

A Monograph on the Need for the Departmental Research Advisor

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Abstract

Some institutions have an expectation of publication by junior faculty but there are no mentors and resources available. This study is the result of the author's efforts to find a solution to the problem. The investigation found that several junior faculty members faced the same problem. Hence, the author presented the need for the designation of one or two senior faculty member(s) as Departmental Research Advisor(s) responsible for guiding junior faculty toward publication. In the final analyses, the study recommends that the Departmental Research Advisor's portfolio focuses on increasing scholarly productivity of junior faculty, solving the problem of scheduling between mentor and mentee experienced in mentorship programs, and improving the academic career of junior faculty within discipline, department, and institution.

Keywords: junior faculty, tenure, assistance, support, guidance toward publication, mentoring

1. Introduction

To ensure junior faculty achieve one of the requirements for tenure that seems most elusive – publication, departments in institutions of higher learning should designate one or two senior faculty members with the responsibility of guiding the junior faculty toward publishing scholarly work. Data¹ has shown that junior faculty would be well served if there was someone with the credentials and ability of a *Research Advisor* in the department to which the junior faculty member has been assigned who would serve to reinforce concepts learned during the dissertation process and to guide the faculty member toward the goal of publication, especially if that person has not yet published. More often than not a junior faculty member delays publishing because s/he does not know where to start.

Junior faculty members need to be exposed to many different writers, taught the craft of writing and be given ways of utilizing literature in multiple dimensions. To ensure success, mentoring is essential. A supportive community is needed to encourage research and publication. Hence, it would be advantageous to have someone or an advisor/faculty committee, read the work done and give feedback. This approach would encourage on-going thinking and scholarship² in that given field.

Junior faculty members are engaged with the responsibilities of classroom teaching, institutional committees, administrative work, creative activity in the community, and extra-curricula activities while time elapses without much work done toward research and publication. An advisor would be of great service to such individuals, the department and the institution. Generally, junior faculty find themselves being pressured from every side on a daily basis to do everything that demands attention, for example, lesson-preparation, grading of student work, office hours, students guidance and a myriad committee meetings and their subsequent work. However, in most cases, there is no one to assist, draw attention to (except on annual Chair's report and reappointment letter) active work toward research and publication.

Given a *departmental research advisor*/faculty committee, such personnel would avert being turned down by funding agencies because one would adequately prepare a proposal. Applying for resources without help is non-productive. An advisor would direct one to the appropriate sources of information, books to read³ where needed. Junior faculty members need support and nurturing that could be provided by the Departmental Research Advisor such as workshops and other opportunities to share information about grants, research and publication. These kinds of activities provide a support system for projects as well as provide individuals who can respond to each other's proposals as they develop⁴.

2. The Departmental Research Advisor

Faculty wants to succeed in chosen field through teaching and scholarly achievement. Junior faculty members need role-modeling, guidance, and the assurance of success in the fulfillment of expectation regarding research and publication. They need to hear, "I've made it work and you can too."⁵ Encouraging junior faculty to go from a place of not knowing where to start to starting and going forward to completion bodes well for, not only the individual, but the department and the institution. The success of faculty, supported by the Departmental Research Advisor, could result in camaraderie with the potential to envelop the department and lead to the growth of real community on the entire campus. The key to having no faculty left behind in the areas of scholarly research and publication thus ensuring departmental success that puts the entire institution on the map is to bring on board a supportive, well informed Departmental Research Advisor.

3. Making the Case for the Departmental Research Advisor

In most research-oriented universities, while quality teaching and service to the university and the profession contribute to the overall academic profile of the candidate for tenure, they do not take the place of research contribution⁶ and publication. It stands the more reason why junior faculty in such institutions would benefit from guidance in planning their professional activities in a way that maximizes their chances of recognition and promotion.⁷

Bekey posits that, due to the fact that research is balanced against other demands on one's time, such as, teaching, counseling students, service to the department, professional society activities or consulting, and one's personal life, one cannot wait for a year or two to start research. One has to begin as soon as one gets appointed as a junior faculty because many journals have a two-year publication delay and waiting three years to submit the first journal paper may mean five years before publication. Bekey further states, "More importantly, there is a discipline and commitment associated with productive research, which must be achieved early [because] it becomes more and more difficult as time passes."⁸

The presence in the department of a senior faculty member active in research and whose portfolio it is to ensure that junior faculty take their place in research in their field, possibly through collaboration, would be beneficial to all concerned, the senior (Departmental Research Advisor) and junior faculty, the department, the institution and the larger community.

4. Job Description of the Departmental Research Advisor

In order to be able to give guidance and support to junior faculty in pursuit of scholarly growth, the Departmental Research Advisor needs to: **1)** be knowledgeable regarding research design as posited by Creswell (2009), **2)** be personally involved in scholarly activity, and be able to recognize which topic/study would best be served by qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods research, **3)** connect faculty to other relevant areas of the institution (e.g., Departments of Teaching and Learning or Research and Sponsored Programs), and **4)** give guidance regarding grant writing. This description could be appropriately expanded as needed.

5. The Dilemma

In some institutions there seems to be no concern about the progress of junior faculty publication. A case in point, the Dean of a particular school in an institution of higher learning, invited his faculty to hear him present his writing but showed no interest in giving guidance in this area to the junior faculty in his school. Even more disturbing, there was no Center for Teaching and Learning that could give assistance in this area. Hence, morale among junior faculty in this institution was low because the feeling was no one seemed to care about junior faculty obtaining tenure.

