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# Understanding Early Faculty Experience: On Becoming Teachers, Scholars, and Community Members

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## Understanding Early Faculty Experience: On Becoming Teachers, Scholars, and Community Members

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*This article focuses on findings from a qualitative study of the experiences of pretenured faculty within their first two years in the academy. The authors share narratives from faculty participants who are diverse in their disciplinary backgrounds and prior experiences, focusing on the expectations they had upon entering the profession, the challenges they encountered, and what they found helpful for meeting the many demands of faculty life. Their stories provide evidence of the enduring need for faculty learning communities. Implications of this work can inform the efforts of faculty developers, college and university administrators, and anyone with an interest in supporting tenure-track faculty.*

The requirements to be a successful teacher, scholar, and community member are undergoing a period of change at many institutions of higher education, and such shifts are ratcheting up expectations of full-time faculty members nationwide (Modern Language Association Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion, 2006). How can we support tenure-track faculty who are navigating the professoriate during

such tumultuous times? One approach is to examine the experience of faculty members as they enter the academy and begin to carry out the manifold obligations of teaching, research, and service—an investigation that should be ongoing during such a challenging era of change. In this article, we (the authors—a former full-time faculty developer who is undergoing the tenure experience as a regular faculty member in higher education administration, a former clinical faculty member who is currently a tenure-track faculty member in counseling, and a businesswoman who is studying higher education administration at the doctoral level) share findings from a qualitative study on the teaching, research, and service experiences of newly hired tenure-track faculty. In the pages to follow, a short presentation of the research literature on early-career faculty and the research methodology and methods employed in this study provides context, while subsequent sections focus on participant narratives and implications of these findings for faculty development during this dynamic period in higher education's history.

### **Studies of New Faculty**

The attention that social scientists focus on a given social group tends to vary directly with its size or its status. The larger the group or the higher its status the more attention it commands, and vice versa. The higher education literature on new and junior faculty confirms this generalization—with a vengeance. (Finkelstein & LaCelle-Peterson, 1992, p. 5)

Finkelstein and LaCelle-Peterson (1992) offered this critical commentary on the amount of research that had been focused on early career faculty prior to the 1990s. The early 1990s were, however, a time of adjustment for higher education. The large number of professors that were hired during the rapid growth years of the late 1960s and early '70s were approaching retirement, and there was no critical mass of new professors readily available (Finkelstein & LaCelle-Peterson, 1992). College and university leaders needed to know why and, even more importantly, how to recruit high-quality tenure-track candidates. As a result, according to Finkelstein and LaCelle-Peterson, more researchers were drawn to the study of early career faculty.

Olsen and Sorcinelli (1992) conducted a study of tenure-track faculty hired at a major research university. Their findings suggested that over the pretenure period, the early-career faculty members' time spent on teaching decreased, while their time on research and stress about the tenure process increased. Satisfaction with teaching and its intrinsic rewards remained

high for these faculty over the years, while their overall job satisfaction declined significantly due to sensing a lack of institutional support and recognition. Menges (1999) conducted a study of incoming pretenure faculty at various types of institutions (community college, rural and urban liberal arts schools, comprehensive and research universities). His new-faculty participants reported encountering great anxiety, facing unrelenting demands on their time, which influenced their personal and family lives, and being disappointed in the amount of support they received.

In 2000, Rice, Sorcinelli, and Austin published the landmark study *Heeding New Voices*, a large-scale project led by major figures in higher education and faculty development, aimed at understanding graduate student and new faculty views. The participants' interview narratives painted a picture of early-career professors who were frustrated by the uncertainties of the tenure system, desiring deeper community connections and seeking a more balanced life. Rice et al.'s (2000) study prompted some important changes, including recognizing the need for early career faculty mentoring and an effort to develop more opportunities for teaching and research support.

