states that the teacher is to maintain an active and visible performance career, it can be particularly at odds with full-time on-campus university duties, since one requires being present with students, and the other requires absences from campus. This conflict places the teacher in a difficult "Catch-22" situation. While there are various models of covering faculty duties during off-campus absences, or requiring faculty to make up missed duties, in our view, extended and repeated absences (as distinguished from a formal sabbatical leave) are at odds with the regular, systematic training needed by students in the studio and classroom, as well as with other required duties.

A number of the most successful teachers in our field are not active performers; rather, they make a significant impact through the following (not in any hierarchy): teaching outcomes and student successes, publication or presentations of pedagogic ideas and research, residencies, guest teaching, presenting master classes and/or seminars, and adjudication, among others. The Academy recognizes that promotion and tenure dossiers already allow for inclusion of these activities, and strongly recommends that they be sufficient to fulfill the requisite research and creative accomplishment profile.

We believe that teachers of singing should, of course, be evaluated first and foremost on their pedagogic success in the studio. Their primary responsibility is to the developing artistry of their students. Beyond that, faculty should be encouraged to carve out the way in which they build a reputation of excellence for themselves and the institution — be it by performance, presentation, or publication.

It is not the intent of the Academy that these recommendations lessen expectations for promotion and tenure; rather, they are presented as a call to allow the teachers in our field every opportunity to fully count their many important and varied contributions to the profession, thus recognizing the creative spirit and productivity of our colleagues. The expectation that a professor of voice maintain a professional profile singularly through ongoing performance is not always possible, and may not even be desirable given the demands of effective studio teaching. The Academy suggests that we, as teachers of singing, take it upon ourselves to inform, inspire, and educate administrators in colleges and universities about the diverse nature of our profession, acknowledging the unique differences among us.

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Non-Prioritized Sample Activities in Performance, Presentation, or Publication

- Original monographs
- Articles in refereed journals
- Solo performance
- Featured teaching engagements, residencies, master classes, other public teaching
- Sessions at professional conferences, seminars or workshops
- Teaching outcomes and student successes
- Recordings
- Research leading to publication or presentation
- Development of pedagogic methods, new courses, programs, or materials
- Collaborative/ensemble performance
- Public lectures
- Poster papers at professional conference, seminar or workshop
- Organizing and/or presiding over professional events
- Articles in non peer-reviewed journals
- Commissioning of new works
- Editing performing editions or anthologies
- Music criticism
- Adjudication
- Funded projects or grants
- Record of further academic study or professional development
- Outreach or other activities using candidate's expertise (consulting, reviewer for refereed journals, peer reviewer of grants, service to government, professional, or educational institutions, etc.)
- Membership in professional and learned societies
- Honors or awards for scholarship or professional activity
- Selected performance prior to appointment