There were institutions also in which junior faculty have had suggestions from senior faculty regarding research grants and have had their applications read by said senior faculty in their institutions but failed to obtain a grant because of the possibility of their seniors not being knowledgeable regarding the specific requirements of the research grant committees. My point is, the Departmental Research Advisor should have in-depth knowledge of such requirements and procedures, placing her/him in a stronger position to give guidance that would ensure success.

Lucy Deckard's response posted August 23, 2012 to a question posed on his webinar, "Helping Junior Faculty Jumpstart their Search for Research Funding" regarding paying senior faculty to review junior faculty proposals supports my point. Here is Deckard's response:

I think this is a good idea assuming the senior faculty is knowledgeable about the agency to which the proposal will be submitted. I would also encourage some follow-up once the PI (Principal Investigator) has worked to address the issues raised, either in the form of another review by the senior faculty or, if that's too much to ask, in the form of work with someone else. (My experience has been that one iteration is just not enough for junior faculty who are new to writing proposals – they need help with addressing the issues raised.)⁹

The above befits the portfolio of the knowledgeable Departmental Research Advisor.

In the literature regarding assistance for faculty research, Lucy Deckard (2012) pointed out that:

By focusing on ensuring that the infrastructure is there to encourage and support your junior faculty not only when they're developing and submitting proposals, but also when they receive a grant and need help administering it, you'll encourage them to continue to pursue grant funding, and that will help change the culture at your university. You'll also want to make sure that they are rewarded and celebrated when they do receive grant funding – maybe some teaching release or extra travel money, plus a write-up on the university website or a lunch with the Vice-President – that kind of visibility will help others see the rewards of taking on the extra work of pursuing grant funding.¹⁰

5.1 No Mentors

There are institutions which have an expectation of publication but with no available mentors and resources. Some junior faculty members do feel isolated. Junior faculty have reached out to various senior faculty in their school only to find that they are all totally preoccupied with their own particular professional responsibilities that there is really no time to give the type of specialized guidance needed by them (junior faculty) . In some situations, not even the Office of Academic Affairs provided assistance.

6. Support for Junior Faculty in Some Institutions of Higher Education

The literature provides ample reports and models about institutions and /or academic departments providing needed support and guidance for junior faculty through mentoring and other services as they strive for publication and tenure. So far, no institution has utilized the faculty position of the Departmental Research Advisor.

For example, Stanford University has five categories of assistance:

1. Faculty childcare assistance program
2. Junior faculty dependent care travel grants
3. Junior faculty leave policy (School of Humanities and Sciences)
This category of assistance came home to me. Here, junior faculty gets one full year of sabbatical at 100% pay (on the nine-month base salary) during their fifth or sixth year. "The intent of this program is to provide every reappointed assistant professor with a full year of leave to enhance the preparation for tenure review and to provide a period of time for pure research leave."¹¹
4. Junior faculty professional development program:
"The Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity (CCSRE) sponsors Research Institute Fellowships for Stanford Faculty, which are designed to help young faculty produce high-quality scholarship and research during their early years at Stanford by providing time off from teaching responsibilities."¹²
5. Presidential research grants for junior faculty:
This program gives "unrestricted research to provide an incentive at the time of appointment, and a reward for those who achieve tenure."¹³

6. Mentoring Program (Department of Radiology):

Here is a department at Stanford University which saw the need to (1) better promote successful career development of the junior faculty as measured by metrics such as publications, grant funding, and professional advancement and (2) enhance the overall openness and clarity of communication in the department. Its response to the need was to implement a mentoring program in the department of Radiology in 1995. The rationale for developing the program was rooted in the fundamental need for more formal partnership among junior faculty, senior faculty, and other department professionals and staff and to enhance the sense of community and opportunity for success for all department members.¹⁴

Stanford's junior faculty assistance is institutionalized and managed by schools, the aim of which is "to provide an incentive at the time of appointment, and a reward for those who achieve tenure."¹⁵ The step-by-step method has not been outlined here but, looking from the perspective of the institution of which the writer is a part, the envisioned effectiveness of the Departmental Research Advisor(s) in ensuring that junior faculty in his/her department achieve tenure. None would be left behind. The support would be present throughout the entire venture.

A report by the American College of Physicians showed that in academic institutions, junior faculty with identified mentors tend to publish more papers, have better career opportunities, and feel more confident about their capabilities and are more satisfied professionally.¹⁶

Palepu, et al (1998) found that "individuals with mentors had higher institutional support for teaching, administration, and research than individuals who lacked mentors."¹⁷ Informal mentoring was among the Principles and Best Practices posited in the Guidelines for Mentoring Junior Faculty published (2002) by the University of Michigan's College of Literature, Science and the Arts. Collegial mentoring was listed Number two of nine best practices for a departmental effort in the mentoring of junior faculty. The position here is that departments and programs should work to develop a climate of mentoring in which all members of the department/program engages in spontaneous and informal mentoring of new colleagues.¹⁸

7. Funding

Departments can optimize the use of their human and financial resources in developing their research programs.¹⁹ Investing in a Departmental Research Advisor would be one way to go. The difference being suggested here between a Departmental Research Advisor and that of mentoring is that mentors and mentees usually struggle to find the time needed for mentoring beyond already saturated schedules,²⁰ while time for work with junior faculty on matters regarding research would be built into the Departmental Research Advisor's schedule.

8. Conclusion

The argument for mentorship is strong but, given the scheduling problems often encountered by mentors and mentees, the need for a Departmental Research Advisor is evident. The Departmental Research Advisor would also be in a better position to focus on increasing scholarly productivity and improving junior faculty's academic career within discipline and institution.²¹

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