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Lessons Learned about Mentoring Junior Faculty in Higher Education

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Mentoring junior faculty in higher education is often thought of as an easy task that every tenured faculty member and college administrator thinks they can effectively do. Most tenured faculty think they know the “tricks of the trade” because they have successfully gone through the process themselves. Most administrators also think they know what to do because they have seen or gained “insight” from viewing the successful and unsuccessful tenure applicants over the last few years. This “lived experience” of tenured faculty and administrators, however, may not be the current “lived experience” of junior faculty in higher education today.

Today’s junior faculty in many colleges often are older and more likely to be female, ethnic minorities, or foreign born. These facts alone make the lived experienced of junior faculty very different than the experiences that the traditional tenured, white-male faculty member or administrator had perhaps decades ago. Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2008) illustrate, for example, how race and gender influence the academic life of faculty. Diggs, Garrison-Wade, Estrada, and Galindo (2009) similarly maintain that issues of marginalization, racism, and sexism impact untenured faculty of color and hinder their progress toward tenure. Additionally, Cullen and Harris (2008) argue that, “unlike their predecessors, the new generation of faculty entering the workforce has expressed their increasing dissatisfaction with the traditional academic work environment (p, 17).”

The purpose of this article is to describe our pooled advise to both junior and senior faculty about strategies for successfully mentoring junior faculty in higher education. Although our experiences are primarily based from the College of Education and Human Development from a major research university in the southwest United States, we feel that many of these lessons generalize to a wider university and college population. Due to the need to find quality replacements for aging professors who are retiring, there has been increased interest surrounding the hiring and support of newly hired junior faculty at universities (Clayton, 2007). In an effort to recruit and retain top quality and promising junior faculty members, many universities are making an investment in the new faculty including such things as offering contract signing bonuses and providing newly designed mentoring programs (Clayton, 2007). Unfortunately, many of the new mentoring programs have not been successful with this new generation of junior faculty. This article describes some advise from new faculty who recently were hired at a major research university in the central Texas area. One of us is a minority, woman in her first tenured-tack position as an assistant professor. Another author is an associate professor (without tenure) who has been at several universities throughout his career. The final author is a professor with nearly 25 years of academic experience. We feel that the following sections describe some common experiences that junior faculty will go through at most universities today.

Writing Does Not Relate to Research Skills

One of the erroneous assumptions that many senior faculty have is that the lack of scholarly productivity on the part of junior faculty is due to their lack of research skills. This is so prevalent at some universities that they offer regularly scheduled professional development research seminars (a.k.a. remedial research and statistics courses for dummies) for junior faculty. At several universities, they

nationally advertise these seminars and allow other faculty and students from across the country to attend (for a fee) these intensive one- or two-week seminars. Another prevalent form of this “remediation” strategy is developing a College-Wide Research Center where senior faculty and advanced doctoral students are available to help junior faculty, graduate students, and other faculty with statistical consulting.

Professional development activities for faculty are highly valued and necessary in higher education, but these should be experiences aimed at growth, not remediation. Most colleges of education presently require at least 12 graduate hours of research methods courses for their graduates (Capraro & Thompson, 2008). That is approximately a 100% increase in hours from the previous decade. In other words, most junior faculty today have probably taken nearly twice as many research courses than their senior faculty did nearly a decade ago.

We maintain that it is not a lack of knowledge about research methods that prevents junior faculty from writing. Rather, we propose that it is a lack of “opportunities” to work collegially with other senior faculty that hinders the writing and research process. Many years ago, you often saw wonderful examples of “apprenticeships” where senior faculty would “open the doors” to their labs, centers, projects, and sites for research. Senior faculty would gladly share their own resources with junior faculty because that’s what happened to them many years ago.

Times and traditions, however, have changed. Junior faculty often receive faculty appointments today that include their own startup monies for research that include equipment, research assistants, travel, and release time. Instead of making “life” easier for junior faculty, these visible benefits often cause jealousy and resentment for senior faculty who gripe “we never had it so good.” The intrinsic rewards that faculty use to receive for mentoring junior faculty are presently lost because of all the extrinsic rewards that are given to them.

Teaching Matters!