Subsequent works have documented the continuing high levels of stress for tenure-track faculty. In a longitudinal study on new faculty in counselor education, Magnuson, Norem, and Lonneman-Doroff (2009) found that faculty members uniformly spoke of vulnerability, stress, and concerns about their continued employment. The increasing demands on faculty are reflected in increasing work hours; the average number of hours worked by faculty grew from 50.61 in 1993 to 52.12 in 2004 (Townsend & Rosser, 2007), with attendant escalations in tensions over work/life balance. For example:

At one conference, a graduate student asked a celebrated senior researcher what was the secret of his success. The reply was "childlessness. . . ." An industry of articles discusses the balancing (or fire torch juggling) act that comprises being on the tenure track as well as the mommy-wife, husband-father, or even caregiver-to-elderly-parents track. (Perlmutter, 2010, pp. 125-126)

The current academic community faces perhaps even more pronounced changes than were seen in the 1990s. Higher education is enduring declining governmental support (Hainline, Gaines, Feather, Padilla, & Terry, 2010), rising demands for accountability (Townsend & Rosser, 2007), changing student and faculty demographics (Hainline et al., 2010), escalating research expectations (Fairweather, 2005), new legal and regulatory requirements (Dowden, 2011), intensifying competition globally and from

for-profit institutions (Lechuga, 2006), fast-developing technologies (Lechuga, 2006), and the increasing use of contingent/adjunct faculty (Kezar & Maxey, 2012). This article, written by researchers who are sympathetic to juggling the myriad demands of new faculty life, is intended to provide some of the voices of today's early career faculty during this latest period of intense academic change.

### **Methodology/Methods**

In order better to understand the teaching, research, and service experiences of newly hired faculty, we used a constructivist approach. According to Patton (2002), "Constructivists study the multiple realities constructed by people and the implications of those constructions for their lives and interactions with others" (p. 96). We aimed to examine the various constructions of reality related to acclimating to faculty life that our participants held and the impact of such constructions on their professional and personal lives. Based on our positionality—two of us being pretenure faculty members struggling to find balance ourselves—we were curious to see if our experience was similar to or different than others'. Our shared status and lack of positional power likely made participants more comfortable and apt to share their stories with us. However, as qualitative researchers we were mindful of the need to set our constructions of reality aside enough to hear what our participants were experiencing so that their narratives, not ours, were the focus of this work.

#### *Participant Selection*

Although not a university-sanctioned project, university administrators at a private, religiously-affiliated Midwestern university identified faculty members from various disciplines who met our criterion of being in their first two years of employment in a tenure-track position. After the project received Institutional Review Board approval, each potential participant was sent an e-mail describing the nature of the research project, ensuring confidentiality, and requesting that he or she meet with us for an approximately 45-minute interview. Follow-up phone calls and e-mails from this "purposeful, criterion sampling" (Patton, 2002, p. 243) resulted in recruitment of a total of 14 faculty informants—six women and eight men from business, education, arts and sciences, and engineering fields, and more diverse in race and nationality than the general university faculty population. Participants' teaching experience spanned from 0-13 years, and they had attended a variety of institutional types for their doctoral

work. Of the original 23 faculty members who were eligible to participate, two had left the university, three did not respond to our multiple requests, and four declined involvement due to feeling too vulnerable to share their views.

### *The Interviews*

All three of us, either working solo or in pairs, conducted the individual face-to-face interviews. These interviews were held in a location chosen by the participant—usually an office or available conference room. Prior to the scheduled interview, participants were given a description of the project and consent form, a demographic form, and a pre-interview written questionnaire to collect general information and provide participants with a sense of the type of questions that would be asked in the interviews, where a deeper level of insight could be gained. The purpose of the demographics form was to gather basic participant information so a general profile of the interviewees could be created. The pre-interview questions were designed to prime participants' thinking about their experience as faculty members so that our time during interviews would be focused and yield thoughtful responses. We used an "interview guide" approach (Patton, 2002), which "provides a framework within which the interviewer . . . develop[s] questions, sequence[s] those questions, and make[s] decisions about which information to pursue in greater depth" (p. 344). By developing an interview guide, we aimed to maintain consistency across interviewers while maintaining the freedom to follow up with appropriate questions based on the flow of conversation. Sample questions from the pre-interview questionnaire and interview included the following:

1. How closely have your expectations of faculty life matched the reality of the role? What did you expect prior to starting? Were there any surprises?
2. What are your main goals as they relate to teaching, research, and service? What are the greatest obstacles to achieving your goals in this position? What support have you found helpful for the challenges?
3. If you could change something about your faculty role, what would it be?

