Academic departments decide on tenure standards with limited evidence about their accuracy and efficacy. The authors study the implications of stricter tenure standards in law schools, an environment in which 95 percent of all tenure track hires receive tenure. To do so, the authors construct a novel dataset of the articles and citation counts of 1,720 law professors who were granted tenure at top-100 law schools between 1970 and 2007. The authors first show that pre-tenure research records are highly predictive of future academic impact. The authors then simulate the costs and benefits of applying stricter tenure standards using predictions of law professors’ future academic impact at the time of their tenure decision. Of faculty members not tenured under stricter standards, only 5 percent have greater future academic impacts than their counterfactual replacements. Moreover, increasing tenure denials by 10 percentage points would increase the academic impact of a school’s median professor by over 50 percent. This research is a joint work with Adam Chilton and Jonathan Masur of the University of Chicago Law School.

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