Selected Findings from the MLA's 2005 Survey of Tenure and Promotion

The survey sought information from 1,339 departments in 734 four-year US universities and colleges.

- 596 English departments

- 647 foreign language departments

- 96 departments that teach both English and foreign languages

The MLA identified 1,339 departments in 734 four-year colleges and universities to complete the survey, which was administered in spring of 2005. The 1,339 departments represent about a third (32.4%) of the 4,100-plus departments in four-year institutions in the MLA's database of departments.
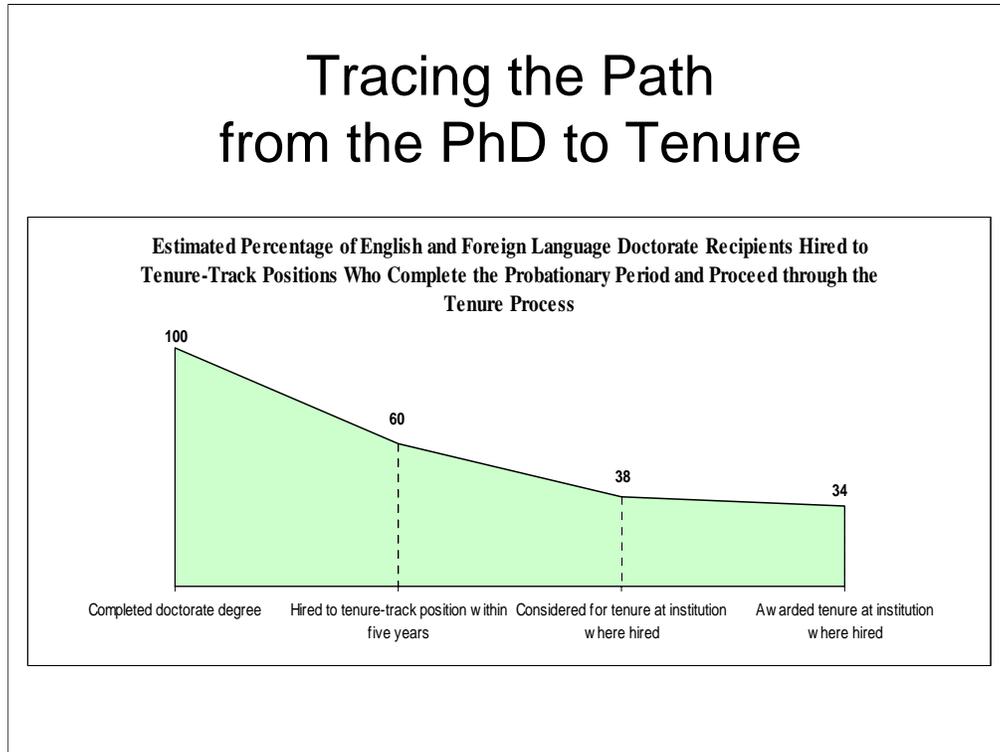
- 686 departments in 490 institutions responded

- 51% departmental response rate

- At least one department in 67% of the 734 institutions responded

At the close of data collection, 686 or 51% of the 1,339 departments had responded. Respondents represent just over 15% of the four-year departments in the MLA's database of departments. Responding departments are not a representative sample in a technical sense but are a group sizable enough to give us a good picture of conditions across a significant swath of the profession.

- Analysis includes 671 departments in 476 institutions that reported having a tenure system

- 324 of the 331 responding English departments

- 347 of the 355 foreign language or "combined" departments

The analysis of survey findings is based on responses from 671 departments in 476 institutions that reported having a tenure system. "Combined" departments teach both foreign languages and English.
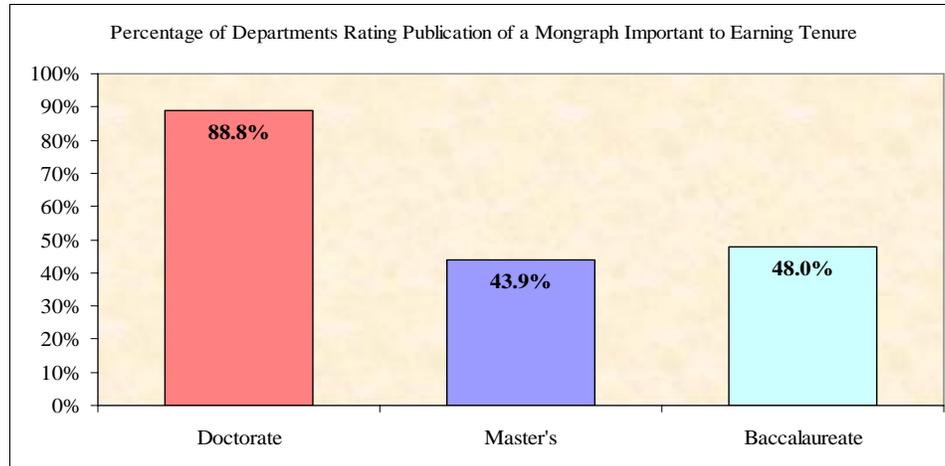
Tracing the Path
from the PhD to Tenure