Interviews were audiotaped so that they could be transcribed verbatim to capture informants' specific statements. The interviewees chose (or, if they did not have a preference, were assigned) a pseudonym to protect their identities. Those pseudonyms are used throughout the article.

### *Data Analysis*

All three of us were involved in data analysis, individually coding the data and “attempt[ing] to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2002, p. 452). One of us (Mary) used NVivo to sort and code the data, while the other two (Michelle and Michele) sorted data into clusters manually. Once we all had coded the data on our own, we brought our work together to compare our organizational systems and compile like ideas into the resultant themes.

In an effort to address “elements of goodness” (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006, p. 119), or establish the appropriate quality and rigor for qualitative work, we triangulated interview and questionnaire data for consistency, performed member checking with participants to ensure our themes reflected their perspectives, utilized multiple analysis approaches (NVivo and manual sorting processes) and analysts (all three researchers), and reflected on the relationship between our research purpose and methods.

We chose to present themes from the interview data under three main categories of the overarching story that faculty members shared—their expectations, supports, and challenges—so that the narratives speak clearly to each category and can inform readers’ understanding. Under Expectations, participants speak about what influenced their notions of faculty life, their motivations to enter the profession, and how they prioritize the roles of teaching, research, and service. The section on Supports offers sources of assistance, including the importance of relationships with colleagues and campus administrators and the potential of collaborative work. Finally, the section on Challenges spotlights the specific trials these faculty members faced, illuminating those areas in need of attention.

## **Findings**

### *Expectations of New Faculty*

When asked the question, “How closely have your expectations of faculty life matched the reality of the role?” respondents detailed how their expectations were shaped prior to starting their position. They also shared their perspectives regarding the advantages of the faculty member’s role and the priorities related to teaching, research, and service.

### **Sources of Information**

Most of these new faculty had entered the profession with some pre-conceived ideas about their positions and, through time and experience,

had found those ideas to be either supported or challenged. These new assistant professors had initially gained a sense of their roles in academia through sources such as family members, friends, advisors/mentors, and experience as a graduate or teaching assistant. Adam remarked, "I've got an uncle who's on the faculty . . . so I had some insights there. I've got a cousin who has his doctorate and [is a faculty member] . . . so I've got that perspective." Scott also shared, "I had a lot of experience with people who were in kind of similar positions that went to grad school like me that I had spoken to. . . . I think I had kind of a good idea about what was in store when I came here." Some respondents explained how advisors or mentors played a role in the development of their ideas of what faculty life would be like. May shared initial impressions from her advisor: "When I work[ed] . . . where I [got] my PhD, I work[ed] days and nights in our lab. And my advisor was available almost all of the time. So I think I expected that [a] faculty member's life would be very busy and they would work extremely hard." Adam, Scott, and May portrayed their current experience as faculty members as being similar to what they had heard about from others.

Knowledge from others and graduate school or post-doctoral positions contributed to new faculty expectations, but it was actual faculty experience that eventually rendered those expectations either valid or misguided. Some new faculty members expressed a disconnection between their expectations and current experience. Norma offered that while she believed she had an intellectual understanding of the position before she began, her real-life experience was different:

I knew what the position entailed because I have many, many colleagues who have gone through assistant professor, associate professor, and full professor. So I wasn't naïve to the time commitment. . . . That being said, it is overwhelming. It's an overwhelming time commitment and my one comment is that it feels like you're drinking from a fire hose.

Mary shared her disillusionment about the lack of interaction with other faculty poignantly:

I had thought that I would have all these vigorous discussions . . . and now, it's like that almost never happens. I almost never have discussions where we talk about ideas that could change our discipline or change the world or something. . . . I honestly, I didn't get it that I was going to spend most of my time alone in my office.

Thus, some participants seemed to enter the professoriate with a prac-



tical view of what the role would entail, while others did not have such preparation.

