

The Chair's Role in New Faculty Mentoring

Chair's Duties Owed to Brand-New Faculty Hires: A Checklist

Prepare members of the department for the new hire's arrival in several ways.

Prior to every new faculty member's arrival, the department as a whole should meet with the dean to decide specifically how the newcomer(s) will be welcomed, professionally supported, introduced to networks and key players, and so on. In addition, the department chair and dean should lead discussions on how diversifying the faculty will enhance (rather than dilute) the excellence of the department and its value to students on campus.

Assign short-term (one semester) allies to new faculty hires.

The chair could ask appropriate senior faculty to make a point of offering specific help along these lines: "Do you know much about how the grant process works? I'd be glad to discuss this over lunch. I myself used to be overwhelmed by it." Or "I taught that course last year. Would you like to discuss it? I can dig up my old notes and exams. Feel free to ignore them if they don't help."

Disarm those who may be opposed to the new hire.

"Very few faculty appointment decisions are unanimous," observes University of Washington Physics Professor Marjorie Olmstead. "Don't assume that the opposition will evaporate overnight." Take pro-active steps to turn around those likely to undermine the new hire or at least work to neutralize their power (conversation with Professor Olmstead, 2009).

Supply a newcomer with essential information about departmental operations months before their arrival on campus.

The department chair, aided by other faculty and the departmental secretary, should provide details to the newcomer about course load, anticipated class size, academic level and preparation of students, and expectations regarding office hours. Details about other duties (as clinical-care provider or museum director, for instance) should obviously be spelled out. Sample course syllabi should be sent, together with sample book lists or case studies that the newcomer may wish to review, plus email addresses of faculty who have taught the course and are willing to chat with the newcomer.

Assign courses carefully to early-stagers and newcomers.

For all new full-time hires, the department and its chair should do their best to arrange a reduced teaching load during the newcomer's first year and also ensure that the courses to be taught are ones that are very familiar. These steps will help newcomers avoid a frenetic launch of their careers (Sorcinelli at the UMass-Amherst website).

Double-check to see if equipment and space are ready for the newcomer's arrival.

Several weeks prior to the new faculty member's arrival, find out if their office or clinical space, computer, lab and other equipment and staff are ready. Make sure that all promises made to the new hire during the earlier hiring process are kept. If any of the equipment or support promised fails to materialize or is being delayed, then the chair or a designated senior faculty member should immediately and apologetically inform the newcomer prior to his or her arrival.

Introduce and warmly promote the new faculty member to students (at the very beginning of the semester).

To heighten the newcomer's sense of belonging, the chair or a designated senior faculty member should visit each newcomer's classes on the first day of the semester, to briefly and enthusiastically explain to the students why the department is so pleased about its new addition. In addition, the chair should underscore to the dean and faculty colleagues how valuable the newcomer is to the department.

Acting as a broker.

Immediately introduce the new faculty member to each departmental colleague and then, throughout the year, help newcomers make substantive scholarly connections within and outside the department. Merely making casual introductions is insufficient.

Protect junior faculty – in particular NIs and URM (underrepresented minority) – from excessive teaching, advising, and service assignments. This is the responsibility of provosts, deans, and chairs. A chronic overtaxing predictably occurs when URW and NI faculty are asked to serve as the "diversity" member for numerous campus-wide or department communities. Prevent an overload not only of committee work but also of student advising. Help early-stage colleagues wisely choose committee assignments and leadership positions that will enhance their standing among their colleagues and boost their career advancement

Ensure that professional-development workshops are being offered every year.

[These should be] for early-stage faculty (including adjunct, term, tenure-track, research-only, clinical, and so on). These workshops were discussed earlier in this chapter.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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