



Center for Teaching Excellence Hampton University Teaching Matters

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In This Issue

- ◆ Mentoring New Faculty:
Strategies and Initiatives

Teaching Excellence Related Links

- ◆ Bloom's Revised Taxonomy
- ◆ TechLearning – Free
subscription

Other Useful Links

- ◆ Education Grants from the
U.S. Department of Education

In the Next Issue

- ◆ Technology in the
Classroom

Mentoring New Faculty: Strategies and Initiatives

by Zina McGee

New faculty are an integral part of fulfilling the overall mission of an academic institution, and the task of integrating them into a university's culture can be both exciting and challenging. Research on best practices in developing new faculty often point toward a well-developed orientation process and the use of a socially-rich mentoring program to assist with handling the pressures of publication and teaching loads, as well as understanding new institutional missions, structures and processes. Well-developed orientation programs, including a formal mentoring program, are valuable for new faculty. As part of Hampton University's new faculty training program, an orientation is given each semester that includes a thorough discussion of the mission as it relates to the faculty role, an overview of the University's structure and personnel, a discussion of the teaching, research, and service expectations as well as the tenure and promotion process, and an explanation of the resources available pertaining to student support and academic records. Each semester, interactive workshops are provided for new faculty to learn more about assessment, research, pedagogical issues and technological instruction.

In addition to the aforementioned workshops provided by the Center for Teaching Excellence, our initiative this academic year is to assist in the development of a structured mentorship program for faculty designed to (1) increase the overall quality of teaching, scholarship, and service among faculty; (2) increase collaboration between senior and junior faculty; and (3) lay the groundwork for long range productivity through training and nurture. This initiative is based on a review of previous literature which suggests that the most effective mentoring programs are those which are designed to strengthen and assure continuity of the organizational culture, reduce new faculty anxiety, improve new faculty decision making, increase the potential for academic success, and increase new faculty commitment to the organization. In fact, it has been suggested that a well-crafted mentoring program should include the following components:

- Careful selection of mentors with high levels of personal achievement to reflect the values of the institution.
- Clearly defined roles and expectations pertaining to the mentor/mentee relationship.
- Formal orientation for mentors and mentees to clarify responsibilities,

process and objectives.

- Assessment points throughout the mentor program.
- Improvement processes for implementing required mentor changes.

Others successful mentoring programs have included an extensive mentoring process that addresses mission, vision and values, academic structure, teaching excellence, active learning, advising, student evaluations, classroom observations, classroom mechanics, promotion and tenure, strategic planning and curriculum committees.

Recently, a mentorship survey was distributed to the Chairs and Coordinators of all academic programs at Hampton University. The survey was sent electronically to participants with follow-up procedures conducted by the Office of the Provost to ensure that each individual had an opportunity to participate. Results were tabulated and showed that overall, the Chairs and Coordinators responded that a mentoring program for new faculty was a valuable process that would contribute to the efficient operation of the department. Participants were also provided an opportunity to give comments about their current mentorship program. From these findings, there were indicators that some informal programs exist. Other units suggested that school-wide programs would be beneficial, particularly those that would provide more hands-on training for new faculty members, especially with regard to technology. Overall, the responses support a program between mentors and new faculty.

The specific aim of the mentoring program at Hampton University is to provide junior faculty with opportunities to engage in scholarly research in order to increase participation in conferences/presentations, enhance professional writing for publications, and improve teaching strategies. Emphasis will be placed on interdisciplinary research and collaborations with faculty and students. The effectiveness of research and teaching strategies will be addressed through a series of workshops/seminars offered through the Center for Teaching Excellence to enhance faculty participation in the research and teaching process. As we continue to survey your views and beliefs about the mentoring process, we would also like to learn more about any specific established procedures for mentoring faculty in your academic units. This information will be used as we continue our efforts to institute a university-wide mentorship program.

Announcements

AAC&U's 2009 Annual Meeting, "Ready or Not: Global Challenges, College Learning, and America's Promise," will be held in Seattle, Washington, January 21-24, 2009. "Early bird" registration discounts are available through November 21. Plan to attend AAC&U's Network for Academic Renewal meeting in Baltimore, Maryland on February 26-28, 2009. The meeting, "General Education, Assessment, and the Learning Students Need," will explore how well general education programs match up with expectations for student accomplishment. For more information and to register, visit the meeting Web Page at www.aacu.org.