

Best Practices: Welcoming New Faculty

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Best Practices Series

Social Events & Intellectual Pursuits

What the institution should do to encourage a smooth transition for new faculty



Best Practices for Colleagues

As workloads have increased during the past decade, and scarce resources of time and money have been focused upon the demands of teaching and research, the psychosocial activities and benefits of the academic career have often been overlooked and deemed expendable. In a busy schedule, it is no doubt easy to dismiss the department social interactions in favor of other academic or domestic duties. Unfortunately, though, anecdotal evidence is mounting which suggests that the loss of these important community-building activities is significantly affecting job satisfaction throughout the faculty generally and among new faculty particularly.

We urge faculty members to pay attention to the communal health of their departments and faculties.



In order to rectify this situation, we urge faculty members to pay attention to the communal health of their departments and faculties. The following is a list of suggestions which might help to increase collegiality and social well-being within our ranks, and in turn, encourage the retention of new scholars on our campuses.

Academic Activities

Departments should create supportive teaching environments.

We can support each other as teachers through the following suggested practices:



- **B**e open and willing to exchange course syllabi, text lists, and successful lectures with colleagues.
- **P**rovide pedagogical workshops within your department or widely advertise institutional workshops. A special effort should be made to encourage new scholars to attend.
- **P**rovide opportunities for faculty to share successful teaching strategies.
- **E**ncourage the peer review of new

scholars' teaching which is not related to the formal evaluation process, with the aim being the constructive development of new teaching strategies and insight into current teaching practices. This practice need not be restricted to new scholars; the ongoing renewal of teaching skills throughout the faculty can only be positive.

- **E**nsure that courses are distributed equitably among the faculty, paying particular attention to enrollment numbers and grading loads of particular courses.
- **E**nsure that all faculty, including term faculty, have an equitable opportunity to teach courses which reflect their interests.
- **D**emonstrate collegiality within the classroom through team-teaching or guest lecturing.
- **C**elebrate award-winning teachers in your department.
- **E**nsure that the required teaching load is weighted fairly within the criteria for tenure.

Remember that non-tenure track faculty and post-doctoral fellows are also members of your departments, faculties, and institutions and should be actively included within the social and intellectual academic community.

Creative & Scholarly Activities

Intellectual Exchange

- Study groups devoted to specific areas of specialization can encourage the cross-fertilization of ideas among colleagues. They can also help new and established faculty become aware of new ideas and trends occurring within their discipline which are not necessarily directly related to their own research. These groups could also include graduate students.
- Public lectures by visiting scholars and readings by authors can also encourage social and intellectual exchange between colleagues as well as between faculty, students, and the general public.
- Where possible, inter-disciplinary exchange should be facilitated, through joint arrangement of social events, colloquiums, or public lectures/readings.

Intellectual Support

- During key grant-application periods, colleagues should be particularly open to mentoring one another, sharing valuable insight and experience wherever possible.
- Collaborative projects should be encouraged within and between departments. Increasing amounts of funding are earmarked for collaborative work. To increase proficiency in this area, training for writing collaborative grants should be made available and widely publicized.
- Encourage faculty attendance at graduate students' thesis proposal and defense sessions, if they are open to the public.

"A sense of intellectual community has less to do with laboratory and office space than with relationships, opportunities for personal expression, and climates conducive to collegiality, mutual appreciation, encouragement, assistance, and sharing of ideas, an open mind, helping hand and generous heart."

~ Finney et al. (2008) in *Creating a Positive Departmental Climate at Virginia Tech: A Compendium of Successful Strategies*

Social Events

Make social events a priority within the department and faculty.



Most departments and faculties have social events which mark the beginning of each year, but this is not enough. Friendships can, of course, spring up spontaneously during initial meetings, but most only develop over time and through repeated encounters. There are many kinds of encounters which could be arranged: short, daily coffee breaks; regular, but informal get-togethers over lunch or breakfast; Friday afternoons at the pub; monthly wine-and-cheeses; barbeques; family picnics; and term parties.

Social Events should reflect the domestic situation of your faculty.

If your faculty consists of several young families, try to include some events during the year which can accommodate children. Special attention should be paid to whether the locale and timing of the event can meet the needs of children. Ideally, some of the party budget should be reserved for hiring babysitters who will be able to distract and entertain the children while their parents engage in adult conversation. If, on the other hand, most of your faculty members are childless, family events may be limited.

Social events should be as inexpensive as possible.

Although it may be pleasant to have one event during the year which involves considerable expense (i.e. during the December holiday period), too many costly events can prevent the participation of the whole faculty. If more than one event is planned during the year, new faculty members may feel almost actively excluded from the party as it will seem to them quite obvious that the event exceeds their financial means and that the senior faculty is ignoring their particular circumstances.

Domestic Issues

The domestic situation of new faculty members should be recognized and accommodated.

Many new faculty members face the prospect of moving not only themselves to a new town or city, but also spouses/partners and young children. The academy has been slow to accommodate the reality that many new scholars have spouses/partners with professional careers, indeed many with academic careers, and that many are women who either have recently begun their families or plan to in the near future. In the 2003 Killam Lecture, Shirley M. Tilghman, President of Princeton University, argues that “the single most effective thing that a university can do to hire and retain faculty in all disciplines is to promote among students, faculty and staff a healthy balance between family and work”. We recommend that your College and Department develop a plan to address these issues with policies such as:

“The single most effective thing that a university can do to hire and retain faculty in all disciplines is to promote among students, faculty and staff a healthy balance between family and work.”

~ Shirley M. Tilghman,
President of Princeton
University



- Directing spouses/partners of new faculty seeking satisfying employment within the local area to either Marshall's Human Resources or the Career Services Center. MU-Advance has also developed a website to assist faculty spouses and partners in locating employment (<http://www.marshall.edu/mu-advance/dualcareer.asp>). If it is not possible for the spouse/partner to find local employment and the spouse/partner chooses not to leave his or her

current job, then the department should be prepared to be flexible in its residency requirements for the new appointee.

- Departments and faculties should avoid scheduling meetings late in the day, as this will create undue conflicts for faculty with young children. Given that some faculty members begin their days with 8 a.m. classes, it is reasonable for them to expect their day to end at 4:30 p. m.

Creative & Scholarly Activities

Departments should create supportive scholarly environments.

Encouragement of creative and scholarly achievements is a vital



component of faculty development. There are several ways in which we can support and acknowledge the scholarly accomplishments of our colleagues. Many of these ideas are inexpensive and relatively simple to implement, but can provide big pay-offs with regard to

faculty satisfaction and retention efforts.

Achievement Acknowledgement

- In department newsletters, create a regular feature to which all faculty are encouraged to submit information about recent publications, poster presentations, and public lectures.
- Once a year, arrange a faculty-wide celebration of major publications (books, textbooks, editions, etc.) published by full-time and adjunct faculty members.
- Spotlight faculty accomplishments on the main departmental or college webpage, or develop a page devoted to the achievements of faculty members.
- Faculty should be invited to share works-in-progress with their colleagues through organized activities, such as department colloquiums. The invitation to do so should be made public, with clearly stated expectations and deadlines. In other words, colloquiums should not be formed through private, informal invitation. New tenure track and term faculty as well as post-docs, whose work will likely be unknown to organizers, may be overlooked and inadvertently alienated from the process.