New Faculty: Starting Them Off in the Right Direction

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They hit the ground running. The problem is, they don't always know where they are running or why. They'll have their syllabi, but will they know where to get it copied? They'll have their classroom assignments, but will they know which building? Not only will they have to learn the names of hundreds of new students, but they may not know who shares the offices next door. Not wanting to appear stupid, they hesitate to ask what they fear are obvious questions. Who issues office supplies? What happens when there are more students than chairs? When does drop/add begin? Where are the class rosters? So they observe the faculty who seem to know what they're doing. If these new arrivals are lucky, they'll find the copier and their classroom. It's not just a new semester; it's a new job, a new school, a new life. Add to this one additional pressure. Back in graduate school they were told "to publish or perish," but nobody told them how to find the time for research and writing while simultaneously preparing for four classes, planning new courses, joining committees, advising students, and trying to figure out exactly what "community service" means. They are your new faculty, and they need help. The key to their success is communication: establishing a network for information, assistance, and encouragement.

Arriving as new faculty two years ago at a state university, we experienced the disorientation of the move from graduate school students to college professors. We arrived with varied backgrounds; one had been a full-time college professor for over a decade before returning to graduate school for a Ph.D., the other had been on temporary contracts at numerous universities and had been instrumental in organizing an orientation program for part-time faculty. We discovered that the new faculty support system at our university greatly facilitated our transition. Environments were created as part of the orientation program that reduced communication apprehension, opened up channels for questioning and dialogue between the different divisions of the university organization, and built interpersonal bonds that strengthened our sense of campus identity.

Miller and Nadler (1994) surveyed faculty members from 14 community colleges and noted that there was a need for orientation programs because faculty hired in the seventies are retiring, thus creating openings for new faculty. These programs have traditionally focused on providing information about benefits and social receptions to welcome the new faculty. However, sometimes these programs focus on the narrow interests of the organiz-

ers, resulting in less than effective communication of relevant issues. Contemporary times demand that new avenues for orientation be explored that include the age of technology and its impact on education, as well as the diverse needs of the changing student population. The 144 faculty who responded to Miller and Nadler's surveys, however, seemed focused on their own identity within the institution. They ranked the answers to the following questions as their priority during the orientation process: "'What role do I have at this institution?' followed by 'How do I fulfill this role?' and, in time, 'What role do I have in this department?'" Finally, for the organizers, a smooth transition was the priority for community college faculty rather than a strong focus on retention.

Hill, Bahniuk, and Dobos (1989) suggest creating communication support systems where faculty can interact with new peers and colleagues from their own disciplines, as well as campus-wide orientation. The results of their survey discovered that when faculty had such support systems, they perceived themselves as successful and satisfied with their relationship with the wider campus community. Working closely with colleagues on projects was also emphasized as a source of job satisfaction, perhaps because it was a way to balance peer relationships and accomplish joint tasks.

Responding to our research and our own experience with the new faculty orientation program and services at our own university, it is apparent that the advantages of a new faculty orientation program are numerous. 1) It opens communication channels between all levels of a campus organizational system. 2) It provides a smooth transition into the specific academic community. 3) It encourages and facilitates high quality teaching. 4) It provides information necessary for efficiency within general college/university operations. 5) It creates communication networks interdepartmentally that build solidarity among faculty and staff and discourages the territory wars that often mar our campuses. 6) This opens the way to networking for joint publications, projects, and student services. 7) It builds campus identity, spirit, and morale. 8) It increases faculty retention, thus providing departmental and campus stability.

In order to encourage and facilitate the development of new faculty orientation programs, we will discuss the particulars of our orientation program, highlighting those areas which were most advantageous. We will also make suggestions on how the program might be further improved.

Any effective orientation program should create a positive environment which not only informs but nurtures new faculty members. Our faculty orientation began as two full days of orientation before classes began and continued as a series of meetings and workshops spread out over the entire school year. The Center for Professional Development and the Kean Instruction Team (KIT) provided the core of the orientation program. In addition, the Untenured Faculty Organization (with the ironically appropriate abbreviation, U.F.O.) held workshops and informational meetings.

A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

Our orientation provided different social settings where we met with campus administrators, department chairs, senior faculty, and junior faculty on an informal basis. Luncheons, receptions, and dinners provided for the new faculty created a friendly atmosphere and gave the implicit message that the university cared about us as people. With great good humor we went around the room at the beginning of each session and everyone, from the President to the newest staff person, introduced themselves. Program coordinators apologized for having to do this, but we appreciated it as it made us feel welcome and helped us to remember names. We were on information overload, and the repetition was an effective memory tool. In addition, the U.F.O. put out a newsletter, *U.F.O. Sightings,* which kept us

abreast of upcoming events, profiled new faculty members, and provided additional university operational data.