Estimated Percentage of English and Foreign Language Doctorate Recipients Hired to Tenure-Track Positions Who Complete the Probationary Period and Proceed through the Tenure Process

100

60

38

34

Completed doctorate degree

Hired to tenure-track position within five years

Considered for tenure at institution where hired

Awarded tenure at institution where hired

Recent turbulence in the world of scholarly publishing has led many to wonder, and worry, about the effects on tenure outcomes for young scholars. This chart delineates the pathway from receipt of the PhD to tenure as available information allows us to map it. The figures present our estimates of how many graduates enter the tenure track, complete their probationary appointment, and are considered for and awarded tenure at the institution where they were initially hired. MLA placement studies tell us that 40% to 50% of a given year's graduates find a tenure-track position in the year they receive their degrees. Information becomes sketchy about what happens to graduates after that first year. What information we have suggests that most exits occur because graduates do not find tenure-track positions or because they leave a tenure-track position before being formally considered for tenure. The denial rate at the end of the path is small--around 10%. That's the final portion of the slope moving from left to right, where the numbers drop from 38 to 34 of every 100 doctorate recipients.

Sources (in addition to the MLA 2005 Survey of Tenure and Promotion): MLA studies of PhD placement, 1976-77 to 2003-04. Maresi Nerad and Joseph Cerny, "From Rumors to Facts: Career Outcomes of English PhDs," *ADE Bulletin* 124 (2000), 43-55. Michael J. Dooris and Marianne Guidos, "Tenure Achievement Rates at Research Universities," http://www.epi.elps.vt.edu/Perspectives/TenureFlow.pdf.

The Monograph in Current Practice

Percentage of Departments Rating Publication of a Mongraph Important to Earning Tenure

| Doctorate	Master's	Baccalaureate
88.8%	43.9%	48.0%

Developments in scholarly publishing have also led to renewed discussion of the monograph as a criterion or requirement for earning tenure. What did the survey discover about how widely the expectation applies that candidates for tenure will produce a monograph? This chart shows the percentage of departments that rate publication of a monograph either "very important" or "important" to earning tenure in their institution, broken out by the Carnegie classification of the institutions where departments are housed. The monograph is clearly the centerpiece of tenure expectations at doctorate universities; publication of a monograph is important for earning tenure in close to 90% of departments in the Carnegie doctorate sector. Nearly half the departments in baccalaureate colleges follow suit, and a slightly lower percentage of departments in Carnegie master's institutions do so.

Requiring More Publication

Percentage of Departments Where the Importance of Publication Increased
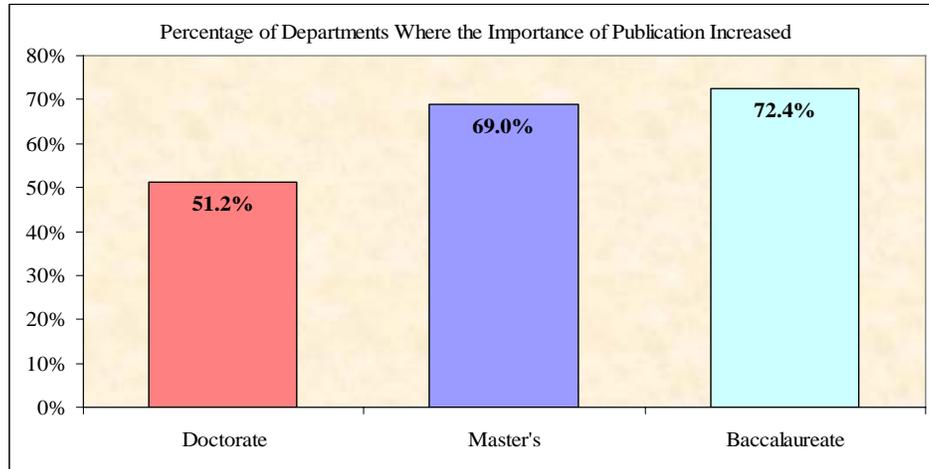

As this chart shows, expectations for publication have increased most in departments in the baccalaureate colleges, where teaching has heretofore counted most, followed closely by departments in Carnegie master's institutions. An upward "creep" in publication requirements for tenure is noticeable across high percentages of departments in all sectors but is most pronounced in the Carnegie baccalaureate and master's institutions. That such high percentages of departments outside the Carnegie doctorate sector report increased publication requirements suggests a ripple-out or trickle-down effect from doctoral institutions, where publication has always been most emphasized.