Another area where junior faculty often receives contradictory advice is in the area of teaching. Most administrators and many senior faculty tell junior faculty to make sure that they do an excellent job teaching. Often they’re told that “everyone” in our program area, department, college, or university is an excellent instructor so make sure that you “live-up” to that standard. Sometimes junior faculty will be shown the teaching awards or plaques that nearly everyone in their Department has earned. Unfortunately, it takes a while to figure out that during a 15-year period, for example, nearly all of the 15 tenured professors in the Department have received the award. Junior faculty also hear they should concentrate on their research or scholarship. The understanding in this version is that your efforts at good teaching are less important than time spent developing your research agenda. However if classes are being developed and taught for the first time, not uncommon for junior faculty, initial preparation can be very time consuming.

Teaching is important, but what many tenured professors have learned is that you can’t devote all of your time to teaching your classes and helping students. One of our untenured colleagues recently told us that she likes to spend the first six to eight weeks of the semester just focusing on getting her courses “together,” so that she could spend the remaining part of the semester on research. In reality, the first six to eight weeks becomes 10 weeks and then she still has to grade papers and exams, teach her classes, and work with students. Needless to say, her research and scholarly productivity suffer at

the expense of her complete dedication to her teaching and students. Many junior faculty get caught up in this cycle, especially since so many students appear at their door wanting and needing their assistance because other tenured faculty don't have the time to work with them. Another untenured colleague of ours says that students seek her out since she is both minority and female and they can relate better to her than other senior faculty.

Junior faculty need to learn how to say "no" and understand if they work with all these students that they may not be around long enough to see their students graduate. Likewise, preparing for class should probably be limited to a fixed amount of time. Preparing for class the day or night before the class works best for some of us because it limits us to about six hours of preparation for a three-hour class. Others may prefer an optimal time between the four to eight-hour range, but this "optimum" time period probably should be altered on rare exceptions (e.g., grading papers).

Prioritize the Needs of New Faculty Members

Assign new faculty favorable courses for teaching and make sure that they are populated with students. One of the authors was asked what course they would like to teach as part of the interview process and their response was anything except X course. They were assigned to teach X course their first semester and it was added to the course listings the week before classes started. The new faculty member immediately received a form e-mail stating, "Your assigned class did not have enough students and it will be cancelled, please see the department chair if this adversely affects your teaching load." Needless to say, this rude awakening has deleterious effects on junior faculty.

Another related concern is if the new faculty member has a graduate student as part of their start-up package; don't assign all of the graduates to the senior faculty before the new faculty member arrives. We should assign or save the best graduate students for the new faculty member or give them the option of waiting a year so that they can select their own. Two of the authors were required to "use" their graduate student in the first year and when none were available in the department they had to choose a graduate student from another department that wasn't quite "good enough" to be supported by their home department. The end result is that the graduate students ended up doing little more than clerical work and took more time to supervise that it would have taken to do the tasks.

Not all graduate students require the same type or amount of mentoring. Protect new faculty from graduate students who have shuffled through the entire current faculty in the department. At some point in their career, they will have to mentor these students, but not all of them and not as their first grad students. Assign new faculty as Co-chairs on the first available dissertation. The only way to learn the inside information on chairing a dissertation is to chair a dissertation, better to do this as early as possible and with an experienced Chair who is willing to mentor junior faculty in the process.

Value the Diversity and Individuality of New Faculty.

Early in the departmental-level mentoring program, we had a meeting where among many other atrocities, a department-level administrator went around the table and pointed out specific individuals and things that they were doing that were not going to help them get tenure. There was one junior faculty member who went to too many conferences (using her own money to finance them), one who wrote too many grants, and one who was president of an international professional organization. All of these activities were viewed as taking away precious time that could be spent publishing in national peer-

reviewed journals and were therefore a waste of time. Never mind that conference goer had a strong record of turning conference presentations into publications with collaborators that she had met at previous conferences; grant guy was securing research grants that were paying for graduate students and would ultimately lead to series of publications instead of episodic publication efforts; and our association president is turning down opportunities to collaborate/write on a global scale. It was disappointing that the long-term publication opportunities were not recognized in these types of activities, but what was really devastating was that these attacks were personal and individually addressed at the exact professional activity that each of these faculty members was most proud. It takes a great deal of courage/energy for some individuals to walk up and introduce themselves to internationally known scholars whom you have been reading and citing. Ultimately collaborating with these individuals is a proven way to grow a career. Writing grants is a special form of scholarship, running grants is a special kind of work, and publishing from them brings prestige to the faculty member and the institutions as good stewards. Becoming president of an international professional association is the culmination of years of dedication and increasingly more responsible leadership roles, something all of us would be proud of. These efforts need to be celebrated, not denigrated.

