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Mentorship, Guidance, and Respect for Guiding New Faculty

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Mentorship, Guidance, and Respect for Guiding New Faculty

Abstract

Department chairs wield great power in the career of new faculty. In addition to gatekeeping functions as an evaluator, chairs serve as role models and senior leaders. Mentorship, guidance, and respect form the foundation for chairs to propel newer faculty to senior department members.

Session Description

Despite years of study and acquired expertise in their subject matter, many newer faculty still feel unprepared for some facets of their academic roles. They are well versed in the subject matter of their discipline, and often arrive with copious quantities of research in progress, with strong intentions for future scholarly work. However, unless they are experienced pedagogues at the university or pre-collegiate level, they may struggle to find their voice in the classroom, especially if they are teaching at an institution with a different feel and culture than their graduate school. Furthermore, adding a service component to the mix may lead faculty to query how best to balance the tri-pronged approach that constitutes university life and the onward flow toward tenure or a permanent position in academia.

Department chairs perform an integral role in the newer faculty member's initial years on the job, and ultimately, in their longevity and productiveness as a career academic. Officially, the chair's role is to serve as a quasi-gatekeeper, the writer of evaluations, observations, and progress reports. Unofficially, however, the chair performs far more duties, including the role of coach, mentor, advisor, and networker. Even in a shared governance environment, where the chair may be considered an equal whose primary role may be to fulfill requisite administrative functions, the chair should take the lead to shepherd new faculty members to fulfill their potential to positively contribute to profession.

Presented by experienced administrators who have worked with many early career academics, this session highlights a multi-faceted approach for chairs to consider while crafting a professional relationship with early career faculty. The framework of mentorship, guidance, and respect forms the foundation for the consideration of questions such as: What expectations should the chair place on a faculty member's ability to balance teaching, scholarly work, service, and personal interests? In what manners should a chair support scholarship? What approaches could assist a faculty member who is struggling in the classroom? How could a chair help to prevent early career burnout? Should a chair expect questions or intervene often with advice? When is it appropriate to approach the topic of "fit" in terms of continued employment? How could informal discussions help advance a career? What is the right balance between formal and informal interactions? Is a chair obligated to make professional introductions and connections on behalf of the faculty member?

Whether navigating the tenure-track or perhaps in a visiting position, early career faculty are often found in the unenviable position of fighting for their own job

security. The aim of this presentation is to provide chairs with a framework of ideas for consideration in their interactions with early career faculty. Ample time will be provided for questions and discussion.