### **Advantages of the Role**

When speaking about benefits of the faculty position, participants discussed having freedom/autonomy, opportunities to discover and develop new ideas, pride and respect, security and stability, and student success as being most important.

Respondents agreed about freedom and autonomy being motivators for entering academia, and they echoed Chris's sentiments below:

Even though there is a lot of work and there is a lot of stress, I mean, there always is that anxiety . . . of getting published or not, that always stays there. I think that it's definitely outweighed by the freedom—freedom in the research that I do . . . what I teach in my courses, how I mentor the graduate students, there's a lot of freedom. I really value that a lot.

Coupled to the idea of freedom, many participants spoke enthusiastically about research as an invigorating part of the job. Ray reflected that "It's really exciting to put stuff together that no one's ever either looked at, or researched or even thought about. . . . That's the excitement of what we do, and it's constant. If I could get paid for just doing that, I would do that for the rest of my life."

Respondents also mentioned being motivated by respect and recognition, and they shared feelings of pride when speaking of their professions. Job security was another factor that motivated faculty to enter academia. Susan shared that "a growing family" prompted her to seek a position that did not rely on less-stable grant funds for her research and salary.

Finally, for many new faculty, helping students succeed is a powerful reward. Norma shared, "Getting a publication, getting a grant, they're givens, but seeing my students succeed and seeing the looks on their faces when something worked and it's something that they devised . . . that's probably the best professional reward is that legacy, to see [students] succeed and see them go on."

### **Priorities of the Role**

The data regarding respondents' expectations reveal the following themes: New faculty prioritize (or are being asked to prioritize) research over teaching, and they believe that teaching and research are valued more than service. Douglas shared his perspective on the university's expectations of him: "I'm under the impression that my performance is

50% research, 40% teaching, 10% service." The majority of new faculty named research as their number one priority. Ray communicated this view succinctly: "I mean, the department has said you need to focus on your research, so that's what I'm doing."

Although research looms large in the minds of many new faculty members, the majority also highlighted teaching as extremely important. Participants seemed to value not just teaching, but teaching *well*, the primary goal being student learning. Chris defined his teaching as "spurring [students] on to be curious. . . . With teaching, it's getting better at that, over and over and over." For many of these new faculty members, student learning is about much more than gaining content. For Norma, student learning goes beyond time spent in her class: "I want them to remember that they learned something in my class. Not just material, but about themselves, and [that] it made them a better student and a better person, because that makes them a better member of the community when they get out."

Given the emphasis participants placed on student learning, coupled with other time-consuming tasks associated with their positions, it is not surprising that some faculty feel they do not have enough time to spend on their teaching. When reflecting about what he would change about his job, Alex stated, "I would spend more time on my teaching. . . . Sometimes, because I have [a] deadline for my paper, I kind of, you know [say to myself] 'the class is okay.'"

For most of the new faculty we interviewed, service seemed to be an *ad-hoc* activity rather than a priority. Bob's remarks about service represent the overall sentiment: "I mean to be honest my service goals are really just to do what I'm asked to do. . . . I don't think I really set goals in regards to service beyond being willing to serve, I suppose." Susan's perspective on service was similar to Bob's in that she expressed a willingness to contribute in whatever way she is asked, but she is not seeking out such opportunities. She shared, "I hope to save as much of my time for my teaching or research-based activities, but I don't want to shy away from whatever is required of me as a good citizen of the department. . . . I just want to stay under the radar."

Most participants had ideas about what faculty life would entail. The surprises came in the time required in each area of the faculty member role and the benefits and drawbacks to working autonomously. Their priorities were influenced by promotion and tenure requirements that put research above teaching and service. For some, this has resulted in a tug-of-war between the demands of (and their commitments to) quality teaching and research.

*Supports for New Faculty*

Supports for new faculty seemed to come in both informal (via colleagues) and formal forms (administration). Peers and department chairs played pivotal roles for most respondents, providing assistance across teaching, research, service, and sometimes even personal domains.