AN INFORMATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Various meetings in the form of dialogues occurred throughout the year. Refreshments were always served, which enhanced the feel of a social gathering and created positive communication environments. The new faculty met with the directors of various campus support services for teaching, such as the Center for New Students, Exceptional Education Opportunities, General Education, Holocaust Resource Center, Human Relations and Counseling Center, Instructional Resource Center, Learning Assistance Program, and the university library. Representatives provided an overview of their services, supplied information handouts, and fielded questions from the new faculty. When a member of the new faculty could not be present at one of these meetings, the orientation leader always forwarded the handouts. This not only served to disseminate the information, but it further maintained that welcoming environment.

The U.F.O. also planned several meetings with key administrators, including "A Dialogue with the Deans of the Four Schools," "A Dialogue with the President," "A Dialogue with the Academic Vice-President," and "A Dialogue on Promotion and Tenure." The Center for Professional Development and KIT also offered informative sessions to all the faculty on various aspects of academic concern. For the new faculty member, these sessions enhanced the orientation process. For example, a meeting was held with the Director of the Grants Office to discuss the "Nuts, Bolts, and Bureaucracy: A Very Practical Look at the Grants Process." The director of career services was present at all gatherings, making herself approachable and reminding us that she was available for private consultation.

A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Workshops and informative sessions were given for the new faculty throughout the school year. Areas covered included student evaluation of faculty teaching effectiveness, cooperative learning, course syllabi, student learning styles, and teaching styles. For example, in the session on student evaluations, senior faculty noted the reality of such evaluations and the stress they create for all faculty. They made several valuable suggestions, such as reviewing the syllabus with the class the day before the evaluation in order to remind students of expectations, and distributing informal evaluations throughout the semester to measure the pulse of the class. In addition, the Center for Professional Development and KIT provided numerous workshops and sessions that were open to the entire faculty but which often held special interest for the new faculty. Some of the workshops were ongoing and included "An Action Learning Group for Authors," and an "Ongoing Workshop for Cooperative Learning Practitioners." These ongoing workshops provided much needed support and encouraged cross-departmental interaction. One time workshops were also offered on various aspects of teaching strategy ("Teaching on the Internet," "Using Graphing Calculator to Enhance Active Learning," "Testing: Let's Talk About It," "Presentation Software in the Classroom," "Strategies for Success in Lecturing," "A Panel Discussion on Grading Criteria," and "Multimedia in the Classroom"). The Center also distributed articles from *Teaching Excellence* to all the faculty as a means of enhancing classroom teaching school-wide.

The workshops on teaching methodology for the new faculty combined with the campus-wide workshops served to emphasize the importance and encourage the development of superior classroom performance among the new faculty members. Because the amount of academic experience differed for members of our new faculty, we viewed it as positive

that the discussion format was used. It gave individuals an opportunity to share, not only questions, but their own knowledge and expertise. This served to validate the person as a professional and gave everyone a chance to plug into the discussion even in the midst of our diverse backgrounds.

A NETWORKING ENVIRONMENT

The welcoming, informative, and learning environments resulted in new faculty members forming a bond with one another and with the administrators and senior faculty of the university. It also created cross-departmental and cross-school connections among the new faculty members. In the competitive and often confusing first year at a new school, such a network can truly serve as a safety net and a road map for the new faculty member. We view it as significant that the new faculty got to share with each other. At times, the amount of information to absorb and officials to meet could have been overwhelming, but it was balanced by opportunities for us as an "in-group" to share mutual concerns and issues that were not included by program organizers.

As the orientation was an on-going process, the new faculty were also introduced to and assimilated into the Untenured Faculty Organization. This gave us a sense that we, as untenured faculty, had a voice. We also were empowered to take leadership roles on campus.

Another networking opportunity that was introduced to us during orientation, and proved to be most helpful, was the Action Learning Group for Authors mentioned earlier. The group was composed of about six people (and could be sub-divided if it grew larger). We were composed of faculty from all four schools of the university. The group had emerged a few years earlier at the initiation of a new faculty member. Each month one member of the group would submit an essay or chapter he or she was working on for publication. This was distributed to the entire membership for review and critique. At our monthly meeting, we provided each author with feedback on their scholarship, overall clarity, grammar, and style. The fact that we came from different disciplines was a plus as we needed to become articulate in explaining discipline specific concepts. Turner and Boice (1987) show that most new faculty, overwhelmed with new teaching loads, write in binges during vacation periods. Our process conditioned us to integrate teaching and scholarly research. Several members of the group submitted papers reviewed by the group to scholarly publications with positive results.

