

Survive and Thrive

A Guide for Untenured Faculty



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Survive and Thrive: A Guide for Untenured Faculty
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ABSTRACT

The experience of an untenured faculty member is highly dependent on the quality of the mentoring they receive. This mentoring may come from a number of different sources, and the concept of developing a constellation of mentors is highly recommended, but a mentoring relationship that is guided by the mentee's needs will be the most productive. Often, however, the mentee does not know their own needs, what questions to ask, and what topics they should discuss with a mentor. This book provides a guide to the mentoring process for untenured faculty. Perspectives are provided and questions posed on topics ranging from establishing scholarly expertise and developing professional networks to personal health and balancing responsibilities. The questions posed are not intended for the mentee to answer in isolation, rather a junior faculty member should approach these questions throughout their untenured years with the help of their mentors. *Survive and Thrive: A Guide for Untenured Faculty* will help to facilitate the mentoring process and lead junior faculty to a path where they can move beyond just surviving and truly thrive in their position.

KEYWORDS

mentoring, faculty, tenure, career planning

To my family.

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Preface

INTRODUCTION FOR THE UNTENURED FACULTY MEMBER

As you work toward tenure, keep three basic tenets in mind. First, you were selected from a large and competitive group of applicants. Second, your colleagues at your institution have an interest and investment in your success; it is important that you foster this interest. Third, you need to take a professional interest in your development as a faculty member.

This book is intended to facilitate a proactive and rewarding approach to your professional development and faculty experience. Actively pursuing your goals will increase your professional opportunities and successes, allowing you to thrive in your new faculty position. You should customize the issues and questions in this book to your particular discipline, institution, and personal goals.

Questions are posed for your consideration through this book. Some questions are appropriate at different stages in your career as a faculty member. It is not intended that you read this book from cover to cover in one sitting. Attempting to address too many questions all at once can easily make you feel overwhelmed. Similarly, imagining that one could take on every question in the book simultaneously is unreasonable. Also, it is important to keep in mind that not every question will apply to you. Use this book as a resource recognizing that no single prescription for success in a faculty position is available. The differences in the practices of your particular field or the emphasis of your particular institution will determine which questions are relevant to you. Also, keep in mind that you are a unique individual with your own unique professional and personal circumstances, thus you must determine those questions that apply to you and how to prioritize their importance.

Addressing the questions should be a process. You are not supposed to know the answers a priori. You will be most successful if you use this book in conjunction with your mentors. If you have a formal mentoring relationship with a senior faculty member, you may want to address a section a month during your regular lunch or coffee meetings over the course of the year. You might use this book to help stimulate and direct your conversations. If you have multiple formal or informal mentors you can go to, this book can help you to prompt conversations about certain aspects of your career which will be helpful to you. Successful faculty often have a “constellation” of mentors that they seek advice and guidance from throughout their career.

Although you have the biggest stake in your success, your colleagues and your institution also have an interest in seeing you succeed. You will find that there are many people on your campus and within your discipline willing to assist you in your professional development. You will need these people, so seek them out and nurture these relationships; colleagues and mentors are critical to your

career success. This book will help you to be better prepared for discussions with your mentors and colleagues. After all, the right answers only come when you to ask the right questions.

In many cases, the questions posed will be associated with specific actions you will need to take. Because you cannot act on every front simultaneously, you will need to set a wide range of goals for yourself - some you know you will accomplish quickly and some that may take more time. Along the way keep good records of your progress. Documentation of some of the information discussed in the book will be important for your tenure packet. Take time to recognize and reflect on your accomplishments regularly. Share your achievements with your department head, review committee, and mentors. And, finally, remember to celebrate your successes!

This book is organized according to six key components of your professional development:

- **Tough Questions About Why You Are Here**
- **Joining Your Department and Discipline**
- **Establishing Expertise**
- **Developing Networks, Relationships, and Mentoring Activities**
- **Getting Support and Evaluating Your Personal Health**
- **Planning for the Future**

You may not want to consider these issues sequentially, so an index is also provided as the end to facilitate consultation on a specific question or topic. Because your professional development is your responsibility, you must make the time to develop and act on a strategic plan that addresses your specific needs and goals. Take ownership of your career!

This guide was developed to help you get your career off to a good start and keep it on track.

Don't just survive at your university - thrive!

INTRODUCTION FOR THE MENTOR

This book is also meant for mentors. I have often interacted with senior faculty who hope to be a good mentor to a junior colleague but are not sure what advice or topics of conversation might be helpful. This book can provide a mechanism for identifying questions that need to be discussed or structuring a series of mentoring interactions. This book is organized according to six key components of professional development:

- **Tough Questions About Why You Are Here**
- **Joining Your Department and Discipline**
- **Establishing Expertise**
- **Developing Networks, Relationships, and Mentoring Activities**
- **Getting Support and Evaluating Your Personal Health**
- **Planning for the Future**

Some people have successfully implemented the book in their mentoring relationship by addressing each section at a monthly meeting, while others have used the book to prompt discussion on topic areas of immediate interest to the mentee. An index is provided at the end of the book to facilitate consultation on a specific topic.

Because not every question will apply to your mentee, part of your job will be to help them decide which ones are important to focus on and at which stage in their career development they should be addressed. Use this book as a resource, recognizing that differences in the practices of a particular field or the emphasis of a particular institution will determine which questions are relevant. Your experience is the key ingredient to making the mentoring relationship work.

Mentoring relationships come in various forms and have different levels of formality and expectations. The term “mentor” also means different things to different people. To some, it connotes teacher, advisor, and counselor, while to others, there is either a deep friendship implied or a substantial power relationship at play. Mentees may be looking for different things from their mentor. For instance, you may be expected to provide positive and constructive feedback, understanding and empathy, encouragement and nurturing, and assistance in developing networks. Before embarking on a new mentoring relationship, however, you need to ask yourself which roles do you feel comfortable fulfilling and what time commitment you can give to the mentoring relationship. There may also be an added complexity to the relationship because you may also have to fulfill an evaluation role with a particular mentee. This potential source of conflict should be addressed up front.

Unless it is a brief and fleeting interaction, you should make a point to discuss the parameters of the mentoring relationship with your mentee. There are a number of questions you should consider: How much time can you each devote? How frequently should you plan to meet? Will you do all of your mentoring in person, or are phone and email exchanges also useful? On which topics do you feel

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comfortable mentoring that fall within the needs of your mentee? Can you develop a productive and non-threatening relationship? How does the mentee best take criticism and constructive feedback? Will it be beneficial for you to create a mentoring plan that you will enact over time?

Wendy C. Crone
August 2010

I recall wanting to be a professor as early as grade school after visiting the small college where the mother of one of my friends was on the faculty. Early in my graduate school career, I became disillusioned with this goal as I saw more of the day to day realities of faculty life. After some experience with a variety of academic institutions, however, I learned that faculty positions differ from institution to institution and even from position to position within the same department. This was a wonderful realization. It helped me to rekindle my old dream, and it helped me to identify the type of institution I would be happy in. Because of this and later experiences, I believe that institutional fit is a critical component to happiness in a faculty position.