

Faculty Retention and Success: A Departmental View

Jesse Battan, American Studies

Sheryl Fontaine, English, Comparative Literature, and Linguistics

Robert Koch, Biology

When it comes to retention and success, what matters most to faculty in relation to their departments? What are the factors that most influence their desire to stay in departments and their ability to succeed professionally? To answer these questions in terms of our own colleagues in American Studies, English, and Biology, we polled junior and/or senior faculty in our departments, asking them to share with us their beliefs about what they had most “needed” from the department and how those needs were being met. It turns out that there is little difference among our three departments. From the responses we received to our questions, we were easily able to identify several common areas. There were expected departmental differences that emerged from each discipline as well as from the personalities and histories of our particular departments. But overall, what matters most to the untenured faculty recently wooed into our departments and working toward tenure, is very similar to what matters most to senior faculty who have made decisions about continuing their careers at CSU Fullerton.

We hope the outline that follows will be useful to ongoing discussions about faculty retention and success. However, by its very nature, the outline implies that faculty retention and success can be accomplished simply by following this checklist of suggestions. What the outline belies is the ubiquitous environment that is at once the sum of these individual suggestions and yet unique in its characterization. Over and over in their responses to us, faculty attributed their retention and success to having felt respected and valued for the breadth of who they are. And while the suggestions that follow certainly contribute to these qualities, each one rings hollow unless it occurs in a department that values its faculty. This means not only respect and value for the scholar, the teacher, and the community member; but also for all the other elements of who faculty are as men, women, parents, children, siblings, friends, and so on. The suggestions that follow are only as effective as the extent to which they resonate with the recognition that departments are communities of individuals, working together within the complex parameters of a common

discipline, a set of sub-disciplines, and a wide array of personal lives. What matters most for faculty retention and success is that departments have come to collective agreement about the structures and priorities that best support the faculty as individuals and as members of the departmental community.

How can departments create an environment that meets the expectations and needs of faculty?

1. Retention, Tenure, and Promotion

In general, all factors that foster the faculty's success support their progress toward retention, tenure, and promotion, thus all conditions listed in 2-6 below also contribute, but those listed here are of more direct relevance.

- Provide clear and transparent information on the tenure and promotion process, letting untenured faculty know what is going well and what still needs work in their annual evaluations.
- Provide new faculty with a mentoring colleague in their area of study and the assistance of the department chair.
- Provide peer evaluations of teaching, so SOQ's are not the sole measure of teaching performance.

2. Research Resources

- Time
 - As the demand on faculty research time has increased, provide schedules that are respectful of this expectation.
 - Whenever possible, provide release time and, thus, a decreased expectation for teaching and service that allows a greater concentration of efforts in establishing a research program.
- Facilities
 - Be certain that the infrastructure, including facilities, shared major equipment and library resources, for supporting research efforts is complete.
 - Provide support and encouragement for obtaining important new, shared research equipment as needed by new faculty.
- Funding
 - Make research and professional travel a top priority.
 - Provide start-up funds that are competitive with other masters-level institutions.

3. Teaching Resources

- Time

- Provide adequate time for untenured faculty to prepare for courses, create a comfortable but dynamic class atmosphere, and be approachable instructors.
- Facilities
 - Provide adequate resources, including equipment, staff support, and materials to make it easier for faculty to help students develop hands-on skills in their disciplines.
- Sharing of Expertise and Mentoring
 - Create a culture in which faculty regularly exchange ideas about teaching and research projects, read one another's works in progress, and provide editorial support and advice on the publication process.

4. Student-Faculty Collaboration

- Research
 - In the sciences, the development of externally funded programs that support student research training is encouraged. These programs recognize high-achieving students interested in research and provide faculty the opportunity to engage highly motivated students in their research activities.
- Curricular Activities
 - Support and encourage faculty opportunities to help students develop leadership skills in service organizations and academic programs like Teaching Associate programs, and hone advanced research and communication skills while working on student/faculty colloquia, student conference presentations, student edited journals, and other publications.

5. Staff Support

- Make available the support of a professional, well-prepared departmental staff who provides continuity and insures the smooth operation of the department.
- Encourage access to an instructional support staff that works in association with faculty and also works independently to develop and prepare course and laboratory materials required to allow students to meet expected learning outcomes.

6. Department Operations and Governance

- Create a democratic process of scheduling that balances a respect for faculty's professional specialties and needs with students' interest and curricular needs.
- Hire faculty who fit exceptionally well with the needs and "personality" of the department.

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- Create a department governance/committee structure that includes everyone in a manner that allows for individual choice and also invites individual involvement throughout the work of the department.
- Hold annual or bi-annual retreats on topics generated from within the department such as the curriculum, the public profile of the department, and/or governance issues in the department.
- Share a sense that the department chair is the frontline between faculty and the University—watching out for financial and academic opportunities (grants, release time, travel monies), running interference when necessary, and serving as the translator between faculty and administration.
- Having collegiality as a goal seems to have made it so. It may also be due to the very clear goals that are set for promotion and tenure and the yearly reviews of those goals to stay on track.
- Provide the assurance of supportive administrators at department and college levels.
- Create a supportive, collegial atmosphere.
- Provide new faculty with a congenial home that fosters their growth as teachers and scholars and helps to create a sense of membership in a faculty community.
- Keep departmental conflict under control. The goal is a department culture based on mutual respect that allows for honest interaction and authentic negotiations, where things can be discussed, even argued about and compromise, if not consensus, can be reached.
- Note and celebrate the achievements of new faculty.
- Create social events that provide opportunities for faculty to interact outside of hallway conversations or department meetings.
- Ensure that work-load assignments—teaching and committee work—are distributed fairly. Provide as much latitude as possible when new faculty select their teaching schedules and assignments.
- Provide strong examples of teaching, research, and service.
- Maintain and communicate shared values with regard to teaching and scholarship. Approaches to both, of course, will vary, but faculty should share common objectives and be respectful of colleagues when they differ.

The result of all of these suggestions can best be summed up in the following comment that we received from a new faculty member: “I always felt—in ways little and small—that my department supported me, that my colleagues wanted me to succeed and get tenure, and that they would support me in whatever ways necessary to make that happen. Although intangible, that feeling is invaluable.”