



**Supporting Success and Productivity:
Practical Tools for Making Your University
a Great Place to Work**

**NEW FACULTY ORIENTATION AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA, TWIN CITIES,
U.S.A.**

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This paper outlines both the rationale for and the process of developing a comprehensive New Faculty Orientation at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities (UMTC), U.S.A. The paper introduces the program developed, reviews relevant academic literature regarding faculty development and early career faculty, describes the University of Minnesota context, discusses the content and structure of the New Faculty Orientation program, explores the lessons learned from the orientation evaluation and other data regarding the University's probationary faculty, and outlines implications for future programming.

Having identified a need for a more robust orientation to the University for new faculty, the University of Minnesota initiated a three-day orientation in the fall of 2006. With nearly 100 new faculty participants, the orientation introduced new faculty to key facets of the university in an effort to connect faculty to the larger University community, to help new faculty make connections to other faculty, both new and current, and to senior administrators, and to provide an ongoing source of support that would enable new faculty to be successful in their first year and beyond. Feedback from evaluations of the orientation and from ongoing discussions with new faculty throughout the year indicates that new faculty appreciated and benefited from the orientation. Additional data from UMTC probationary faculty participants in the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) survey and our own internal surveys of two cohorts of faculty indicate a number of areas on which to focus faculty development efforts for probationary and new faculty. Our commitment to data-driven faculty development programming has led to changes in the year-two New Faculty Orientation as well as to the development of additional programming aimed at faculty at various stages of their life as a faculty member. (Word count: 287)

Introduction

The higher education literature suggests that orientation programs can play a key role in ensuring a positive experience for new and early career faculty (Sorcinelli *et al.*, 2006). However, data collected at the University of Minnesota during 2005-2006 as part of an institution-wide strategic positioning initiative indicated that many faculty found the orientation they received upon arriving at the University to be inadequate. In an effort to address this gap, in August 2006 the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities (the University) implemented an inaugural, comprehensive, institution-wide orientation program for faculty new to the University.

Working closely with key constituencies throughout the University in areas including research, teaching and learning, faculty affairs (including the promotion and tenure process), undergraduate and graduate education, technology, human resources, and University service areas, our office designed a three-day program intended to introduce faculty to resources critical to their success, to facilitate networking with colleagues, and to create a sense of community among the group and a connection to the University. In particular, it was this lack of connection to the University of Minnesota, reported by faculty in a comprehensive survey of all aspects of faculty culture at the University, which motivated us to develop a more compelling introduction to the University of Minnesota itself.

Of the 135 tenured, tenure-track, clinical, and visiting faculty who were invited, a total of 96 faculty attended at least one day of the orientation program, and 72 attended all three days. Overall, feedback from faculty participants and University contributors to the program was extremely positive and support for the program on the part of faculty, deans, the Provost, and the President has continued to grow. In an effort to build upon our initial success, our office undertook a comprehensive evaluation of the 2006 orientation program, and is now using the feedback collected, along with two other sources - 1) the University of Minnesota participants' data from Harvard University's Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) study, and 2) a study our office is conducting with two cohorts of faculty—one that entered the University in the fall of 2005 without the comprehensive orientation and the other who entered in the fall of 2006 with the comprehensive orientation—to design the August 2007 New Faculty Orientation program. In addition, we are applying this data-driven approach to program creation and improvement to a variety of other faculty development initiatives sponsored by our office.

Current Challenges to and Strategies for Faculty Vitality: A Brief Review of the Literature

Higher education in the United States dates back to the 1600's, beginning with the establishment of the colonial colleges. The primary purpose of the first colleges was religious training, which continued to be the case through the mid-seventeenth century, at which point the academic enterprise started to become more secular (Brubacher & Rudy, 1999). While the higher education system expanded steadily over the following two centuries, it was in the 1960's—often termed the “golden age” of American higher education—that access to higher education in the U.S expanded most significantly, bringing with it a corresponding increase in the number of faculty employed (Altbach, 1997).

