

# Advice for New (and Seasoned) Faculty: Reprise

This issue of the *Journal of Nursing Education* marks the beginning of another new academic year, at a time when continuing pressures are confronting most nursing schools and the faculties who teach in them. While enrollment demands remain high and expectations of faculty performance and productivity continue to rise, tight institutional resources, looming faculty shortages, and growing competition for clinical placements are creating serious stumbling blocks as schools strive to educate the next generation of nurses.

Changes in health care delivery, technology, and financing are placing unprecedented pressure on schools to graduate better prepared students. Additional forces, such as the slow-growing U.S. economy, rising costs of college and the corresponding rise in student loan indebtedness, increasing income inequality, a dissatisfied electorate, domestic and international incidents of terrorism, growing racial tensions, demands for social justice, and continued political instability and conflicts both here and abroad are a constant presence in our lives. Exponential advances in science and technology offer great promise to treat disease and prolong life, feed the world's population, and advance business innovation and productivity, but these are complicated by the moral and ethical dilemmas they create and their impact on the human condition. Our inability to control health care costs or make progress in addressing disparities in health care access and outcomes threaten to consume an ever greater share of the nation's resources. Further, unprecedented challenges to faculty rights and responsibilities from

elected officials and their appointees, and their growing interference in academic governance, have contributed to a climate of distrust and fear on college campuses and upended long-cherished ideals of academic freedom, faculty autonomy, and job security.

In the midst of this swirl of almost unparalleled complexity and magnitude, nurse educators across the United States and the world are, as they do every August or September, settling down to the everyday business of teaching and learning, serving their institutions and communities, and conducting scholarly work that contributes to our discipline's growing body of knowledge. And they are doing all this while trying to balance professional and personal responsibilities in ways that are manageable and meaningful.

Each academic year, schools welcome new faculty, many of whom are not only new to the school but new to academia. Although experienced in clinical nursing, they often are entering an unfamiliar culture with its own ethos, policies, procedures, and role expectations—a culture they have only previously experienced as students. Further, today's new faculty are joining the world of nursing education at a time when they must focus on learning their new roles and responsibilities while doing so in the context of the evolving changes and challenges facing higher education, health care, and society at large.

The success of those new to the academic enterprise and the nurse educator role depends on their own interests and initiative, as well as the support they receive from academic leaders and colleagues in learning about and acclimating and adapting to a new and unfamiliar

culture. Boice (2000), in his classic book *Advice for New Faculty Members*, encouraged new faculty to learn about academic culture early and pay attention to the unique context in which their work takes place and which ultimately will influence their success or failure, as well as their satisfaction or disillusionment. He pointedly noted, "One fact stands out in my 20 years of studying new faculty: Almost all the failures...of...new hires owed to misunderstandings about effective ways of working and socializing" (Boice, 2000, p. 1).

The advice I offer here has been garnered from my years as a faculty member and academic administrator and is supported by research as being critical to both the success and satisfaction of new faculty. Seasoned faculty may also benefit from these reminders or, at the very least, recall their own new faculty experiences and find ways to welcome, support, and actively guide and assist their new colleagues. To our newest faculty colleagues, I offer the following tips:

**Learn about the school and your new colleagues early.** Familiarize yourself with your school's mission, history, core values, and evolving plans and its role and fit in the larger institutional context. Review your new colleagues' profiles, often available on the school's Web site, and their areas of experience and expertise. Seek out receptive colleagues and learn all you can from them about the "ways of being and doing" in your particular setting. Your department chair, course coordinator, committee head, and assigned buddy or mentor are valuable sources of information. Don't wait for them to tell you. Ask.

**Learn your institution's and school's organizational structure, reporting lines, and roles.** Obtain a copy of the organizational chart. Learn the roles and responsibilities of different leaders, such as the provost, academic deans, vice presidents, and so on. Ask colleagues how formal the lines of reporting and communication are, which will vary by institutional mission, size, operating procedures, and history. When I began my first administrative role at a public southern academic health sciences center, I naively made an appointment to meet the provost—it seemed the sociable thing to do—without first checking with my dean about appropriate protocol. The provost called the dean, who called me to say this simply “wasn't done” in that institution, which I quickly learned had more formal lines of authority than I was used to. It was a powerful lesson.

**Ask if there is a strategic plan for the institution or school and, if so, familiarize yourself with it.** Discuss with your supervisor how you and your department can help advance the plan and its goals, and volunteer to become involved in an area of particular interest to you. Such early involvement is a wonderful way to learn about and become connected with your new work environment and with academic culture.

