4. UNDERSTANDING NEW FACULTY: BACKGROUND, ASPIRATIONS, CHALLENGES, AND GROWTH

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Abstract

Early career faculty, defined as those within the first seven years of appointment to a faculty position or those who have not yet received tenure, contribute to the present and create the future of universities and colleges. This chapter contributes to deeper understanding of new faculty by addressing these issues: 1) the demographics of early career faculty; 2) the preparation they receive and the gaps in their graduate and post-doctoral backgrounds; 3) the abilities and skills early career faculty need to succeed in higher education; 4) the expectations early career faculty have for their careers and the challenges they experience in their new roles; 5) the strategies individual early career faculty and institutions can employ to enhance their professional growth; and 6) directions for future research.

Key Words: Early career faculty; New faculty; Demographics; Socialization; Preparation; Expectations; Motivations; Tenure process; Colleagueship; Community; Mentoring; Balance; Flexibility; Non-majority faculty; Strategies

Early career faculty contribute to the present and create the future of universities and colleges. When a higher education institution recruits, selects, and hires a new faculty member, it is making a major investment of resources and trust. Ideally, the faculty member will thrive at the institution, finding intellectual excitement and professional and personal satisfaction as well as contributing his or her talents to achieving institutional missions and enhancing organizational excellence. Yet the success of new faculty members usually requires more than simply good hiring decisions. Institutional leaders and estab-
lished professors need to understand what new faculty need and what strategies support their growth and success.

This chapter contributes to deeper understanding of new faculty, with particular attention to five key issues: 1) What are the demographics of early career faculty today? 2) What preparation do they receive and what are the gaps in their graduate and post-doctoral backgrounds? 3) What abilities and skills must early career faculty have to succeed in higher education? 4) What expectations do early career faculty have for their careers and what are the challenges they experience in their new roles? 5) What strategies can individual early career faculty and institutions that employ them use to enhance their professional growth? This chapter highlights, synthesizes, and analyzes key findings from research that enhance knowledge and understanding of new faculty. It also provides suggestions for institutional leaders, established faculty members, and new faculty members themselves about specific strategies to help early career faculty succeed.

Several points need to be clarified at the beginning of this chapter. The term “new faculty” is not precisely defined in the literature. Here we are defining new faculty as those within the first seven years of appointment to a faculty position or those who have not yet been awarded tenure (in institutional contexts where tenure is a possibility), acknowledging that, in some cases, faculty members are awarded tenure prior to the seventh year. We note also that new faculty may be individuals in their 20s or individuals who are older in age, having had other professional posts prior to moving into the professoriate. Furthermore, new faculty may work either full-time or part-time. We sometimes use the term “early career faculty member” in place of “new faculty member.”

The literature concerning new faculty has some limitations. Much of the literature is based on research that specifically concerns new faculty in tenure-track positions and has focused less on the experiences of a growing number of new faculty in part-time, fixed-term, or non-tenure-track positions. Another limitation of the literature is that faculty in four-year institutions are more likely to have been included in studies than faculty working in two-year colleges.

Current shifts in the academic workforce make studying new faculty particularly important at the present time. Over the past fifty years, the need for new faculty has waxed and waned. Currently, the demand for new faculty members is expected to increase: between 2000