Over the last four decades, however, this expansion has slowed, and the pressures on institutions have increased significantly. As Brubacher and Rudy (1997) note, during the 1990's, “American higher education found itself confronted by some of the most perplexing difficulties it had faced during the more than three and a half centuries of its existence” (p. 399). Chief among these concerns was is shift in the public view of higher education as a public good to a private good, which has resulted in decreased public funding and rising demands for accountability (Altbach, 1997, p. 4). Faculty have been a particular target of criticism; Finkelstein (in Altbach *et al.*, 2001) observes that the public often describe faculty as:

- Self serving
- Lazy
- Doing the minimum
- Answering to no one

Perhaps unsurprisingly given this somewhat bleak context and negative public perception, colleges and universities in the U.S. face increasing challenges in recruiting and retaining the “best and brightest” faculty. Given the critical importance of talented faculty to the success of institutions, this issue has received much attention from higher education scholars in recent years. The resulting literature addresses both the stressors faculty face in the current accountability-focused environment, as well as measures institutions can take to mitigate these stressors and support their faculty. Among the key stressors impinging upon the professoriate are:

- The need to balance teaching, research, and service activities
- An increasing work load
- Longer work hours and lack of work-life balance
- Salaries that have not kept up with those in the private sector (see Finkelstein, 2001, who notes that salaries, while perhaps better in the U.S. than in many other countries, remain 25 to 30 percent below other professional fields in the U.S. such as law, medicine, and engineering)
- Attacks on the tenure system
- Decreases in autonomy
- Changes in the nature of our students
- Demands that faculty be more engaged with the public

Finkelstein (2001) reports that faculty members' overall workload at research universities averages a 60-hour work week. He further estimates that with the impact of technology, we can probably increase this figure by five to 10 percent. U.S. faculty are spending an increasing amount of time on teaching, in part due to technology, in part due to new pedagogies, and in part due to the explosion of information in most fields.

The pressures to publish are increasing as well, particularly at research universities, along with pressures brought on by an expectation that faculty bring in external support and generate their own salaries; this is coupled with a shift in students' primary focus for their educational outcomes to the purely vocational, and an increasing tension, among faculty, between competition and collegiality within institutions (Blackburn and Lawrence, 1995). In addition, faculty find themselves divided by disciplines, departments, and geography to the point that a sense of community among faculty in the United States is gone, for the most part (Altbach *et al.*, 1999; Faculty Culture Task Force, May 2006). Many of these issues are felt particularly acutely by certain subgroups of faculty, such as women and faculty of color. Overall, as Altbach *et al.*

(1999) note, the “...traditional academic lifestyle has deteriorated” (p. 31), and there is a rising level of dissatisfaction with issues of work-life balance, salaries, and ever-increasing demands in all realms of faculty life – research, teaching, and service.

New and early career faculty immediately face most of the challenges and stressors that have been described from the very beginning of their academic careers. Gappa *et al.* (2007) note that new faculty today “...enter their academic careers because they believe that faculty work involves autonomy, flexibility, freedom to pursue academic interests, and opportunities to serve society through education. Unfortunately, what early-career faculty members hope for does not fully match what they actually experience” (p.69). One study by Olsen (1993, cited in Gappa *et al.*, 2007) found that “satisfaction with faculty work actually declined over the first several years of a tenure-track appointment, and that this decline was accompanied by an increase in job-related stress attributed to conflicts involving time and work-life balance” (p. 69). Many probationary faculty also report feeling a fair amount of isolation and loneliness during their probationary years; they feel disconnected from the senior faculty in their departments and some question the ability of senior faculty to judge their work, given the changes and advances in a discipline with which senior faculty may not have kept up.

While this delineation of stressors and challenges creates what could be construed as a fairly grim picture for U.S. higher education, and in particular for faculty life, research indicates that most faculty are “relatively satisfied with their current positions and enthusiastic about their core professional activities” (Haas, 1997, p. 347). In recent years, much attention in U.S. colleges and universities has been focused on improving the student experience; in order to ensure that the professoriate remains satisfied and productive, this same caring and attention, as a fundamental part of a university’s culture, should extend as well to faculty and staff (Chaffee, 1998). Many scholars of higher education (e.g., Chaffee, 1998; Gappa *et al.*, 2007; Sorcinelli *et al.*, 2006) note the importance of making strategic investments in faculty, the human capital of the organization, since personnel is where the lion’s share of any university’s budget is spent.

