

# **Enabling Junior Faculty Success**

*Resources for Deans and Chairs*  
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## **Enabling Junior Faculty Success**

Surprisingly, many of the things that junior faculty describe as being helpful to their success do not cost a department very much. Yet, they help create a positive environment and, in the end, may save a department considerable amounts of money in replacement costs for recruiting and hiring.

As part of the ADVANCE project at the University of Michigan, we interviewed faculty in a number of STEM departments. Our researchers uncovered some common traits of departments that were successful in retaining and promoting junior faculty members. While the ADVANCE grants have a specific focus on women faculty in the sciences and engineering, CEW's on-going conversations with faculty in other disciplines as well as previous research on junior faculty identify these same traits and activities as useful for encouraging and retaining junior faculty.

The four practices described below appear likely to provide a supportive, positive climate for junior faculty, both female and male. Specific examples of activities and comments from faculty illustrate how each of these approaches can be implemented.

### **Positive Practices for Supporting Junior Faculty**

1. Providing well-documented and transparent information about departmental policies and practices, particularly regarding the tenure process.
2. Having the chair and senior faculty be well-informed and supportive of family friendly policies available to junior faculty.
3. Developing a "critical mass" of under-represented groups (such as women or people of color) in the junior faculty ranks.
4. Mentoring junior faculty, both individually and as a group.

## ***Information and Transparency***

New faculty need information about the institution as a whole, about their college or unit, and about their department. This information should be readily accessible, clearly written, and available in one place. Junior faculty stress the importance of having the information *given to* them, rather than having to seek it out themselves. Junior faculty then are both assured that they have complete information, but are more likely to feel that senior colleagues are truly interested in their careers. Successful departments provide such information through a variety of means:

- Website with all relevant policies
- Start of the year retreat for junior faculty
- Ongoing meetings of junior faculty with specific topics such as how the department's tenure review process works.

In particular, transparency in the tenure process separates departments with positive climates for junior faculty members from those whose junior faculty find themselves in the dark, possibly feeling unsupported by their department. In one department where CEW conducted interviews, for example, a junior faculty member complained that “[at] an annual meeting with the chair...in theory you’re supposed to get progress reports,” yet felt that little specific information was transmitted. By comparison a faculty member from a different department told CEW researchers that “...we developed a very involved mid-term review process... We have external reviewers and the like [to make it mirror the tenure review].” This faculty member described her department’s review as being “very helpful.” Clearly, thorough, well planned an specific tenure review processes made a difference.

### ***Availability of Family-Friendly Policies***

A vast gulf exists between creating family-friendly policies such as modified duties for childbirth or caregiving, tenure clock extension, or unpaid childcare leave, and having faculty both know of these policies and feel that they are entitled to use them.

In a CEW study of the use of flexible career policies, we heard many positive comments from faculty members who elected to use one or more of the policies. As one woman told us “I cherish the (modified duties) policy’s symbolic as well as practical benefit for integrating demanding professional life with being a fit parent.” At the same time, the primary reason women faculty members gave for not using the available modified duties policy was simply not being aware of the existence of the policy. The two main reasons women faculty chose not to use the tenure clock extension policy were 1) fear of a negative career impact and 2) lack of knowledge of the policy. Some faculty – particularly new faculty – are likely not to be aware of all relevant institutional policies. In addition to making such information readily available, department level administrators need to themselves inform junior faculty of flexible work policies and be proactive in encouraging faculty to make use of such policies. As one faculty member said in 2006 “...in a different [e.g., better] environment, my chair would have told me this [modified duties] policy existed. He would have suggested that I take it.” Instead, the faculty member learned about his eligibility for the policy only through a chance encounter with a colleague.

Women faculty, in particular, continue to report negative reactions and perceptions from colleagues to use of family-friendly policies, especially to the use of tenure clock extension policies. Some women faculty tell us, for example, that “The stop-the-tenure-clock policy has a negative association with a woman’s career in my department/school.” Similarly, faculty members are often concerned about the numbers of publication or amount of research productivity expected of them while tenure clocks are extended (even though the point of the extension is to “step off” the clock). Thus, departmental administrators must not only keep junior faculty apprised of their opportunity to use such

policies, but also must assist all department members to recognize the appropriate use and application of these policies.

### ***The Importance of “Critical Mass”***

One of the clear advantages of NSF ADVANCE activities in departments at the University of Michigan was that, either the proportion of women faculty increased in some departments, or women faculty had increased opportunities to meet in groups to explore common concerns and issues.

The STRIDE training programs developed as a part of UM’s ADVANCE grant presented information on unconscious gender bias and provided models for conducting searches that helped to avoid such bias. In particular, the “single search committee” concept for all positions (the “open search”), which produces greater diversity in the candidate pool as a whole, was seen as a mechanism that increased the chances of hiring women or people of color while also bringing to the department the best candidates regardless of sub-specialty: “It [open search] worked very well in identifying outstanding candidates, not as identifying outstanding women candidates.” Nevertheless, the possibility of hiring a woman was increased for that search.

Critical mass can be seen in numbers, but it may also be seen in the development of networks and cohorts. In some departments, the ADVANCE grant allowed for this to be achieved through a series of lunches for the specific group of women faculty or of junior women faculty. The same techniques can be applied to all junior faculty through, for example:

- lunches that allow junior faculty to discuss issues or questions related to their newness on campus
- seminars that bring in senior faculty and/or administrators to talk about publication, preparing dossiers, handling graduate students, or other topics.

## ***Mentoring***

Junior faculty, like all employees, benefit from mentoring. Mentoring provides emotional support in addition to valuable information ranging from how institutional governance works to advice on publishing. Mentoring may have many aspects, including:

- One on one relationships
- Group mentoring (e.g. a cohort of junior faculty hired in one year)
- Mentoring regarding a specific aspect of worklife, such as publication, curriculum design, or securing grant funding
- Mentoring related to under representation, e.g., mentoring junior women or mentoring new faculty of color.

As junior faculty comment on mentoring, they indicate that some formality in the process may improve the experience. Suggestions include having written documentation of the mentor's activities related to the assignment, having assignments made clear to both parties, and having mentoring reside within a specific committee or position within the department. Mentoring may be enhanced by offering junior faculty opportunities to present pre-publication work, to serve on personnel review committees, or to develop relationships with external scholars in their fields.

## **Conclusion**

Many departments focus on recruiting outstanding new faculty members, but lack focus in assisting these junior faculty to succeed at their new positions. Departments incur a cost when junior faculty leave for whatever reason, whether that cost affects finances or climate. Enabling junior faculty through the means outlined above benefits not simply those faculty as individuals, but the entire department. Furthermore, the monetary cost is very small. Where benefits and policies are offered in a structured way and where a critical mass of women or minority faculty can be developed, junior faculty are more likely to succeed as productive members of their institutions. Departments are key to this success, and as one faculty member described her department's lunch group " They were amazed that they could do something that simple and it could help...But, then I can't believe what a difference that made [for us]."