How Departments Weight Teaching and Publication in Relation to One Another
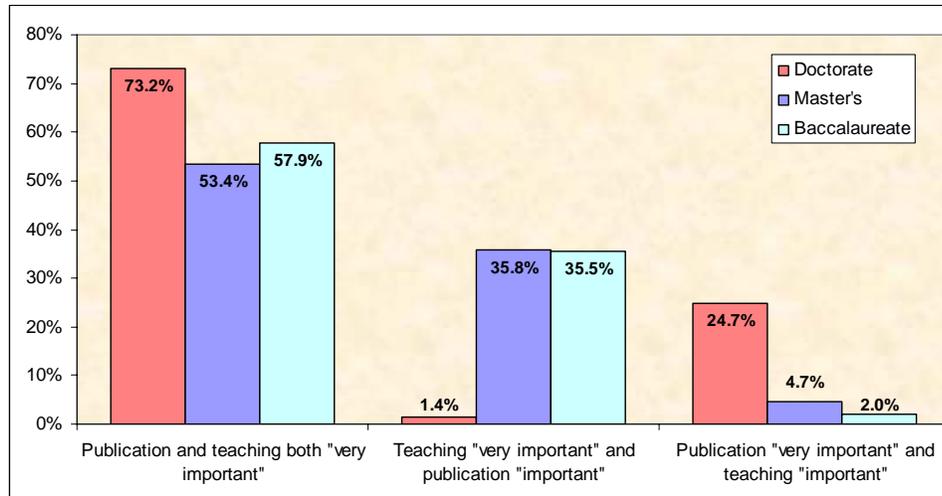
It is revealing to look at how departments rate the two criteria of teaching and publication in relation to each other. The bars in this chart show the percentages of departments in different Carnegie institutional sectors that rate both publication and teaching "very important" in their evaluation of candidates for tenure and promotion, compared with the percentages that rate teaching "very important" and publication "important" and the percentages where publication is "very important" and teaching is rated "important." A clear majority of departments across all Carnegie institutional types weight both teaching and publication "very important" in their evaluation of candidates for tenure and promotion. Teaching claims priority over publication in a significant minority (almost 36%) of departments outside the Carnegie doctorates. There is a somewhat smaller minority (about 25%) of departments in the Carnegie doctorate sector where publication holds priority over teaching.

Teaching, Publication, and Tenure in 1967 and in 2005

Percentage of Departments Ranking Teaching and Publication First or Second (1967) or Very Important (2005) among Criteria for Tenure
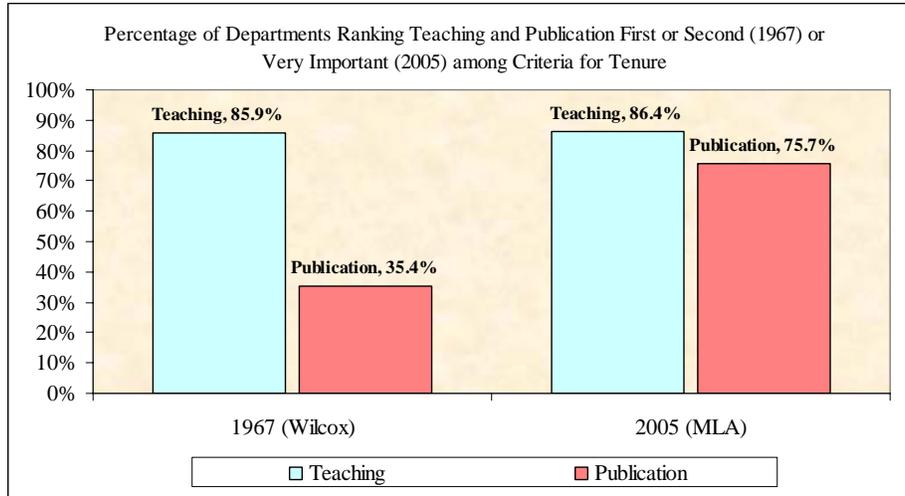
A survey of English departments that the NCTE and MLA conducted in the 1960s (covering the 1966-67 academic year) puts recent developments in historical perspective. (Published in 1970, the report on the survey was prepared by Thomas W. Wilcox of the University of Connecticut.) Asked about their criteria for awarding tenure and promotion, 85.9% of departments placed teaching first or second in the mid-1960s, and 35.4% placed publication first or second. For the MLA survey in 2005 an almost identical 86.4% of departments ranked teaching "very important" in their criteria for tenure, while 75.7% ranked publication "very important." Publication expectations have doubled in the decades since the seller's market became a buyer's market.

Source for 1967 figures: Thomas W. Wilcox, *A Comprehensive Survey of Undergraduate Programs in English in the United States*, ED 044 422, 14 May 1970, 36.

