



Top Ten Things New Faculty Would Like to Hear from Colleagues

"As an antidote to the triple threat of evaluation, isolation, and overwork, ... some advice on what helps new faculty succeed..."
-Sorcinelli (2004)

Consider the following top ten list of things new faculty members would like to hear from their chairs, their senior colleagues, their mentors as they try to teach well, produce fruitful research, earn tenure, pay attention to a partner and children, lead an examined life, and make plans for the future (Sorcinelli, 2004).

1) Remember: you are great. We hired you for a reason. We hired you for success. We make a huge, up front effort to get talented early-career and the goal is to have you succeed. Newcomers, with new energy and ideas, help us improve our department. You are rising stock, an investment in the future of the department and institution. Despite your greatness, however, you aren't expected to figure out everything about this department and institution on your own. Reach out to all of us in the department. Ask questions. Ask for help.

2) You don't have to be superwoman or superman tomorrow. Or even next month. The senior professor who is an outstanding teacher, has built a daunting research program, and is president of his professional society did not get there in a year. There may be one or two new faculty members who appear to manage it all in their first year, but such an expectation is unrealistic. It takes new faculty two or three years to get established; so, pace yourself for the long run. Things will take off more quickly than you think.

3) Figure out what matters (tenure). Every department and college differs in its expectations for research, teaching and service. Sometimes, departmental and college requirements can be vague or contradictory. Don't try to figure things out on your own. Talk to everyone. Talk to your department chair and to the dean, but remember that what they say may be constrained by pressures bearing on them at the moment. You can't be guaranteed that the same administrators will be around when you go up for tenure. Talk to recently tenured faculty and talk to that respected, older,

straight shooting professor who can give you solid, realistic advice. Seek input on managing your teaching and research goals as well as your annual faculty report, and the tenure timetable.

4) Decide what doesn't matter. Everyone works hard. But you're not going to help your career development if you are working hard on something that does not matter. It's okay to serve in places that will be of some benefit to you. For example, being in charge of the departmental seminar series may help you establish relationships with important colleagues in your field. Invite them to give a departmental seminar. Their input about your work will be valuable, and you will be expanding your network of colleagues beyond our campus. A positive, national reputation does not hurt in influencing local tenure decisions.

5) Teaching matters. Increasingly, teaching matters a lot in most departments. Senior colleagues are here to help you figure out where your teaching is going and why you are taking it there. The teaching and learning center (URI Institutional Development Center) or your dean or your department chair can introduce you to teachers in and outside of our department who are committed to teaching and student learning. They have a range of skills and experiences worth tapping, for making lectures more effective, facilitating discussion, testing and assigning grades, and teaching with technology. Put simply, departments can't afford faculty who can't teach their way out of a paper bag. So instead, we subscribe to the "open-bag policy:" we regard teaching as worthy, public, and always developing and evolving. We'll be talking about and assessing teaching and student learning all along the way with you.

6) Make a plan. As you are figuring out 3, 4, and 5, make a plan. Consult with your department chair about the priorities you set. As you pursue your plan, here are a few tips. Play to your strengths. Cultivate a specialty that you enjoy and do well. Develop a "big picture" for your teaching, for your research and service. As well, think about how are you helping to define and complement the department's mission. How will your work help to enhance the department? Finally, try not to avoid or procrastinate on the important tasks in your plan.

7) Think "mentors," plural. Those who are older are sometimes wise and can give you realistic and solid advice on a lot of issues. Mentors inside the department can help you with issues of teaching and scholarship and also on how to read the culture. But reach out to colleagues beyond the department. There might be someone outside your department or college who can provide you a broader view of the discipline.

8) Invite community. It's the rare department that can unanimously achieve the ideal in relationship harmony. But most of us want more collegiality. If you share a sense of excitement about your teaching and scholarship, it will bring colleagues to you who can contribute to your work.

Almost everything you encounter, someone else has, too. Track down our successful scholars and teachers and consult with them. Don't hide your own teaching and scholarship away. Tell us what you're doing. Don't forget your own students. Be sure to invite their feedback. They just might be your best teachers.

9) Don't work on 15 things all at once. Nothing will ever get done. The good news is that as a new faculty member, you'll probably get better at juggling multiple roles and tasks. The bad news is it remains a challenge throughout an academic career. Pick one thing that matters out of your responsibilities and tasks. Try to make sure you are devoting at least a quarter of your time to that one thing and splitting the other three-fourths of your time among the 14 other things. Once that one thing went "out the door," turn to the next thing that matters, so there is always one project getting a good chunk of your time. It doesn't always work, but it is helpful to hold as an ideal plan.

10) Have a life. Take care of yourself and your life outside of work. Whether the fatigue is emotional or physical, work can be an effort when you are too tired to put on a public face, to smile and chat at the mailboxes, to stand in front of the classroom. So you must take care of yourself, "fill the tank," whatever that is to you. If you are drained, you can't be imaginative in the ways your teaching and research require. If you take care of yourself, you'll have more time and energy to do what matters and you'll enjoy this job, despite all the pressures. Mark Twain once said of Richard Wagner's music, "It's better than it sounds." For most of us, an academic career is better than it sounds. For some of us, it remains the greatest job in the world.