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Helping Junior Faculty Achieve Success in Promotion and Tenure

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Helping Junior Faculty Achieve Success in Promotion and Tenure

Abstract

Part and parcel of the chair's job is to prepare junior faculty to achieve success. In academic departments that typically means achieving tenure and promotion to associate professor. In my experience, the success of a junior faculty member has as much to do with what the department and chair do as with the faculty member's native ability. Junior faculty need to learn what activities are rewarded and what are not, what strategies they may use during their probationary period to develop the evidence needed for a successful tenure case, and how to present their materials in their file—what evidence is needed, what arguments to make or avoid, and how to put it all together. To that end, one could argue that a chair whose faculty are not successful is not doing her or his job if the department has hired well. The ideas presented in this article offer chairs some approaches to providing the support junior faculty need to convert their abilities into a successful tenure case.

Disciplines

Communication | Higher Education | Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

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Helping Junior Faculty Achieve Success in Promotion and Tenure

Jon Hess

Part and parcel of the chair's job is to prepare junior faculty to achieve success. In academic departments that typically means achieving tenure and promotion to associate professor. In my experience, the success of a junior faculty member has as much to do with what the department and chair do as with the faculty member's native ability. Junior faculty need to learn what activities are rewarded and what are not, what strategies they may use during their probationary period to develop the evidence needed for a successful tenure case, and how to present their materials in their file—what evidence is needed, what arguments to make or avoid, and how to put it all together. To that end, one could argue that a chair whose faculty are not successful is not doing her or his job if the department has hired well. The ideas presented below offer chairs some approaches to providing the support junior faculty need to convert their abilities into a successful tenure case.

I. Empower yourself and the department.

- A. Educate yourself about promotion and tenure (P&T) decisions at the college and university level.
- B. Learn about criteria used by college and university P&T committees, with special attention to any areas where those committees may feel that department criteria are not stringent enough.
- C. Be aware of changes in standards that evolve across time (e.g., increasing quantity or quality of publications expected).
- D. Make your department influential in this process. Get faculty onto college and university P&T committees. This may take lobbying the dean or provost (if committee is appointed) or cooperating with other departments to get the votes (if committee is elected), especially if your department is small.

II. Communicate with junior faculty.

- A. Be sure new faculty understand the criteria early.
 - 1. Preview the entire P&T process in new faculty's first week so they understand what they are working toward.
 - 2. Be sure they know what has to be done, who makes decisions, what criteria will be used, and what evidence is highly regarded.
- B. Invite members of university P&T committees to talk with junior faculty and chair. Issues to discuss include:
 - 1. Most common strengths and weaknesses in files
 - 2. What topics are most talked about
 - 3. What evidence is compelling
 - 4. Most common reasons for negative decisions
 - 5. How strongly discipline-specific criteria are considered
 - 6. What standards are constant and what are changing
 - 7. What evidence is most impressive

III. Support junior faculty progress toward tenure

- A. Help them get organized and maintain good records.
 - 1. Provide files for teaching, research, and service.

2. Include a single-page list in each file of criteria for that area and what evidence to collect.
 - B. Keep track of what junior faculty are doing so you can guide their efforts
 1. Regular formal or informal conversations about tenure can be a good way to do this.
 2. Informal conversations might be over coffee with the junior faculty once a semester.
 - C. Provide annual written feedback on their progress toward tenure
 - D. Find ways to support the development of junior faculty
 1. You have to take initiative, because they often won't know what to ask about.
 2. Examples:
 - a. Schedule them to teach a graduate class that facilitates research they're doing.
 - b. Help them find funding (perhaps from the dean) to send them to a teaching development conference they might not have known about.
 - E. Offer candidates the opportunity to provide timely responses to any evidence in their file that they feel is inaccurate or misleading (this should be used sparingly).
- IV. Help candidates develop strongest possible file.
- A. Consider assigning a senior faculty to help them prepare their file.
 - B. Have department or candidate provide relevant contextualizing info in P&T file—keep this brief, but provide enough to help reviewers (internal or external) understand and interpret the evidence.