Yet another campus-wide organization introduced to us during our orientation was the Women's Studies Program. Fulfilling not only a special interest for one of us, this program also provided an extensive networking system. Through collaboration with junior to senior faculty across the university spectrum on numerous issues (including program and curriculum development, special events, and public relations), this program not only served as an invaluable learning resource on university procedures, but provided the new faculty with visibility far beyond their respective departments. In addition, working partnerships were formed cross-departmentally for publication and special projects.

The networking environment of these groups established lines of communication across the entire campus that would not have developed otherwise. Dialogue between faculty from various disciplines was established and resulted in interdisciplinary cooperation and partnership that should be the hallmark of any liberal arts institution.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

In planning an orientation program for new faculty, there are two realities that need to be respected regarding the wider context: diverse needs and time. Any faculty orientation

program should consider the fact that faculty members arrive on campus at various stages in their academic careers. While some may need to attend a workshop on the basics of writing a syllabus, others may only need to know the specifics of campus-wide or departmental syllabi requirements. Some may need to learn about implementing cooperative learning in their classroom, while others may be in the position to teach such a workshop. Any program must be flexible enough to adapt to the unique needs of the orientation group. The authors suggest that the series of meetings be composed of three types: 1) meetings for all new faculty that orient them to the specifics of that college/university's operations (e.g., academic advising, special services, procedures, locations), 2) workshops for first time to full-time teaching faculty, 3) advanced workshops for new faculty with previous full-time college teaching experience, and 4) a mini orientation for part-time faculty. Another possibility is to conduct group discussions where new faculty members can share their experiential strengths and weaknesses. Subsequent meetings would be planned to provide mutual instruction. For example, those who have created effective syllabi in the past can conduct workshops for those writing their first syllabi, or those with more experience with time management could explain how they have successfully taught, published, and maintained a life off campus. This will also serve to create peer support systems. In addition, it helps the administrators and faculty conducting the orientation program learn about the strengths and contributions that the new faculty members have to offer the campus community. Also, by recognizing the diverse experiential levels of the new faculty, the time spent in orientation meetings and workshops will be viewed as a positive learning experience rather than as time better spent somewhere else.

This leads to the second contextual reality for any orientation program: time. The new faculty member is being pulled in many directions at once. Just creating the day-to-day content of four new classes is a gargantuan task in the first year. We have to admit that our first reaction to the invitation to the first faculty orientation meeting was one of dismay. We were still unpacking our books and trying to find the copier. We wanted to teach, not talk about teaching. There is never an ideal time for this type of orientation program. If it becomes too constraining, it will subvert any possible pluses and lead to hostility. Our program was sensitive to these issues and allowed for flexibility by spreading the initial orientation over the whole first year and provided considerable advance notice of all meetings. This not only facilitated personal time management but helped avoid the information overload that would have occurred if the meetings and workshops had all occurred at the beginning of the school year when our circuits were already on overload. As a result, we retained more of the information. In addition, by spreading the orientation over a nine-month period, meetings became more productive as new faculty members were able to bring their first-year experiences to the orientation sessions as new issues evolved.

AREAS OF NEED NOT ADDRESSED

Bogert (1991) found that while new faculty valued collegiality and the chance to engage in personal sharing and even gossip, that they also needed structures within the institution to facilitate scholarly discussion among peers. Busy teaching loads simply prevented discussions on teaching strategies and shared research interests. Such academic sharing did occur during our orientation program, but sessions were not designed specifically for that purpose. Strategically planned discussion groups, facilitated by a orientation leader/facilitator, could greatly enhance this important networking process. During the orientation program for new faculty, before departmental routine becomes entrenched, would be the ideal time to exchange ideas, strategies, and form research partnerships.

While we did examine differences in learning styles that point to the root of some classroom conflicts between student and teacher, one issue that was not central to our orien-

tation was the demographics and diversity of the student body. It would have been helpful to know more about the student population. Because a good teacher is a good communicator; a good communicator needs to know the audience being addressed. In addition, knowledge of current trends in student profiles would also be advantageous. As noted in the "The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1997," produced annually by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, the average student today is characterized as bored and academically disengaged. In addition, today's students are products of a consumer centered world, replete with a pervasive video and entertainment culture (Edmundson, 1997; Sacks, 1996). Taken together, this argues for a key instructional role for communication faculty in the new faculty orientation program. New faculty would profit from an examination of how today's culture has impacted traditional learning channels and an explanation of what types of communication methods are effective with today's students. Finally, each campus has a unique student identity, and even the most experienced new faculty member realizes that an understanding of the students she or he will be facing in the classroom can affect course preparation and enhance teaching effectiveness.