Research shows that there are multiple opportunities to make investments that can help to mediate the challenges faculty face and contribute to their success. Among the factors that contribute to faculty members’ satisfaction are support from the administration, a positive departmental climate, a sense of community and collegial relationships, opportunities for professional development, a perception of being fairly compensated, autonomy and a feeling of control over one’s career, and having the resources one needs. (Blackburn and Lawrence, 1995; Gappa *et al.*, 2007). Gappa *et al.* (2007) contend that the five features of one’s work life that all people should experience are:

- Employment equity
- Academic freedom and autonomy
- Flexibility
- Professional growth
- Collegiality (p. 132)

Institutions in the U.S. are realizing that to the extent we can create these conditions in the academic work environment, faculty will be more satisfied and more successful; many have begun to put a great deal of emphasis on faculty development and, more recently, on work-life balance and faculty life course issues. A solid orientation to the institution is often a critical first step in this effort; as Blackburn and Lawrence (1995) note, “The right start matters immensely for new faculty....Student assistance, critical equipment, and psychological support [can help] can get the individual off on the right foot” (p. 175). Given the potential of orientation programming to contribute to the professional growth and satisfaction of new and early career faculty (Gappa *et al.*, 2007), the development of such programs, along with the sharing of “best practices” among institutions engaged in their creation, is becoming a key priority for the field of higher education and faculty development, in the U.S. and world-wide.

The University of Minnesota Context

The University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, one of the most comprehensive public universities in the U.S., is a Land-Grant university in an urban setting, the largest of four campuses in the University of Minnesota system, located in the heart of the Midwestern United States. Land Grant universities were established in the



late 1800's to serve the needs of the states and their population, with a focus at that time on agriculture and the mechanical arts. The University's Twin Cities campus serves over 50,000 undergraduate and graduate students (second in the size of the student population of a U.S. university in 2006), awarding over 10,000 degrees annually.

The Twin Cities campus has approximately 2,400 faculty, a total of almost 15,000 faculty and staff, and welcomes approximately 100 to 150 new faculty each fall to the Twin Cities campus. In terms of satisfaction, data on University faculty collected as part of the COACHE project (limited to junior faculty pre-tenure) and various focus groups and other on-campus studies, including the survey from the Faculty Culture Task Force and the University-wide PULSE Survey, are fairly consistent with the data on U.S. faculty in general; while most faculty, regardless of rank, are satisfied with their careers overall, issues such as work-life balance, career-related stress, perceptions of senior colleagues' lack of recent contribution to or engagement with their discipline, and a lack of community are key concerns.

During the 2005-2006 academic year, the President and the Provost of the University embarked on an ambitious strategic change initiative, involving all four of the University's campuses. The first year of this effort engaged over 500 faculty and staff in 34 task forces that examined all aspects of the University – its people, its programs, and its structures. The Task Force on Faculty Culture (TFFC), whose charge was to study and define the requirements for a faculty culture that will support the University's strategic goal of transforming the University of Minnesota into one of the top three public research universities in the world, recommended, among many things, the need for regular communication and increased faculty interaction around issues such as research, teaching, and public engagement, the tripartite mission of the University. As is consistent with the higher education literature, the need for a culture in which faculty feel connected to the University is one of the key recommendations of this task force.

In the Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost (the Provost's Office), the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs is charged with responsibility for addressing the development of faculty across the faculty life course – from the time they join the University's faculty through their retirement. Prior to fall 2006, the Provost's office provided a brief, four-hour orientation for new faculty, three to four weeks after the start of the fall semester; the remaining orientation came from the home college and/or department, more typically hosted during the week before classes started. Feedback from faculty focus groups led by the TFFC during 2005-2006, and particularly feedback from newer faculty, indicated clearly that these orientations were insufficient, both in content and duration; faculty felt disconnected, uninformed, and lost in a sea of resources, information, and regulations in such a large institution. The task force discovered faculty three and four years into their time at the University who were unaware of many important policies and resources designed to help them and to increase their productivity.

Acting upon these data, the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs, in conjunction with faculty and administrators, proposed an intensive, three-day New Faculty Orientation program, designed to address the lack of a sufficient mechanism for addressing key issues for faculty new to the University, and to begin to build a stronger faculty culture. Funding for the initiative was approved in May 2006 and development of the program became the major focus of our four-member office's efforts throughout the summer of 2006.

The Faculty Development *Autobahn*: New Faculty Orientation 2006

With a compressed timeline of barely four months from approval to implementation of the orientation program, our first critical challenges were logistical. Classrooms and other meeting spaces at the University, particularly those large enough to accommodate 150 people, are often reserved months in advance. We specifically chose a three-day format for the program in order to allow us to host one day at each of the three geographical locations of the very large Twin Cities campus, thereby orienting faculty to the physical layout of the University. Thus, our first task was to determine what venues were available at each location at which times; these arrangements dictated the dates of the program, and formed the skeleton of our agenda. In addition, we felt it was critical for the President, the Provost, and other key administrators to address the group and welcome them to the University; given their busy schedules, their availability was limited, and we needed to secure their involvement and set the times of their sessions before planning the rest of the program.