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Mentoring Faculty Colleagues¹

Jeff Kerssen-Griep

Department chairs often come from—and return to—faculty ranks. That temporary status shift complicates interactions with colleagues, even (or especially?) given communication scholars' rich understandings of the process. Knowing how to collegially and productively manage key interpersonal aspects of leading an academic unit can simplify a chair's unusual supervisory role for everyone involved.

I. Key Needs

- A. The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's Faculty Career Enhancement (FCE) program names as key issues requiring faculty mentoring, time, and space:

¹ Harvested from Stanford's "Tomorrow's Professor" Listserv: <http://cgi.stanford.edu/~dept-ctl/tomprof/postings.php#>

1. The need for faculty professional and personal balance.
 2. The need for intellectual and social community. And
 3. The need for experimentation, risk-taking, and innovation.
- B. Meet one-on-one with faculty, framing conversation around perceptions, strengths, and priorities:
1. What is your perception of our department?
 2. What strengths do you bring to what we are about and the students we are here to serve?
 3. What are your priorities for the next year?
 4. What departmental priorities are most important for our advancement and academic excellence?
- C. General Rules to convey to mentees:
1. Know your strengths, interests, and values—know yourself.
 2. Understand what the department hired you to do, and deliver it. Keep current on expectations as they evolve over time.
 3. Further Your Institutional and Departmental Missions in meaningful ways.
 4. Never Lie.
 5. Respect Everyone’s work, time, and efforts:
 - a. Be collegial in all your working relationships.
 - b. Avoid creating antagonistic relationships.
 - c. Don’t focus on demonstrating your own brilliance.
 6. Pick Your Battles.
 7. Own Your Mistakes.
 8. Because we live in such a small world, it really is important not to burn bridges, no matter how tempted you might be.
 9. Craft Your Role with Intention:
 - a. Think about how you would like to be perceived and then behave in ways that promote your intended image.
 - b. Craft the story now so you’ll be proud to tell it later.
 10. Remember that a sense of humor goes a long way (and is sorely lacking in so many staid, self-important academics!).
- II. Be attuned to impacts of a mentee’s sex, race, ethnicity, or cultural background.
- A. Mentors coming from a dominant culture must transcend their fears or biases about other races and ethnicities.
 - B. Mentors need to find ways to understand and empathize with mentees’ life situations.
 - C. Mentors need to find ways to talk openly about those things.
- III. Teacher Preparation Matters (pun intended)
- A. Mentoring can greatly enhance the process of making tacit knowledge explicit.
 - B. Through the mentoring process individuals are allowed to interrogate their practice, reflect and then reappraise the values, theories and aspirations attached to their individual theories of learning and teaching.
 1. A successful faculty mentoring program should revolve around classroom teaching.

2. Give junior colleagues in-class observation not solely for promotion and tenure but also to give feedback on the development of classroom teaching skills.
- IV. An effective curriculum for mentoring new faculty members should include four components:
 - A. Review of educational theory.
 - B. Development and mastery of a diversity of teaching techniques.
 - C. Collegial networking and the reciprocal process of testing theory.
 - D. Examination of teaching practices.
 - V. Mentees ultimately must make their own way; mentors must be prepared to face thorny issues and to understand their efforts may not pay off quickly or perhaps ever.
 - A. Mentees learn most through observing, doing, commenting, and questioning, rather than simply listening.
 - B. Mentoring is also seen as a powerful tool for professional development and learning for the mentor.
 - C. Know what parameters to keep with mentees so they don't become dependent on / addicted to you.
 - D. It is seen as a means for encouraging systematic critical reflection. It is also a powerful tool to help mentors articulate the skills and knowledge they may have which are frequently tacit. Making explicit what one does and thus allowing someone else to learn from that knowledge is a powerful tool to have: mentoring facilitates the learning of such tools.
 - E. Always remember that faculty are peers and not subordinates, and treat them accordingly. The vast majority are hardworking, cooperative, and collegial, though much supervisory energy gets spent on those who aren't.

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