Giving Only Limited Recognition to Digital Scholarship
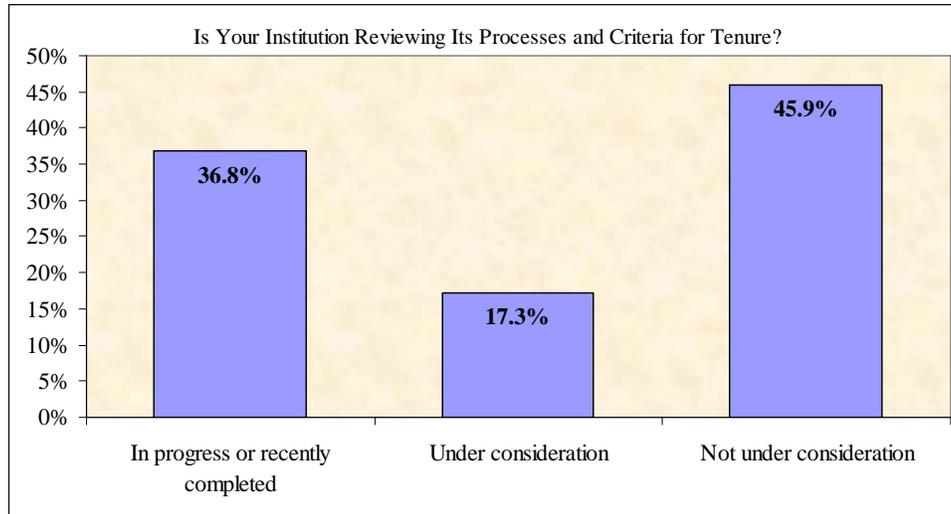
Digital Monographs
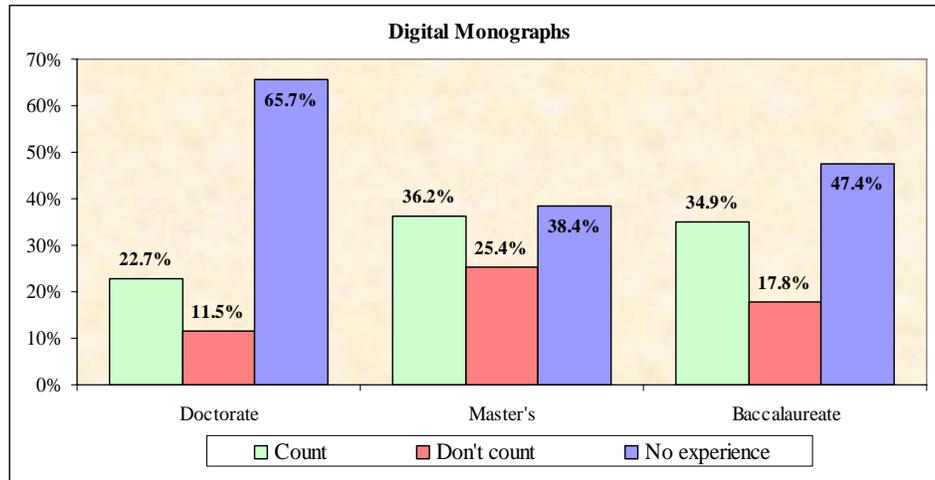
As expectations for publication have crept upward for individual faculty members and outward to a widening circle of institutions, it seems important that new forms for publishing and disseminating scholarship be able to gain recognition. Recognition for work published in digital formats remains limited, however, and high percentages of departments report little experience with scholarship produced in new media. Digital monographs still remain more prospect than reality in our field, and departments' lack of experience may reflect the paucity of examples that have been produced to date. Even so, it seems clear that departments need to take special care not to treat scholarship produced in new media prejudicially. It seems a particular cause for concern that departments in the doctorate sector report the least experience with new media.

Recognition of Digital Scholarship

Refereed Articles in Digital Format
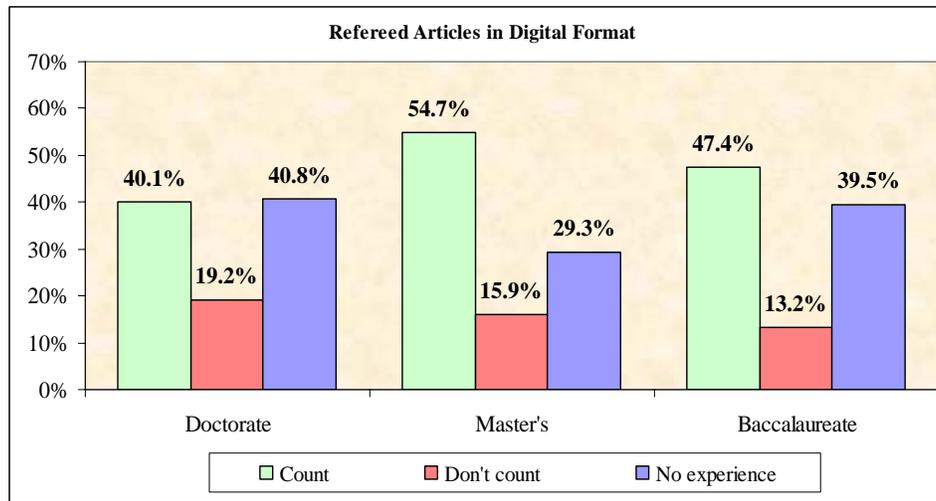
Unsurprisingly, the percentages of departments that report experience with refereed articles produced in digital form is higher than for monographs. But 30% to 40% still report having "no experience." More troublingly, 60% of departments in Carnegie doctorate institutions say refereed articles in digital format either "don't count" for tenure in their departments and institutions or that they have no experience evaluating them. Again, it's possible that some number of respondents who reported that articles in new media "don't count" may be saying that examples have not yet been forthcoming and so they haven't yet had the opportunity to have them count. As the task force recommends, departments and institutions should recognize the legitimacy of scholarship produced in new media and create procedures for evaluating these forms of scholarship.