While acclimating to faculty life, many participants recognized the importance of establishing relationships with colleagues and administrators, as well as collaborating whenever possible. Bob found connecting with others critical to his success:

I would say . . . do more than just figure out who your dean, chair, and P&T chair are. Try to make some relationships there on some level. . . . It just helps in terms of understanding the culture of where you are and . . . contextualizing your journey a little bit in terms of how to divvy up time, how to divvy up efforts, how to think about certain political issues. . . .

Collaboration, some new faculty found, can be a useful tool to enhance their work. Scott stated, "Often I'll find people who are working on things relatively close to what I am, and open up new areas for me to investigate, or maybe know things that I haven't thought about and actually can add to my own work."

With the exception of those who taught in other institutions as graduate assistants or in post-doctoral positions, many respondents shared having some difficulty adapting to their teaching role. For these faculty members, interaction with colleagues became important for their ongoing development. May shared how her colleagues provided her with tools: "I didn't teach full-time before I joined this department. And . . . my colleagues helped me a lot. . . . They showed me examples and they showed me their syllabus, and they showed me their assignments and their exams." Colleagues also provided emotional support for new faculty who encountered challenges with their teaching. Chris advised,

Get to know your colleagues. It's worth the effort because they can be a huge support system. . . . It turns out most of my fears, worries, anxieties are shared by the vast majority of people, so it's not like you're, like, "What? You're worried about that? You should never worry about that." Usually, it's, "Oh, yeah, that worry's going to remain with you forever." Or "Eventually, that'll get better."

New faculty members often relied on department chairs to help them be successful in their role as teachers and researchers. Norma shared that

her department chair provided moral and professional support: “We have a fabulous head of department. . . . She has been [an] enormous support to me. . . . As a sounding board, she’s just been really, really great . . . from a career perspective, as well as a scientific perspective and also a personal perspective.” Faculty development programs were an additional source of support. Alex mentioned, “We have some teaching programs, some mid-term [evaluation] programs that [are] instructional.”

Participants seemed to feel supported for their research, whether through department travel budgets, funding for ancillary expenses, or services from the university grants office. The main trend that emerged from respondents’ remarks regarding support for service was protection from time-consuming efforts. Alex shared, “In terms of service, my department knows that service sometimes will cost a lot of time. So, normally, my department takes care of me so they do not want me to spend too much time on . . . service.”

Based on the complexity of individual positioning within the higher education organization, it is unlikely that all new faculty members experience the same level and intensity of support from peers, collaboration, administration, and university resources. Thus, for support to be optimal, early-career faculty members’ challenges must be continually monitored.

### *Challenges for New Faculty*

Faculty members face many challenges in the first two years of their academic careers. Participants spoke about the trials they encountered in teaching, engaging in research, considering service activities, and navigating the university organization. Specifically, the struggles they shared centered on maintaining quality in teaching, research, and service; dealing with institutional politics; and managing time and stress.

Some participants candidly discussed the tension between expectations for good teaching and tenure requirements related to scholarship and how this tension impacts their time spent in teaching-related tasks. Doug shared,

My tenure’s going to be determined by getting research funding. . . . So I try to approach each day that I’ve got to succeed as a researcher. . . . But the people off the record tell me, “Don’t go overboard on teaching; you can get obsessed trying to make something that’s great perfect—you’ll never get there.”

Faculty respondents discussed how much time it took them to engage in teaching and service and how these activities impact their time for doing research. Consider Eric’s comments: “It’s a lot of work in all three areas,

and all three areas are very important and very interesting, really, to me. So I guess the really big challenge is finding enough time to do all of them.”

In summary, a common thread woven throughout the participants’ stories is the experience of anxiety related to teaching and research. This anxiety appeared to have two sources: external student and peer evaluations and the more often internal responsibility for providing quality education to students.

Many new faculty members spoke of the time commitment required to do service activities well. Although some mentioned committee work, respondents often spoke of advising in terms of the time involved in meeting students’ needs. Norma described her experience: “The time commitment to advising is the one thing that I can honestly say . . . surprised me—how long it takes to do that well. . . . I’m thinking about . . . when I went through school and what I demanded of my advisor, which was not a lot. . . . Students are more needy now.”

