Living the Full Life: Mentorship for Full Professors and Senior Faculty

Robbin Crabtree
David Alan Sapp

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/david_sapp/33/
Shaping Campus Morale: A Proactive Approach

MICHAEL THRASHER

Stakeholders in the higher education community frequently employ the term morale in descriptions of campus climate, culture, and attitudes. As an enterprise focused on teaching, research, creative activity, and service, academia might seem to be an unlikely place for morale problems. And yet, at times, institutions may indeed succumb to low morale and the accompanying paralysis that it can produce. Therefore, effective campus leaders must become adept at understanding the origins of campus morale, its implications, and practical methods for its management.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines morale as "the mental or emotional state (with regard to confidence, hope, enthusiasm, etc.) of a person or group engaged in some activity; degree of contentment with one's lot or situation." From this perspective, morale can describe the mind-set of any population of people—soldiers, an athletic team, corporate employees, or university faculty and staff. How do the organization's members view their work? What are the people's attitudes toward their mission and cause? What is the likelihood of achieving meaningful goals or accomplishments?

Diagnosing the mental or emotional state of a large and diverse group of people presents many inherent challenges. Systematic approaches, such as the Higher Education Research Institute Faculty Survey, provide one option for diagnosing campus climate and morale. Some campus leaders hold open forums, town halls, or casual receptions to gauge morale in more informal settings. Measuring campus morale informs the strategic initiatives of academic leaders; however, relying solely on perceptive data (whether systematic or subjective) may cause leaders to fall into a reactionary pattern in which they are always chasing campus morale from behind. Perhaps a more compelling approach is for the leader to seize the strategic initiative by purposefully influencing campus morale through preemptive action. Such an approach requires a thorough and unequivocal understanding of the concept of morale and a command of tactics for managing its status.

The Oxford definition of morale focuses on four specific environmental aspects: confidence, hope, enthusiasm, and contentment, each of which should be considered in depth. For faculty and staff, the issue of confidence can be further divided into two subelements: the confidence they have in their leadership and the confidence they have in themselves. For positive campus morale, faculty and staff should know that their leaders are competent, skillful, and honorable individuals. The most fundamental element in establishing confidence in a leader is trust. Stakeholders must rely on the immutable concept that their leaders will be honest with them, even when the information shared is undesirable. When a leader makes an error, he or she should be honest enough to admit it and to take appropriate steps to remedy the situation as much as possible. Rather than making the leader seem weak, such an approach...
the curriculum is well structured so that faculty understand what is supposed to be accomplished in each class.

Although it is important to protect junior faculty, it is also crucial to cultivate a sense of service. It is a disservice to leave them out of the loop in the important decisions associated with the department and university (and the tasks associated with those decisions). They need to be in the loop but without being assigned the most onerous tasks. More generally, we need to present service as more than just an obligation to be avoided. I emphasize that service can and should be a part of our career that is just as satisfying as research and teaching. (I'll add that it is an important challenge to bring in colleagues who will believe that.) We have many discussions about which opportunities to seek out and which to avoid. We talk about building a service trajectory in the same way that one might build a research trajectory—from initial roles to help develop familiarity and expertise to navigating a series of roles with increased responsibilities. It is ideal if the chair can find ways that junior faculty can obtain resources or realigns for tasks that will help them to learn and develop—for program advising, curriculum development, assessment, and so on.

Good mentoring should also seek out ways to promote junior faculty. Like most chairs, I receive a lot of notices about opportunities that are not distributed to individual faculty. Keeping junior faculty aware of opportunities can help them to map out academic terrain and trajectories, even if they do not take advantage immediately. In particular, identifying awards or recognitions for which junior faculty might apply (or be nominated) can be a particularly appreciated form of support—and those awards (and even nominations for awards) can be important steps in taking on higher visibility roles and responsibilities.

So far, I have written about the challenges of a junior-heavy department, but there are also wonderful opportunities. Junior faculty can bring renewed energy to a department, along with valuable new perspectives and insights. They are often more aware of recent changes in subfields or curricular initiatives than faculty who have been in the trenches for many years. All of that can provide the impetus to tackle needed changes and revisions—of bylaws, review, tenure, and promotion documents; programmatic roles; curricula; and more.

An equally important advantage is what junior faculty lack specifically, investments in "the way things have always been done." We are living and leading in a time of rapid change in higher education, which means that our curricula and the ways of delivering them (among other things) must be adaptive. Resistance to change is common among senior faculty and quite understandably, as it can mean new reps, new technologies, and rethinking what it is that our students need at a time in their careers where they’ll be less available to enjoy the fruits of those labors. That resistance is minimized in a junior-heavy department, as they do not have years of investments in existing courses, and time frames allow them to focus more on the long-term benefits than the immediate tasks. In addition, they are often excited by the opportunity to put their stamp on a program and to develop a sense of ownership. In my program, we have been able to redesign our curriculum from the ground up, applying the most recent best practices from within our discipline and throughout higher education. It would have been much more difficult to accomplish that in a department with a starkly different faculty composition.