Who Is Rethinking the Process?

Is Your Institution Reviewing Its Processes and Criteria for Tenure?

| Category	Percentage
In progress or recently completed	36.8%
Under consideration	17.3%
Not under consideration	45.9%

How many departments are located in institutions that are reconsidering their processes and standards for tenure and promotion? It's encouraging that, as shown in this chart, over 50% of departments report that their institutions have reviewed their tenure process or are considering a review. We hope the task-force report will encourage the other half.

Outside Letters in Current Practice

Another topic that has attracted much comment is institutions' use of outside letters. The MLA survey makes it clear that the overwhelming trend is for institutions to require departments to seek letters from outside reviewers.

Outside Letters in Current Practice

Does Your Institution Require Outside Letters?

No, 28.0%

Yes, 62.4%

No, but we seek letters anyway, 9.5%
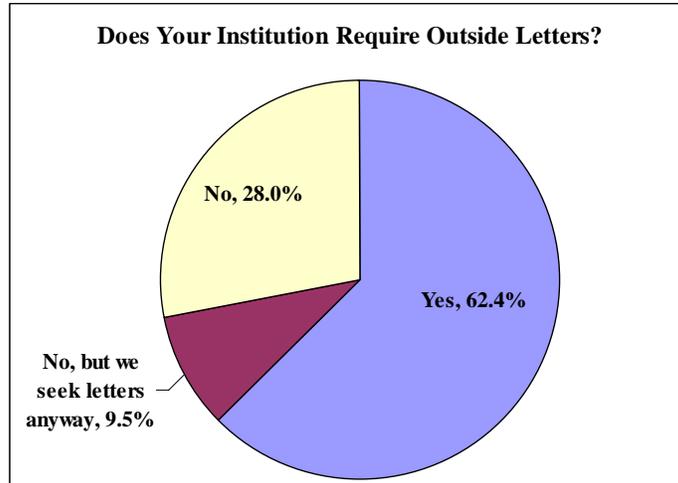
Almost three-quarters of the departments responding to the survey seek outside letters. For more than 60% seeking letters is an institutional requirement.

Is Your Department Required to Ask Outside Referees Whether a Candidate Would Receive Tenure in the Outside Referee's Department and Institution?
(% of all 671 responding departments)

Letters not required, 28.0%

Yes, 52.2%

No, 19.8%
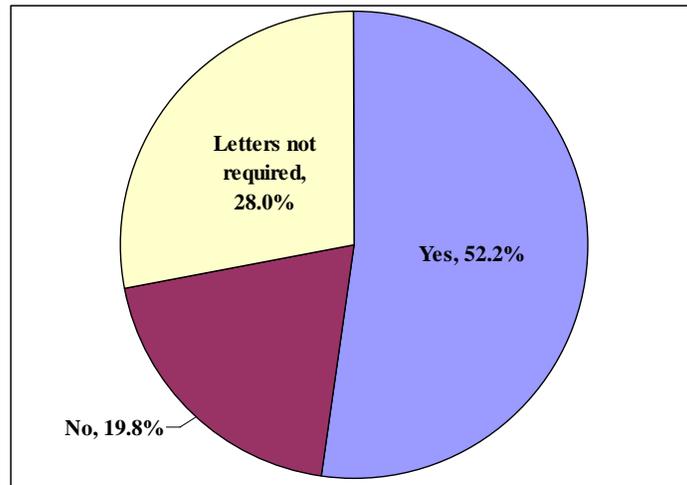
More than half of all 671 responding departments are required to ask those who write outside letters whether a candidate would receive tenure in the outside referee's department and institution. That's almost 70% of the departments that are required to seek outside letters.
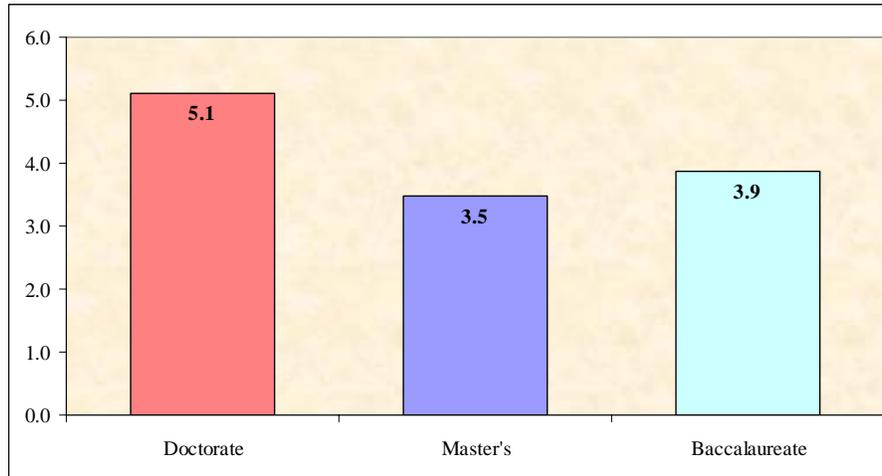
Outside Letters in Current Practice