Pseudo Mentors

Unfortunately, many of us found a number of pseudo mentors who were more than happy to mentor us at our doors or in a meeting, but were more focused on their own agenda than truly mentoring junior faculty. Examples included a Tenure and Promotion meeting where senior white male faculty members told untenured faculty that there was no bias (or that they had not experienced any) in the department. We heard from no tenured women or minorities at this meeting even though there were several in the department. Another example of this was a series of departmental-level administrators who were assigned various roles relative to mentoring junior faculty, but seemed to be more focused on their next promotion rather than on their mentee's success. In one instance, a newly tenured faculty member with no mentor training was asked to help mentor the junior faculty simply because they had recently been successful in achieving tenure. This person spent the winter break arranging mentoring activities in a cafeteria-style menu of options for the junior faculty to choose. A meeting was held that began with over an hour of junior faculty sharing what they wanted as far as mentoring, which was followed with almost an hour of what would be provided. Unfortunately there was little in common and no changes were made as the new mentor had already spent more time arranging the options that they would receive as a release. The net result was a whole lot of effort with less positive effect than was desired (a departmental-funded editing service was at least one of the cafeteria options was universally well received).

Another example of pseudo mentors were the faculty who call themselves mentors and stick their head in your office once a week to ask, "how are you doing?" while rushing to meet a student, going to a class, or attending a meeting. They may even ask you to send them drafts of articles that you are working on. After you send them the manuscripts, however, they typically tell you four months later that "life has been busy" and they just don't have time right now. If someone is going to commit to you as a mentor, then you need to mutually determine what it is that you need, what will be expected on both sides of the relationship, and that the senior faculty member or mentor can provide this for you in that role.

Additionally, potential mentors should also have available to them workshops or trainings for renewing

best practices in this role. Several of the authors attended faculty development or mentoring events sponsored by the university and at some point wondered why the majority of participants were in fact, new faculty.

Market (and Reward) Differential Mentoring Capabilities of Senior Faculty.

It is not reasonable to expect any one senior faculty mentor to be a good mentor in all situations. There seems to persist a notion in higher education that receiving tenure – no matter how long ago and (how low) where the bar was at that time – is all that one needs to be an effective mentor. Another common practice that confounds the mentoring process is the assigning of the senior faculty member most closely to the new faculty member (i.e., the senior faculty member in the same field). This is especially problematic if the new faculty member has research, teaching, or curricular differences of opinion. It is difficult to argue in a faculty meeting or program area meeting with a colleague and then go to them for advice on a paper for publication. Another concern with blindly assigning the close senior faculty member to become a mentor is the time commitment that it requires of an already busy senior faculty member who may not have time to mentor the junior faculty member in how to teach an online course or even how to develop a new course. Since they may currently have six graduate students, two editorships, etc., there is no time for mentoring the new kid on the block – especially on EVERYTHING. Having more mentors with more specialized roles allows the new faculty member to seek out help without overburdening a single individual and increase the likelihood of success for individual tasks and career goals.

Tenure Uncertainty Principle

The Heisenberg uncertainty principle in its simplest form tells us that locating a particle in a small region of space makes the momentum of the particle uncertain; and conversely that measuring the momentum of a particle precisely makes the position uncertain. Or in simpler terms, we can measure either the position or the momentum, not both. This makes sense because momentum includes the velocity of an object and to measure velocity, one must measure a distance traveled and divide that by the time it took to travel that distance. Thus the longer distance that it travels, the more certain the velocity measure. The same principle applies to measuring progress toward tenure. Measuring where and how an untenured faculty is progressing toward tenure at a particular moment in time, tells us little about the overall trajectory or momentum toward tenure. This is especially true when the junior faculty member has to stop everything that they are doing to prepare an evaluation dossier every couple of months. One of us prepared five in 18 months. It is also not productive to be told officially every few months that you are not making progress toward tenure.