I'll add one final and very important benefit, from a chair's perspective, of a junior-heavy program. That is the tremendous sense of satisfaction that comes from working with and mentoring colleagues to build their careers and a program. That may especially be the case at a university like ours that does not yet have a graduate program. I can honestly say that although the last four years have been the most challenging (and overwhelming) of my career, they have also been the most fulfilling.

The biggest lesson I have learned in leading a junior-heavy department is the necessity of thinking in terms of long trajectories. In the short term, it can be easy to focus solely on the challenges of junior colleagues. The opportunities become clear only with a longer perspective. A junior-heavy department is by its very nature a transitory phenomenon; the investments must be made quickly and the benefits reaped later—often long beyond the time that a chair is in place. Our department has term limits on the chair position (which I adamantly support), and I look forward to handing off a healthy and vigorous program to a colleague who has the skills and confidence to take over the leadership role, surrounded by a group of tenured (or near-tenured) colleagues who can support the chair and subsequently take their own turns at the helm. Like Cincinnatus, I'll look forward to going back to my proverbial plough and playing a different role in what we have built together.

Dennis J. Downey is chair of the sociology and anthropology programs at California State University, Channel Islands. Email: dennis.downey@csuci.edu

---

**Living the Full Life: Mentorship for Full Professors and Senior Faculty**

ROBBIN D. CRABTREE AND DAVID ALAN SAPP

As faculty are promoted to full rank, department chairs have an ideal moment to encourage them to set new goals related to the institution's needs as well as to their own aspirations. Chairs should encourage reflection and dialogue to help newly promoted colleagues "live the full life." It is the chair's responsibility to
ensure these faculty don't pull away as too often characterizes this moment in one’s career, sometimes understandably to find lost balance with other aspects of life, but too often with an attitude that they have paid all the dues they ever need pay.

In support of whole-career mentoring and the department’s common good, chairs can steer full professors toward the needs of the university, college, and department and ensure that senior faculty support junior colleagues, students, and the discipline. This article is intended to assist department chairs in advising and guiding full professors as they celebrate promotion, seek meaning in the often anticlimactic postpromotion year, and imagine creatively what they want from their careers in what can be considered “the third act.”

Teaching Beyond Promotion

Although senior faculty are not always expected to document teaching in the same ways as junior faculty are required to do, they should continue to model excellence and innovation in teaching. One should reflect on teaching effectiveness in relation to changes in the discipline, the student body, and the priorities of the department and college.

As chair, through the following practices, you can encourage and support newly promoted faculty to deepen their teaching effectiveness.

Regardless of rank, all faculty should regularly reflect on student feedback. This includes quantitative and qualitative course evaluation data as well as insights gleaned from informal interactions with students. Unsolicited student communication about teaching, including complaints, should be respected. Often, such feedback comes to a department chair first, who can help experienced teachers listen to students and adjust strategies without compromising standards.

Peer review of teaching should not end with promotion. It is important for senior faculty to discuss goals and pedagogical strategies with colleagues on an ongoing basis. They should observe and be observed by junior and senior colleagues alike as part of a healthy process of ongoing self-evaluation. In fact, junior faculty may be more innovative or effective in the classroom, so these exchanges can be part of developing cross-department dialogue about teaching and a department culture of excellence.

Invite professors to build new teaching strengths. Full professors should continue to attend on- and off-campus teaching workshops, reflecting on applications and outcomes. Even in the absence of formal post-tenure review, senior faculty can and should continue to keep a teaching portfolio. Professors also might be tapped to research and lead implementation of new techniques to promote sought-after outcomes for student learning and experiences. Team teaching can be a way of disseminating newer approaches and building curricula, in addition to producing opportunities for shared intellectual community.

Senior faculty should support junior and contingent faculty development. This might take the form of formal mentoring and peer review, as discussed earlier, but it also might mean taking on more challenging teaching schedules to ensure junior and contingent colleagues are not overly disadvantaged.

If a senior colleague’s interest in scholarship has waned, then the chair might encourage more teaching and/or service. This redistributed load can help senior colleagues remain fully engaged beyond active research programs. Asking them to lead department assessment activities is another way to leverage a master teacher’s experience and energy, ensuring ongoing engagement in department life, and has the potential to evolve into scholarship about teaching and learning.