Does Your Institution Require Outside Letters?
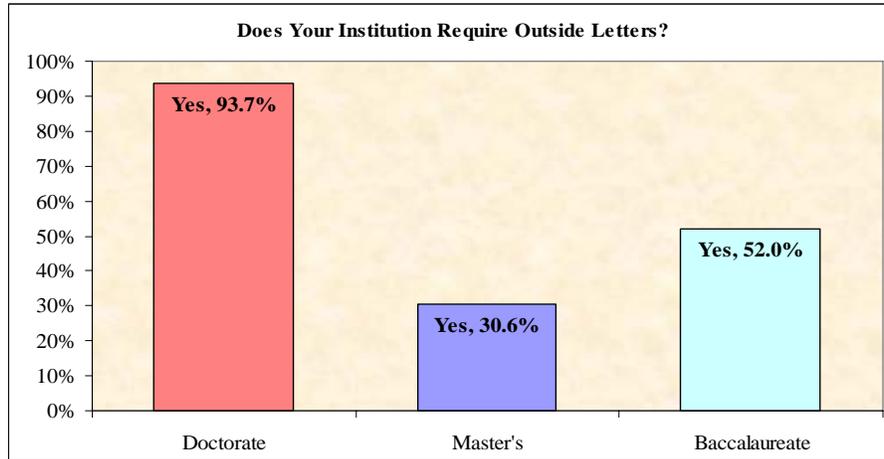
Carnegie doctorate institutions do the most outsourcing by far. More than 90% of departments in Carnegie doctorate institutions are required to seek outside letters.
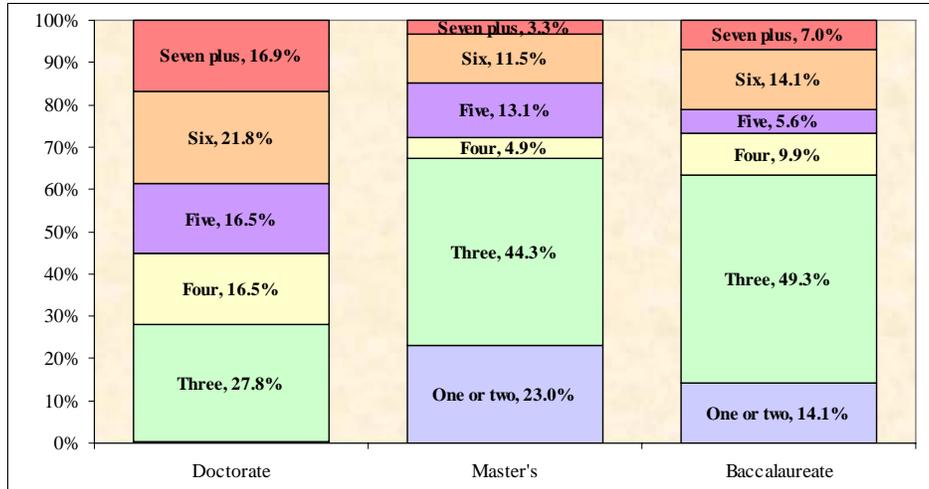
Average Number Required
## (390 departments that provided information about the number of letters required)

Among the 390 responding departments that are required to seek letters and provided information about the number of letters they are required to seek, the number required falls--on average--within the committee's recommendation that "in general, the number should be limited to no more than six." An average number of 5.1 in Carnegie doctorate departments doesn't sound too bad.

Number of Letters Required

The averages mask as much as they reveal, however. In Carnegie doctoral institutions, almost 40% of departments are required to seek the maximum number of letters the task force recommends--six--or more.