During our year of orientation, our university had no formal mentorship program in place. Borisoff (1997), who is concerned with issues of faculty at a four-year institution where publishing and professional relationships to the academic discipline are heavily stressed, encourages a formalized mentoring program to help new faculty in the areas of teaching, scholarship and service. The problem is that communication breaks down between mentors and mentee when the system is too informal. Mentors don't want to be "intrusive or overbearing" into the lives of new faculty, and the mentees don't want to "bother" the mentors with questions.

Hill, Bahniuk, and Dobos, (1989) after distributing a ten-page questionnaire to full-time faculty at two universities, conclude that mentoring must be seen as a campus-wide effort that involves many persons functioning together as mentors for the new faculty member. Their study claims that women do not have the same success as men in the one-to-one mentoring system because female mentors might not have the same institutional power as their male counterparts. It is not clear, but it appears their assumption is that new female faculty will automatically be assigned female mentors. A second reason given is that women are taught to have lower expectations for success than men. They conclude that having a mentor is not enough (although, overall, faculty with mentors have lower levels of communication apprehension and develop richer communication environments).

McGill and Shaeffer (1986) focused on a mentor-like approach that was designed to empower the new professors. One-on-one interviews were employed where the leader/mentor would act as a facilitator rather than as an instructor. The facilitator's job was to encourage new faculty to be active participants in their orientation rather than passive listeners. Rather than serving as the fount of all knowledge, the facilitator would ask the new faculty member to share ideas on learning and explore avenues to connect individuals' previous job skills to their forthcoming classroom experience. New faculty often have innovative ideas, and this style of mentor as facilitator encourages new approaches. It also models the notion that new faculty should be facilitators in the classroom rather than mere dispensers of information.

At our university, while some departments have a mentor program, some do not. Our own department did not have a formal mentoring program, but the caring and supportive atmosphere in our department served to mentor us as new members of the faculty. Those new faculty from departments who had such programs reported on the positive impact their mentors had on their first year experience. We certainly felt that a uniform, university-wide program should be put into place.

As such, we were pleased to learn that the Center for Professional Development will be implementing a mentoring program at the beginning of the next school year. Mentors will be senior, tenured faculty who have a record of superior teaching, publication, and service

to the institution. These mentors will be selected by the school deans in consultation with the mentors' department chairs. There will be interdepartmental and/or interschool matching of mentors and mentees, ensuring that the untenured faculty member is free to discuss issues or problems concerning his or her own department. In addition, nepotism will be avoided by ensuring that the mentor will not be in a position to vote on the mentee's retention or tenure. The mentoring process will take place during the first year of employment. This process will include a workshop dialogue with the mentors and mentees, observation and discussion of the mentor's classes, observation and discussion of the mentee's classes, and at least six one-on-one meetings to discuss institutional expectations. Both the mentor and the mentee will be compensated for this process. Each mentor will be named a Presidential Teaching Scholar for a three-year term and receive a stipend per mentee, a letter of recognition from the university president, and credit for college service. The mentee will receive a one-course (three-semester hour) reduction for his or her first semester. The objectives of this project are fourfold: 1) induct new faculty into the culture of the institution, 2) strengthen the instructional competence of new faculty, 3) strengthen commitments to research, scholarship, and service, and 4) provide a renewal experience for senior, tenured faculty. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of this program, the Center for Professional Development will conduct one-on-one interviews with all program participants. In addition, each mentor and mentee will complete an evaluation checklist after each mentor/mentee session and forward it to the Center for Professional Development for evaluation.

In addition to a formal mentoring program, we also recommend the formal pairing of new faculty members. Since both of us were new hires for the same department, the serendipitous result was a "buddy system," which smoothed the transition from graduate school to full-time teaching. We kept each other posted about on-going meetings and events. We formed working partnerships when opportunities were presented. We served as a check-and-balance for new ideas and helped each other to the sources of needed information. This "buddy system" could be effective even by pairing new faculty members from different disciplines, a theatre professor and a communication professor for example. We were fortunate—our formal orientation program helped us to create an informal support system and, before very long, a rich friendship that enhanced both joint projects and constructive criticism of individual projects.

CONCLUSION

When colleges and universities start new faculty off in the right direction, those faculty members will function better as teachers, as scholars, as committee members, and as long-term members of that academic community. Considering the financial investment a school makes in the interview process and in the hiring of new faculty, a thoroughly considered and well financed orientation program is insurance no college or university should be without. It only makes sense.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

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