The evaluation process for junior faculty does not have to mirror tenured faculty evaluations. Junior faculty should not be expected to accomplish the same outcomes as tenured faculty. This applies to all three traditional areas of evaluation: (a) scholarship, (b) teaching, and (c) service. Using undifferentiated evaluation procedures and constantly monitoring progress does not facilitate the professional development of junior faculty.

Knowing Self as Junior Faculty

Another difficulty for junior faculty lies in the fact that as junior faculty we often don't know what we don't know. In other words, being given an armload of information is often more likely to be unhelpful rather

than helpful. Experience has shown us that you may be told procedures, but often until you need to use or implement them they do not make sense. Our department, for example, has what might be considered an elaborate set of procedures for being reimbursed for travel expenses. While we thought we knew what needed to be done after two years we still find forms that must be completed before travel that make little or no sense. Another example, as new faculty one most likely doesn't understand the politics or typical grievances that go along with something like constructing a course schedule. Some new faculty members may be asked what they would like to teach and they may even be able to suggest and develop a new course to teach. If the Department, however, does not stress course management, then your courses may be planned and designed but very often not 'make' due to low enrollment. The faculty member then must teach another class, also new and requiring additional planning and developing time.

Service Matters!

Just as teaching matters, service matters! If junior faculty find advice on research and teaching to be confusing, service advice borders on hypocrisy or hilarity. Mixed messages are the norm. Does judging a science fair at your daughter's high school count as service? What if it is at the science fair of the dean's daughter? Does being president of a national organization count the same as being on a search committee? It often appears that service is a simply a matter of having a finite number of entrees on the vitae, perhaps at different levels (e.g., local, state, national/international). The obvious disparity between the time commitment and impact do not seem to be taken into account.

Service is important, but what many tenured professors have learned is that service needs to be synchronous with their responsibilities and professional growth. Yes, somebody needs to serve on the parking appeals committee, but junior faculty may want to focus service efforts in areas where they are interested and think they can make a difference.

Junior faculty need to emphasize and be rewarded for service that builds on their research and teaching capabilities. Department chairs and tenure/promotion committees need to protect junior faculty's time and junior faculty need to keep practicing the "no" that they learned when dealing with students and teaching. Service requirements need to be minor and need to focus on introducing the new scholars to people and associations that will be beneficial as their career develops. College-wide committees that focus on singular issues (e.g., technology in instruction) would be preferable to a college-wide committee that focuses on the ten-year accreditation visit next year. Likewise, serving on a committee that meets at the annual conference and has a seven-member listserve to discuss specific issues would be advisable instead of serving on a program area curriculum committee. While this information may be known to senior faculty, new faculty often are not aware of these issues. Having a faculty or staff member who can help new faculty navigate these many activities could be extremely helpful in the first few years of an appointment.

Positive Feedback and Encouragement

When one of us went to graduate school, the major adversary for doctoral students was the COD office, or Committee on Degrees. The office was in a small space in the corner of the administration building with a small area for students when they came in for assistance. To the left of the door was a carousel holding various handouts, directly in front of the entrance was a desk, and to the right of that a space with a half-door – somewhere in this area was a sign that said something to the effect "due to the

confidential nature of our work, please do not enter.” This was the office where we filed our graduate course study plans and thesis proposals, among other things, and where we were notified of our failing or passing certain stages within the program. The people who staffed the office were friendly, efficient, and helpful, but doing anything there was always stressful for the doc students. Additionally, there was always something anti-climatic about dealing with them. Similar to Perlmutter’s (2007) views on achieving tenure, some of us had an “is that all there is?” feeling after completing one process or another. The day we turned in our final thesis copies, the COD members set up a desk outside the office door. There someone checked our documents for required margin widths, page number placement, font size and style, referencing styles, etc. We also completed the forms for copywriting our work, paid the fees for library binding, and hopefully left with a feeling of accomplishment. The year she finished her doctorate, the COD staff had hung a congratulations banner and also offered cookies and punch. A friend and fellow doctoral student suggested the COD could at least play a tape of celebratory music and toss confetti when a student completed this task, but I’m not sure even that would have made the occasion appropriately festive. The bottom line is that people need positive feedback and support along the way rather than being told everything you did or do is incorrect, incomplete, or unuseful.