Average Size of Responding Departments

**Number of Full-Time Faculty Members**
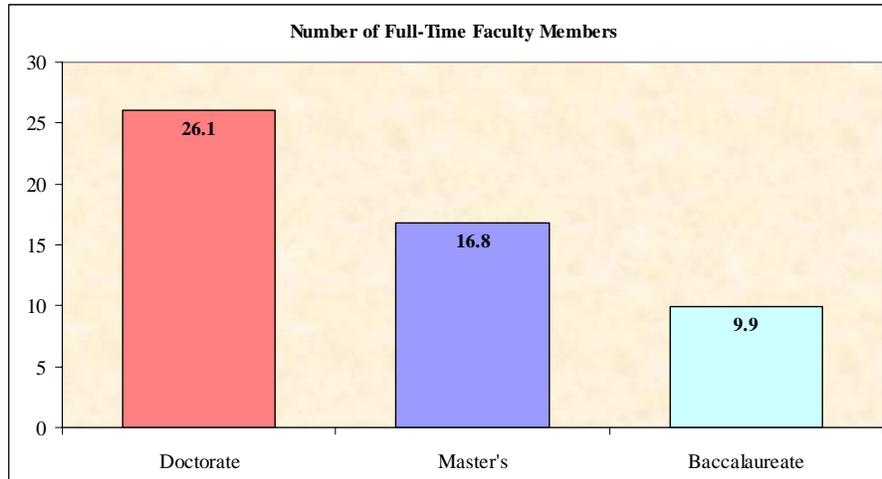
To gauge the impact of practice in Carnegie doctorate institutions on the system as a whole, it's important to remember the "multiplier effect" that comes into play in relation to outside letters. Departments in Carnegie doctorate institutions are not only required to seek letters in numbers at or over the limit the task force recommends. They are required to seek a larger number of letters for a larger number of individuals because their faculties are larger. With an average of 26.1 full-time faculty members, responding departments in Carnegie doctorate institutions are more than two and one-half times larger than departments in Carnegie baccalaureate institutions and more than half again as large as departments in Carnegie master's institutions. Given the demographics, it's not hard to understand why scholars are overburdened with requests for letters. Extrapolating from what respondents to the survey reported about the number of letters they are required to seek, it appears that something on the order of 5,000 letters are sought annually.

What Resources Are Available?

**Percentage of Departments Offering Research Funds
to Junior Faculty Members**
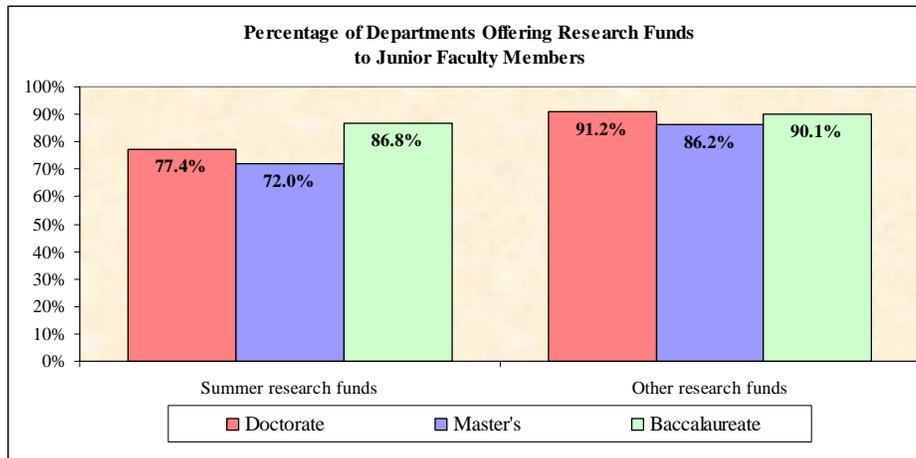
What did the survey findings tell us about the support departments and institutions make available to junior faculty members? One key task force recommendation is for institutions to provide support for scholarship commensurate with the weight scholarship, particularly scholarship expressed as publication, has among their institutional criteria for tenure. Most institutions do this. The summer and other research support departments and institutions provide may serve as a benchmark. As this chart shows, the percentage of departments that offer these is high across the board.

What Resources Are Available?