Ongoing Scholarly Engagement

The strongest research scholars stay mobile throughout their careers by nurturing national and international profiles. These colleagues are often highly valued by the department and the institution for the status their work confers (and perhaps to the extent that they are valued by competing institutions). Nevertheless, not all tenured faculty members are research intensive and not all full professors sustain their research agendas into late career. The teacher-schola: model prevalent at the majority of public and private institutions carries the expectation that faculty will remain research active.

The following sensible approaches allow chairs to support later-career faculty in maintaining research interests and productivity.

Senior faculty can collaborate in ways that support the career development of junior colleagues and/or other emergent scholars in the discipline. Helping guide junior faculty in developing their research trajectories (e.g., by reading their work, suggesting potential publication venues, connecting them to editors) is not the chair’s work alone and can be very satisfying.

Chairs should discuss research plans with full professors. Such whole-career mentoring ensures senior colleagues don’t become invisible (or worse, free agents). In fact, many faculty experience the drop-off of the chair’s (and other mentors’) attentions post-tenure as a loss of community and connection. Chairs also must ensure junior colleagues’ needs are considered in senior colleagues’ planning,
Remember, a culture of decision making and resource/opportunity allocation based purely on seniority usually breeds discontent.

For faculty at risk of becoming dormant as scholars, chairs should work with them to develop a plan for ongoing productivity in disciplinary and interdisciplinary scholarship. Chairs might encourage full professors to create or join a writing group or to attend a short course to support the next project or inquiry into a new subject area. Faculty might pursue interdisciplinary publishing or public scholarship as well as writing about teaching and learning, as discussed previously.

Leadership-in-Service

After promotion to full rank, and despite common patterns, service matters more than ever. Chairs should help newly promoted colleagues to reflect on their new responsibilities, encouraging accountability for the privileges of full rank. Although junior and midcareer faculty often fall into the trap of doing just what counts, full professors should be quick to do what’s right, to do more, and to be generous in picking up the slack. University citizenship should be something all faculty members believe in and enjoy, even while all the necessary roles and duties are not equally meaningful or enjoyable.

Chairs should encourage their senior faculty colleagues to do the following in regard to service and leadership.

Maintain visibility and involvement in university life. Encourage professors to model career-long engagement. Chairs can nominate and counsel full professors to chair department committees or to spearhead initiatives that lighten the chair’s load and advance department goals. Service on university committees always should comprise some part of a professor’s overall responsibilities. Chairs can help colleagues make choices that enrich their service experience, identifying service that matches their interests and feels like a meaningful contribution.

Senior faculty should mentor junior faculty about service. Experienced colleagues can help others navigate service responsibilities judiciously. Instead of warning junior colleagues away from service, nominate them and help them build a portfolio of meaningful service as a significant, necessary, and potentially satisfying aspect of their careers. If junior colleagues are to be expected to focus more on teaching and scholarship, then senior faculty must continue to serve commensurate with rank. Chairs play an essential role in developing this ethos of service.

Leadership is the responsibility of senior faculty. The chair should guide newly promoted and other senior colleagues to greater leadership roles. Those who have not yet chaired the department should be in succession and mentored accordingly. Those who, for whatever reason, do not desire to chair or lack department support can take a turn directing an interdisciplinary minor or graduate program. Prior chairs can provide experienced substitutes when the current chair takes sabbatical, something particularly essential when the chair is an associate professor. Colleagues with full rank need to ensure midcareer faculty leaders do not sacrifice their scholarly trajectories. Chairs also can suggest newly promoted senior colleagues to explore opportunities for leadership in professional societies or community organizations.

Full professors play an especially important role in sustaining shared governance, along with other cherished academic values. This work is all the more important when so many faculty positions are contingent. The American Association of University Professors, in addition to the Chronicle of Higher Education and other publications, have documented the ways “adjunctification” has eroded the power of faculty and protections of academic freedom and shared governance. When senior colleagues pull away from service, the work of managing curricula and representing the faculty falls to midcareer colleagues, who are often disproportionately women and faculty of color, thus contributing to differential experiences and career trajectories.

Chairs must make these facts visible and persuasive to full professors.

Chairs can help senior faculty reflect on administrative possibilities. Relatively soon after a promotion is a good time for the chair to check in with a colleague about her or his potential interest in administration. Despite us-versus-them thinking and faculty fear of “turning to the dark side,” administrative leadership of various kinds can be an exciting part of a faculty member’s “third act.” Chairs can help colleagues identify leadership calling. They can also work with senior administrators to nominate full professors for professional development programs, whether to prepare for an existing post or aspiration, or simply to discern how to use their gifts and talents during this career stage. Chairs can point colleagues to mentors for guidance and to those who may be able to create opportunities that develop leadership skills.

