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Informal Chair Support Groups: Benefits and Obstacles

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Informal Chair Support Groups: Benefits and Obstacles

Brown Bag Lunch Discussion

Feb 4, 2016

Caryn Connelly, Chair of World Languages and Literature, Northern Kentucky University

Emily Detmer-Goebel, Chair of English, Northern Kentucky University

Kristi Haik, Chair of Biological Sciences, Northern Kentucky University

Michael Roth, Chair of Physics, Geology, and Engineering Technology, Northern Kentucky University

Benefits	Obstacles/challenges
Mutual support and sharing of knowledge even on the smallest parts of the job	Making time to maintain/cultivate relationships with other chairs
Improved job satisfaction through friendship and mutually beneficial laughter	Trust and issues surrounding confidentiality
Having a group of peers to consult with and get advice from as well as blow off steam with us to avoid feeling isolated	How to prevent blowing off steam transitioning into destructive gossip.
“Young” chairs can gain mentorship.	It’s a (positive) challenge to leverage our successful chairs group to serve as a seed for other similar mentoring groups
Chairs can see their discipline in the backdrop of a wide range of other ones and understand how different departments do things differently.	

Commonalities between Chair Support Groups and Peer Mentoring

Peer Mentoring is praised in particular for faculty members who are at similar stage in their careers. One of the main elements is its goal of mutual support and collaboration.

We encourage Chairs to see informal support groups as a form of peer mentoring. By drawing this connection, we encourage individuals to consider more seriously the benefits of such collaborations as more than just a sounding board (which is what some might assume is the basic nature of a “support group.”) Some key elements that both support groups and peer mentoring share are:

- Both small collaborative groups meet informally without a leader or a hierarchy.
- Both groups aim to support each other mutually and help to build relationships.
- Both groups help members to avoid feeling isolated by providing positive check-in opportunities.
- Both groups provide a great opportunity to share past experiences to enhance future skill development.
- Both groups offer a sounding board about confidential faculty issues/decisions.
- Both groups can be an avenue to ask questions about the way individuals are addressing elements of their positions; chairs can consult each other about managing enrollment, creating reports, and deciding about resource allocations.
- Participation in these groups can give individuals a stronger sense of belonging to what might be a new position; working with a group of chairs in such a group provides each of us with a better sense of competence and confidence in our identity as chair.

The main requirement for developing such groups is time and building a trust that each member will respect confidentiality.