**Percentage of Departments Offering Start-Up Packages and Subventions
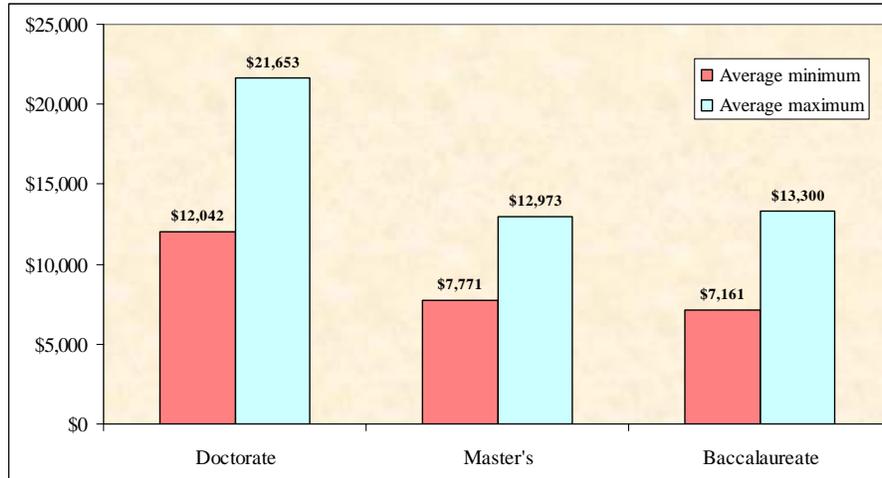to Junior Faculty Members**
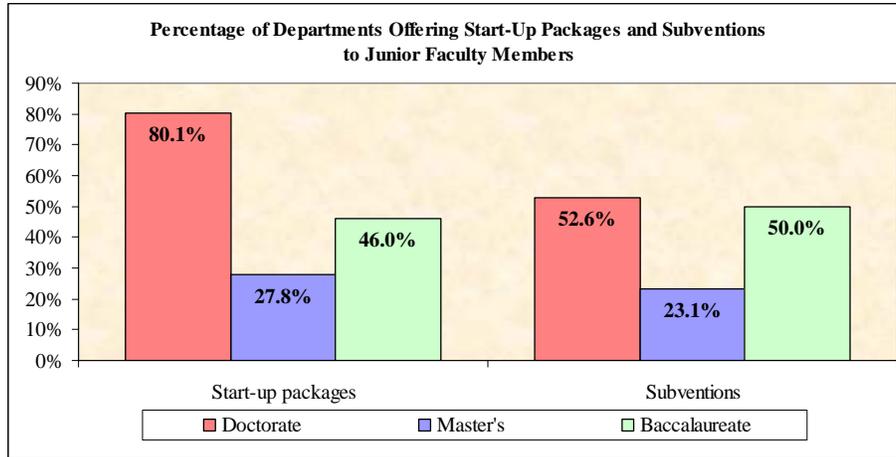
Start-up packages and subventions for publication of accepted book manuscripts are less uniformly available. Start-up packages appear to have become institutionalized in Carnegie doctorate institutions but remain less usual elsewhere. Subventions for accepted book manuscripts are perhaps close to becoming available in a critical mass of departments and institutions. (Start-up packages provide general support that faculty members may often use as they choose; subventions were specified as support for publication of an accepted book manuscript.) Carnegie master's institutions lag behind others in the kinds of support they offer.

What Resources Are Available?

**Percentage of Departments Offering Leaves
to Junior Faculty Members**
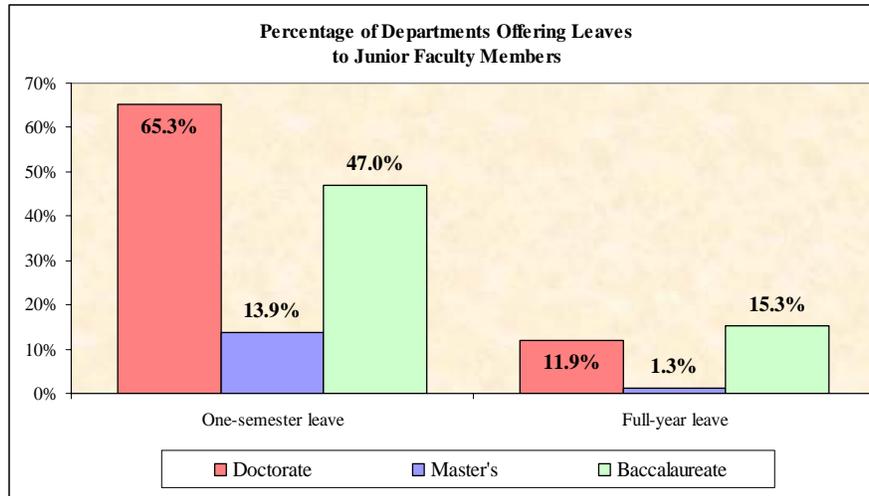
Leaves are the form of support least commonly offered, and full-year leaves are rarely offered in any sector. Although most departments in doctoral institutions offer one-semester leaves, not enough departments in other institutional classifications do, especially in the light of their rising demands for publication.

Average Value of Support Offered
to Junior Faculty Members

In addition to asking about the kinds of support departments offer junior faculty members, the survey inquired about the dollar value of the support. This chart shows the average minimum and maximum value of all forms of support. The figures, which range from $7,000 to slightly more than $20,000, may appear substantial. But the amounts come nowhere near those available in the sciences. And broken down by six pretenure years, the levels of support are less impressive.