Thinking about Retirement and Planning for It

Talking about retirement is a difficult and potentially dangerous act, or so the conventional wisdom tells us. Indeed, the increasingly litigious environment of higher education should give a chair pause about whether, when, and what to talk about in regard to retirement planning. Chairs can nurture a culture of support for whole-career reflection and planning, of which retirement is merely one aspect. A few strategies follow.

Annually remind all faculty of information available through human resources. The chair should include links to a variety of resources in their messaging to faculty that encourage access to information about retirement. Faculty often forget that human resources is the repository of employee policies and services and too rarely access these resources unprompted.

Invite faculty to talk about any aspect of career planning. This includes sabbaticals, fellowships and grants, and flexible scheduling due to family circumstances.
Be a faculty advocate. Remind faculty that the more colleagues work together to meet department needs and educational program requirements, the more likely it will support the collective community and individual well-being.

*If a faculty member's ability to fulfill her or his responsibilities is in obvious decline, then have an honest conversation.* The chair can share student complaints and ask the faculty member what she or he plans to do to improve. Frankly address absences or other dereliction of duties, and hold faculty accountable. Do not allow a faculty member to be the laughing stock of the department or university. At the same time, do not suggest that a faculty member should retire; simply ask the individual to reflect on his or her goals and needs and be as supportive as you can. Refer them to available resources or personnel, and follow up to check on progress or outcomes.

**The chair should advocate for institutional support for retirement planning.** This can be in the form of transparent policies and procedures that are available to all faculty members according to some formula. Consult with the dean, provost, senate, or union representatives. Chair advocacy for faculty should be characterized by deep personal care and reasonable flexibility that supports faculty transition in relation to individual goals and circumstances.

**Final Thoughts**

"Tag, you're it." This is how many chairs experience their senior colleagues passing the torch before they disappear from the scene. Each new chair has the opportunity to move the department culture from one of self-interest, abdication, and hyperseniority to one of engagement, collective responsibility, and career-long mentoring. Keeping full professors fully engaged is part of ensuring all faculty, particularly those in early and midcareer, also have satisfying professional lives.

Robbin D. Crabtree is dean of the Bellarmine College of Liberal Arts and professor of women's studies and David Alan Sopp is vice provost for academic affairs and professor of educational leadership at Loyola Marymount University. Email: robbin.crabtree@lmu.edu, david.sopp@lmu.edu

---

**Progressing Toward Creating a Campus Culture of Faculty Mentoring**

**N. DOUGLAS LEES AND JANE WILLIAMS**

In recent years, the term *mentoring* has been heard and seen with increasing frequency. Here, faculty mentoring is defined as experienced senior faculty imparting their wisdom to fellow faculty by providing advice not only on achieving tenure but also for full rank promotion and energizing languishing careers and career path changes, even for productive senior faculty members. The narrative will unfold using home institution and school examples to illustrate the processes followed, successes achieved at the school level, and progress made toward establishing a campus culture of faculty mentoring. Also shared will be some surprising revelations regarding the internal challenges faced by some of the participating campus schools.

**The Context**

Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) is a large (approximately thirty thousand students), urban, research university that is every bit as complex as its name implies. It is comprised of seventeen schools, two of which offer mostly Purdue degrees and the remainder offering Indiana degrees. Many of the schools predate the 1969 merger that created IUPUI, which, along with the preponderance of professional schools, has generated a siloed environment. This is exacerbated by a responsibility-centered management budgeting system but is ameliorated by genuinely collaborative faculty and administration. Complex, indeed.

Before 2012, there was no comprehensive information on faculty mentoring across the campus. In the fall of the same year, a survey was conducted by the IUPUI Office of Academic Affairs that revealed the extent to which mentoring was taking place, the prevalent models being used, whether mentoring was being monitored or assessed, and importantly, whether there was interest in a campus-level program that would support the efforts of the schools. The results were predictable in that mentoring took place in most schools, was operated at the department level, utilized a variety of models, and was not monitored or assessed. There was, however, a strong voice that a campus-level program (mentor training, review of best practices, workshops on promotion and tenure, mentee training) could improve the efforts under way at that time.

**Events at the School Level**

The year before the survey was conducted, a new dean of science arrived, and he set the expectation that all departments offer mentoring to probationary faculty. Departments were free to develop their own mentoring mechanism, with most doing the standard match of junior faculty with senior faculty. However, some went further and arranged for an internal mentor and one from another department or school. The external mentor was to there to facilitate collaborations with the other unit and to provide input from a different perspective, recognizing that the tenure decision does require endorsements from groups beyond the department. The dean ensured compliance by a checkbox on the annual review documentation of each faculty member. Thus, chairs were delegated the responsibility of ensuring that mentors and mentees met as prescribed. Since these early changes, there is now an expectation that all faculty be offered mentoring at their annual review.