

# Colleges, Facing Budget Cuts, Target Tenure

By DOUGLAS BELKIN

For decades, tenured professors held some of the most prestigious and secure jobs in the U.S. Now, their status is under attack at public and private colleges alike.

In states facing budget pressures such as Missouri, North Dakota and Iowa, conservative lawmakers have introduced bills for the current legislative sessions to eliminate tenure, cut back its protections or create added hoops that tenured faculty at public colleges must jump through to keep their jobs. University administrators, struggling to shave their costs, are trying to limit the ranks of tenured professors or make it easier to fire them.

The institution of tenure—which provides tremendous job security and perks like regular sabbaticals—began in the U.S. early in the 20th cen-

tury as a bulwark against interference from administrators, corporate interests and politicians who might not like professors' opinions or agree with their research.

Attacks on tenure have become commonplace in the wake of the recession as reductions in public support for colleges led to steep tuition increases that have driven up student debt and magnified scrutiny on the business practices of universities.

"We've gone from an atmosphere of optimism [15 years ago] to a time of crisis and despair," said Russ Castronovo, chairman of the English department at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, which saw deep cuts and reduced tenure protections in recent years.

In 2015, the Wisconsin legislature voted to weaken a state tenure law and cut \$250 million from the UW budget.

The university board of regents last year instituted "independent and substantive reviews" of tenured faculty every five years. If deemed lacking, they have three or four semesters to improve or are shown the door, said James Schmidt, chancellor of University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire.

Republican Gov. Scott Walker recently announced plans to cut tuition by 5% across all University of Wisconsin schools while instituting a faculty accountability policy that would monitor time professors spend in the classroom.

Faculty at State College of Florida hired after July 2016 no longer qualify for tenure-like protections. A Missouri bill would prohibit any public institution of higher education from awarding tenure after Jan. 1, 2018.

"I just don't think if you're being paid with tax dollars you

should be guaranteed a job for life," said Iowa state Sen. Brad Zaun, a Republican who filed a bill for the current legislative season that would eliminate the possibility of tenure for new hires and strip it from holders of tenure at the three regents universities in his state.

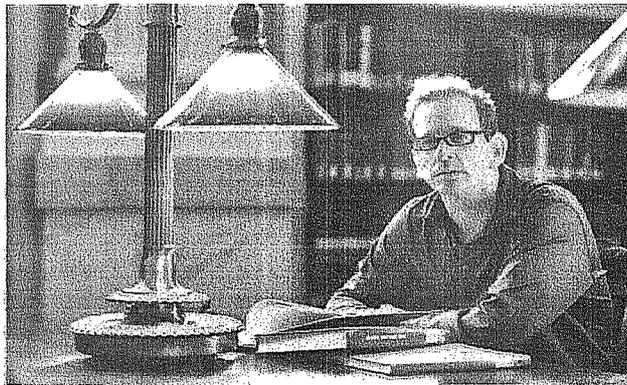
Bruce Rastetter, president of the Iowa Board of Regents, and a leading Republican donor in the state, doesn't support it.

"We recognize the concern about merit-based evaluations addressed in the bill," Mr. Rastetter said in a statement. "However the Board of Regents understands the role of tenure. We oppose this bill, and I look forward to meeting with Senator Zaun to hear his thoughts."

Defenders of tenure say states that do away with it will be at a disadvantage bringing in the most talented professors and risk losing valuable grants that can power economic growth. "If they get rid of it, it would cost them hundreds of millions of dollars in grants," said David Soll, a professor of biology at the University of Iowa.

In 1975, 45% of faculty at public and private schools was tenured or tenure-track; the 2014 figure is 29%. The balance of the jobs are now filled by part-time adjunct profes-

sors who make, on average, less than half the salary of tenured professors, enjoy few of their benefits and are excused from much of the administrative work. While the average salary of a full professor is \$142,141, according to the American Association of University Professors, adjuncts are typically paid between \$1,500 and \$5,000 a course.



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