

Mentoring Junior Faculty at Liberal Arts Colleges

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Recruitment of faculty, particularly faculty from underrepresented groups, is only a first step for the institution. Providing a nurturing, supportive environment where a diverse, talented group of young people can thrive is equally if not more important and challenging. The research literature supports the generally held belief that mentoring programs are key for the success and the retention of junior faculty members. Provosts, Department Chairs and departments, in general must protect their junior faculty, nurture them, avoid overburdening them, and avoid drawing them into the politics of the department and the institution.

Role of Mentors: Mentors should act as advocates for the new faculty members, and advise, support, provide critical feedback and highlight opportunities. Mentors should help the new faculty member understand the culture of the institution, but not use the relationship as a vehicle for enculturation. It is important to clearly distinguish between protection and paternalism. Mentors should balance what the institution needs from its new faculty members along with the goals and needs of the mentee. Finding the overlap between these two areas is the 'sweet spot,' if you will. When mentoring is done well, the relationship builds bridges and establishes a level of trust, familiarity and advocacy.

Teaching, Scholarship and Community Service at a Selective Liberal Arts College

Advice from More Senior Faculty to Junior Faculty
at Small Liberal Arts Colleges

- Reach out to other young faculty and postdoctoral fellows in the area.
- Build connections with assistant faculty members at your home institution
- Protect your time. Working at home at least one day per week can be productive. For those who must be on-campus (especially in the sciences), find a 'safe' physical space to work where interruptions by students and colleagues will be minimized.
- Reach out to colleagues who are recognized for outstanding teaching, have coffee with them, ask for copies of their syllabi. Ask if you can visit their classes. Pick colleagues that have different teaching styles.
- Go to Department Meetings, Faculty meetings, but avoid the politics.
- Find a balance between an open door policy with students/colleagues and a closed door policy to protect your time.
- Be proactive about getting help. Invite colleagues to visit your classroom, not just the chair of your department

- Document *everything* that you do. Keep track of everything for the end of year evaluations and reports.
- To succeed in a liberal arts environment, you have to love teaching. It should be your center of gravity.
- Work closely with students, but avoid getting involved in their personal lives.
- Always remember it is a great place to work. Students think you are important, there is high quality, high engagement of teaching, great facilities and interesting colleagues.
- Opportunities for collaborations with people outside your field can be productive and enriching in ways you never expected.
- Have mechanisms in place to achieve research goals. Take advantage of shared facilities, library holdings, travel funds, research funds.
- Do not dismiss committee work. Committee work affords you the opportunity to meet people outside of your department, gives you a sense of investment, and empowers you to play a role in shaping the institution. But learn to set boundaries and limits on your time.
- If possible, ask to serve on committees where the work is interesting to you. Do not serve on a committee that will just frustrate the hell out of you.
- Observe (sit, listen and watch closely) for the first few months. The power structure among the faculty as a whole and in your department will become evident.
- Just because you disagree with someone does not mean you cannot be good colleagues and possibly friends.
- Unfortunately you will encounter difficult colleagues, and in some cases, these will be senior, well-established members of the faculty in your institution. You need to be bigger and more mature than these colleagues.
- Embrace the area that you live in, even if it is an isolated environment, far from an urban area. Find things you like to do, take up new hobbies, learn about the local community.