As junior faculty at a large university, most of us are again in the familiar process of moving through the required hoops to attain the next golden circle, tenure. At the beginning of this process, we were hosted and toasted as we went through an extensive new faculty orientation. Much of this process included information on the requirements for earning tenure. Included in this information was the number of peer-reviewed articles published within a year, what peer-reviewed journals were rated or considered high quality, presentations made, professional organization involvement, teacher evaluation ratings, and service to the college or university at large. We were also asked what would be helpful to us as new tenure-track faculty by senior faculty. Rarely, however, did these presentations take into consideration what the junior faculty had to say, if we were heard at all.

Collaboration Rocks!

Another lesson learned focuses on the value of collaboration and collaborative writing projects. This article, for example, is a joint-productive activity based on a collaborative writing project initiated by a senior faculty member. Joint-productive activities or collaborative projects are one of the standards for effective pedagogy (Tharp, et al. 2000), but more importantly it really works! Each of us, for example, has individual strengths and weaknesses as a writer and we feel that collaborative writing projects utilize the strengths of individuals and minimize our weaknesses. One of us, for example, likes to work on first drafts, but dislikes “finishing the product.” He, however, worked for several years with a “closer,” that is someone who likes to put the product (e.g., journal article) to rest and finish it off. Their strengths complimented each other well and they were productive on many articles and chapters. In addition to being a starter and finisher, there are a number of other roles individuals can assume in a collaborative writing project. Often, for example, someone has much more substantive knowledge in a given area than others. Obviously, this is critical for providing important insights in the field that others may have missed.

The synergy provided by working collaboratively also adds value to the product and the process. Motivational benefits- encouraging each other and not wanting to let your colleagues down are equally important to the opportunity of working together. We have found this to be particularly true within a college of education where integrated approaches to curriculum are common. In addition, the pressure

to work independently in higher education is no longer as prevalent as it was historically since most academics recognize that nearly all journal articles are published with multiple authors. Collaborative writing projects appear to be an excellent mentoring strategy because they provide opportunities for scholarship as well as build community and collegiality (O'Malley & Lucey, 2008).

Questions to Ask Before Accepting a New Academic Position

From our experience, we offer a list of questions new faculty should ask as they are interviewing for their first position:

- How is mentoring of junior faculty done and by whom? Is it someone in or out of your department? Do mentors or possible mentors receive training of any sort? By whom and how often?
- What are tenure expectations? Promotion expectations? Ask to see a copy of the tenure and promotion paperwork as well as the annual evaluation forms. Particular information here is important.
- What are the teaching expectations? How many courses and which courses would I have to teach? How does the scheduling of courses take place?
- What are 'service' expectations? If you are told to not to do any service work, is that actually feasible, or are you starting a new program where you have no choice but to take part in extensive committee work and program development?
- Will you be a voting member of your faculty as new faculty? Will you achieve graduate status (necessary for teaching grad courses) upon hire or do you have to qualify? What are those qualifications?
- Are there written department procedures made available for all faculty, and are they followed strictly?
- Talk to someone who is a relatively 'new' faculty member, but also in a similar stage of life as you (marital status, age, gender, ethnicity) and ask them questions about the College, Department, and living in the city. Make sure you ask them questions about "quality of life" issues.

Final Suggestions

Not everything we experienced as new faculty has been negative. There were a number of activities and colleagues who went out of their way to be helpful. The following list of activities includes some things we found helpful:

- Colleague dinner circles – fairly informally set up meetings of small groups of new faculty with similar interests meeting monthly for dinner and conversation about the work
- Mentoring lunches – similar to the dinner circles. The goal of lunches/meetings to be set by pair as time
- Seeing and hearing other faculty present their work – especially newer faculty. These can be done via lunchtime forums set up on a regular basis.
- Hearing about strategies for getting things quickly published – group writing work, identification of

journals that accept work that is not empirically based, worked on as a group

“The joyless search for tenure” assumes an “if you get tenure you will be happy.” The new generation of junior faculty does not subscribe to this metaphor. A more appropriate metaphor might be a “tenureless search for joy” which assumes that “if you are happy you will get tenure” because you would focus on the things that excited you about becoming a professor in the first place, which would ultimately lead to success; and ultimately, tenure! The new generation prioritizes how work fits into their lives, rather than accepting the notion that work should be the only priority in their life. It may take awhile for senior faculty to understand that point, but it is also our responsibility to share that point with them.

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