**Obtain and carefully review the institution's and school's catalog, faculty handbook, student handbook, clinical manual, and other core documents.** The school's most recent accreditation self-study can be an especially useful information source. These resources should be kept at hand for frequent reference. Learn about the school's system of faculty governance, as well as faculty rights and responsibilities. It is also critical to learn curriculum requirements; how to advise students accurately; what support services are available to address student needs for counseling, academic support, or special accommodations; standing academic policies and procedures; and policies that protect the institution from potential legal liability (e.g., what can and cannot be disclosed to others, including to students' parents). When in doubt, ask!

**Seek early and ongoing advice and support from your immediate supervisor, which is usually a department**

**chair, dean, or director.** Solicit insights about what it will take for you to be successful in this particular academic context. What factors have made other new faculty successful? Learn what is expected of you in your faculty role in the areas of teaching, research and scholarly productivity, and service, and develop a plan for each of these areas, with specific goals and outcome measures. Expectations and requirements will be shaped by your institution's mission, your academic rank, and your school's appointment, promotion, and tenure policies. These should guide where and how you devote your time, energy, and efforts.

**Seek out approachable faculty colleagues and learn what you can about the informal, often unwritten, rules and ways of operating of your particular academic culture.** Talk with seasoned faculty about explicit and tacit norms for success in your faculty role, such as expectations for on campus presence; promotion time lines; decision-making channels; relative emphasis given to teaching, research, service, and, where appropriate, clinical practice; committee work; participation in faculty events, commencement and convocation ceremonies, and social activities. Do not hesitate to ask for advice when you do not know.

**Appreciate the different roles it takes to ensure your school's success.** Although the faculty design and deliver the curriculum, engage in scholarly productivity, and serve on key committees necessary for effective teaching and faculty governance, their work is also made possible by many others, including back office functions such as technology design and support, business operations (e.g., budget, purchasing, payroll), facilities planning and maintenance, housekeeping, and other essential functions that support the school's daily work and rhythm.

**Cultivate a friendly business relationship with key support staff.** The departmental administrative assistant or other support staff are often your best resources for routine questions about purchases or budget requests; completing paperwork for travel, vacation, or other time off; and other operational details. Most important, relate to them as your work colleagues and team members, not

as subordinates there to do your bidding. They serve different but equally valuable roles in the school's and institution's success.

**Explore resources the institution and school make available to new faculty, and take advantage of them.** These may include such resources as in-house faculty development programs, a campus teaching-learning center or educational technology center, instructional designers, a writing center or writing support services, literature search and reference services, support for travel to professional meetings, internal mini-grants or start-up funds for teaching innovation or research, an office of research administration, and new faculty mentoring programs.

**Find ways to connect beyond your school or department with the larger institution.** Attending special events, serving on institutional committees or task forces, scheduling meetings with faculty in other schools or departments who share your scholarly interests, or simply having lunch regularly in the faculty dining room or lounge where you can meet colleagues from across campus can help you connect with faculty and administrators. They can be valuable allies in helping you acclimate to your institution's culture.

**Create ways to maintain balance between your professional commitments and your personal life.** Exercise, good nutrition, adequate sleep, family and social networks, community involvement, and cultural interests can provide respite and renewal to help you meet the daily and sometimes stressful demands of the new faculty role. The ubiquitous presence of technology—e-mail, text messages, and social media—can drain personal reserves. Give yourself permission to disconnect in ways that work for you while also fulfilling your faculty role commitments.

Boice's (2000) prescription for success is to work with constancy and moderation (*nihil nimis*, meaning “everything in moderation”) and to do so from the start of your faculty career. In addition to the tips above, Boice (2000) provided a brief and helpful list for achieving constancy and moderation in the faculty role:

- Do not rush into tasks. Engage in reflection and mindfulness before beginning.

- Begin early, “before the work... feels like work” (p. 7).

- Work in short, regular sessions.
- Finish “before diminishing returns set in” (p. 7), in other words, don’t belabor and overwork.
- Invite, be receptive to, and learn from feedback and constructive criticism.
- Manage negative and self-defeating thoughts and emotions.
- Take advantage of opportunities to collaborate with and learn from others.
- Focus on the right work to minimize wasted effort.

If you are a new faculty member, the advice offered here can help to ensure the

best start in your academic career. If you are a seasoned faculty member, share this advice with new faculty colleagues who are joining your school this fall. You may even find the advice a helpful refresher for yourself.

With the graying of our profession’s faculty, it is more important than ever that we find ways to welcome, guide, nurture, and support our newer and younger faculty colleagues to ensure their retention, satisfaction, and success—and ultimately, the success of the enterprise we know as nursing education. Its future will someday be in their hands.

## Reference

Boice, R. (2000). *Advice for new faculty members*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

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