An aspect of the job typically not understood by new faculty until they gain some experience is the politics that are often rooted in an institution’s history, structure, and communications. Ray stated that assistance with unpacking the dynamics “that have nothing to do with you . . . but . . . [have] to do with . . . historical relationships before you even stepped through the door . . .” would have been helpful. He cautioned, “You have to be very mindful and delicate in many respects on how you talk about certain things.” According to these new faculty members, the politics of faculty life seemed to affect multiple issues. Whereas some participants perceived politics entering into evaluation decisions, others experienced institutional politics more broadly. Bob spoke of his reliance on senior mentors to help him decipher political issues: “Sometimes we don’t know that we’re making a decision that has a political overtone to [it]. . . . We rely on our . . . senior faculty . . . to kind of bridge that gap.”

Regardless of whether new faculty members had significant experience or little to no experience in academia, they expressed a common theme—not enough time and too much stress. Faculty spoke with colleagues across departments and institutions about teaching and tenure requirements, becoming frustrated at times with the inconsistency and imprecision of faculty workload. For example, Adam shared,

I think there should be ways of quantifying the amount of teaching that you do beyond simply “Okay, here’s one class.” So if I teach a class of 15 people, that is a greatly different situation than a class of 48. That class of 48 is just a whole lot more work, and yet . . . those two classes are [treated] equal[ly].

In addition to a lack of clarity about workload and structures, another

point of frustration and stress for participants is not feeling they have enough time to be successful in all facets of the complex faculty role. Norma said, "It is overwhelming . . . emotionally, mentally physically. . . I knew what I was getting into, but I was still floored by the time commitment. We take work home, we work at night . . . it's a 24-hour job." For Mary, such stress resulted in fatigue: "I'm tremendously tired. . . . I get home and sometimes I just go right to bed, and I'm so tired and I resent how tired I feel."

Clearly, the challenges of being a new faculty member are significant. For many, balancing teaching, research, and service expectations, work/life issues, politics, and a sometimes inconsistent workload can result in decreased satisfaction and even exhaustion.

## Discussion

New faculty in this study emphasized the joy they found in helping students and being involved in knowledge creation. Sometimes this joy is eclipsed, however, by the stresses of serving the multiple masters of teaching, research and service and the pressure they feel to maintain excellence in each area. Faculty members can feel quite vulnerable, as evidenced by several potential informants' discomfort with agreeing to participate in this study. Unfortunately, our findings about pretenure faculty are all too similar to those of the earlier works mentioned in this article. These studies collectively indicate that the same issues and struggles have remained rather consistent across disciplines, institutions, and private/public arenas for a number of years. Perhaps such results should not be surprising, given that the structure of full-time faculty roles generally has not changed in decades, even though the higher education context is undergoing sweeping changes. Faculty entering higher education face significant difficulties—specifically, a tenuous tenure system, competing work and personal lives, and lack of community (Rice et al., 2000). One cannot help but wonder how long the professoriate can survive these circumstances and if there will come a time when it will become difficult to recruit and retain quality faculty under such conditions.

The findings from this study, nevertheless, suggest possible ways to sustain faculty as they progress through their pretenure years. Several participants mentioned how additional clarity and structure in promotion and tenure expectations would help alleviate stress. What seems so obvious—clear learning goals, something we argue should regularly be provided to students—is surprisingly missing from most faculty members' development plans. Ray offered a suggestion for streamlining service

expectations that could be applied to teaching and research equally effectively: "I would try to systematize what all untenured faculty [do] in terms of service: In your first year you do this, and in your second year you do this, and your third year you do this, fourth, and fifth—clear expectations." Transparent goals and expectations are key to learners' success—including faculty members learning how to become excellent teachers, scholars, and community members. Such expectations need not be so detailed that they are constricting, but rather provide an armature around which faculty can make strategic decisions to focus their efforts in each area.

The academy presents tricky waters for new faculty to navigate—to work independently and yet to collaborate, to enjoy academic freedom and yet be mindful of politics, to be a dedicated teacher but not so dedicated that research suffers. It was heartening to hear so many junior faculty in this study devoted to students and wanting to improve their teaching, but disheartening to know that these same faculty are experiencing such anxiety trying to maintain a work/life balance.

While the strain of pretenure life was felt by all participants, it was perhaps most apparent in the women participants' experience. Women in the study appeared to feel the most taxed from handling multiple roles (those at home in addition to those at work), evidenced by their powerful descriptors, such as "overwhelming" by Norma and Sara. Mary added, "I'm tremendously tired. And I realize that there are so many factors that play into that." One female participant even used the word "paralyzing" to capture the magnitude of her struggle. These narratives are consistent with the literature focusing on work/life balance. For example, Wolf-Wendel and Ward (2006) posited the following:

This literature suggests that while men and women as professionals, partners, and parents struggle with the delicate balance work and family life can pose, the challenge for women is even greater given the physical demands of motherhood, gendered expectations of family obligations, and the ongoing disparity with which working women take on the "second shift" through maintenance of children and home (Drago & Williams, 2000; Hochschild, 1989; Spalter-Roth & Merola, 2001; Varner, 2000). (p. 489)

Clearly, there is a need for increased attention to the early-career success of female faculty. While there are ample examples of the disparity between men's and women's pretenure experience due to gender-related roles, there are few examples of practices that help women balance their first and "second-shift" responsibilities successfully and in a healthy fash-

ion. More research (both theoretical and practical in nature) is essential to lessening this disparity.

Particularly striking in this study are faculty participants' consistent references to the challenges of maintaining excellence in teaching and research, dealing with the political climate, and managing time and stress. The supports they found for these challenges most often came in the form of relationships. Participants frequently relied on department chairs for assistance. Those who had an available, supportive chair had a very different experience than those who had a less involved chairperson. Informants also commonly turned to colleagues for pedagogical, professional, and personal support. Peers were often the most significant first-line professional development sources faculty members had in their first two years of employment. Such strong relationships, however, were not consistently experienced by faculty across disciplines and departments, as shown earlier by Mary's disappointment with the lack of interaction she had with colleagues.

These data bring to light the power of community for mitigating some of the anxieties that plague pretenure faculty. Many of the struggles as well as supports these new faculty shared point specifically to the benefits of faculty learning communities (FLCs):

An FLC program can include many bridges linking faculty to deep learning, early-career faculty to experienced faculty, isolated teachers to new colleagues, departments to departments, disciplinary curricula to general education, and faculty to students and staff. Through FLC programs . . . we . . . [can establish] sufficient connections in our institutions to support a learning organization and overcome the isolation in higher education. (Cox, 2004, p. 18)

FLCs are an approach to faculty development that has offered support and encouragement to new faculty in many institutions across the nation. Miami University's exemplary FLC model for early-career faculty began in 1979 (Cox, 2011). Their community "assists selected applicants in developing their teaching abilities and interests by enabling them to participate in a two-semester series of special activities and to pursue individual projects related to teaching and learning" (p. 3). The FLC introduces faculty from various disciplines to the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), which holds the potential to bridge their commitments and interests and diminish the tensions some new faculty feel about teaching and research as competing demands.

In addition to support for teaching from peers,



each member selects one or two experienced faculty members to partner as mentors. The mentor can be from the same or a different department. The structure of the mentor relationship is flexible. For example, mentors and protégés may attend one another's classes, discuss teaching philosophies, and explore university issues together. (Cox, 2011, p. 3)

Such a mentoring relationship could provide support for teaching and research as well as a sounding board for dealing with office politics and balancing personal and professional life that may not always be provided by (or be best addressed with) one's chairperson.

As Cox (2004) states, "FLCs provide early career faculty with opportunities for discussion as well as a community in which participants can explore together their tenure systems and options for integrated lives (Cox, 1995)" (p. 17). The kind of community an early-career FLC can elicit is the ideal mentioned earlier by Mary, where "vigorous" conversations occur with peers, new knowledge is inspired by the freedom of exploration, and one feels part of a larger community of scholars who could "change the world." In an era of higher education marked by significant change, such "communities of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991) could challenge and support early-career faculty as they make their way toward becoming the academy's next generation of leaders.

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