Once these key logistical arrangements were completed, we turned our attention to program content. To ensure the program would be comprehensive, we sought input from a wide variety of constituencies across the University. In May 2006, we convened a 25-member advisory group consisting of faculty and administrators from a wide range of constituencies including the CIC (Committee of Institutional Cooperation) Academic Leadership Fellows Program, the Academy of Distinguished Teachers, the Faculty Culture Task Force, the Center for Teaching and Learning, the Council for Enhancing Student Learning, the Office of the Vice President for Research, the Office of University Women, faculty governance, and Human Resources. From that group, a smaller working group was designated to meet weekly throughout the summer to discuss issues related to program design and implementation.

Based on the input of the advisory groups on the design of the program, we focused on three factors central to the success of faculty new to the University: 1) introducing faculty to key information critical to their early success, 2) helping lay the groundwork for faculty socialization to the University culture, and 3) building important faculty networks across and within disciplines. These factors were addressed through a mix of presentation formats – large-group lecture, small-group discussion, activities, an information fair, etc. – and involved all senior administrators, including the President and Provost, faculty governance representatives, service providers for faculty, deans, and distinguished senior faculty. Specific goals for the orientation, and the activities and sessions in which they were addressed, included:

- Community building and providing informal opportunities for interaction
 - As a first activity, participants gave a two-minute self-introduction in front of the whole group, including their department and college, previous institutional affiliation, courses they were teaching in the fall, and a brief description of their research.
 - Participants collaborated in small groups on an “icebreaker” quiz activity, designed to introduce them to key facts about the University.
 - Meals, snack breaks, and cocktail receptions each day provided time for participants to interact informally and network with other new faculty in a fun, low-stress environment.
- Introducing key University policies and practices
 - Each participant received a binder of information on University resources, categorized by topic and area addressed. Relevant materials for the each day’s session were distributed at check-in, to be added to the binder.
 - Large- and small-group sessions addressed issues and policies regarding: fiscal responsibility, responsible conduct of research, managing conflicts of interest, diversity, teaching, technology, and promotion and tenure.
- Providing practical resources that faculty will use repeatedly in their teaching, research, and daily University life
 - Large- and small-group sessions addressed finding research funding and grants, teaching and learning resources, technology resources, University libraries, and faculty governance.
- Communicating the importance of mentoring
 - An interactive session was hosted by a team of faculty members from the University’s Academic Health Center who have successfully implemented mentoring programs in that context and have conducted research on faculty mentoring across fields.
- Providing faculty contacts for new faculty
 - Second-year faculty, members of the University’s Academy of Distinguished Teachers, Regents Professors (senior, distinguished faculty members), and deans were invited to attend meals and receptions to meet new faculty.
 - Sessions on faculty governance, mentoring, and teaching were hosted by faculty members, introducing them as resources for faculty on those issues.
- Demonstrating the importance of high quality teaching and learning
 - The University’s Center for Teaching and Learning hosted six concurrent sessions, of which participants could attend two. Topics addressed included effective lectures, teaching with writing, syllabus design, mentoring graduate students, learning assessment, and teaching diverse students.
- Welcoming new faculty into the University’s community of scholars and its research programs
 - The President, Provost, and other key administrators, including Vice Provosts and Deans, were introduced and spoke to participants about key University programs and initiatives.

In addition to the time constraints involved in planning the program, we faced a number of other challenges. First, the University does not maintain contact information for incoming faculty centrally; we had to work with each individual department to gather this information and distribute invitations. This required extensive and continual follow-up throughout the summer; we were still receiving RSVP's the day before orientation started. Gathering materials and assembling participants' binders was at times difficult and time consuming; we did not enforce the deadline we set for submission of materials for the binders, and therefore spent many hours photocopying and assembling materials. We had designed gift bags for each new faculty member with items from the University of Minnesota as well as items from key units (such as passes for the University Arboretum and products of major Minnesota industries). We also faced the logistical issue of how to transport the considerable amount of materials to each of the three locations each day, which involved complex arrangements with our campus courier service.

Despite these challenges, the three-day event itself went very smoothly. We employed a number of staff from various offices around campus, and had adequate staffing throughout the event. Staff and student workers wore shirts identifying themselves as hosts for New Faculty Orientation. Initial feedback from all involved was extremely positive, and we finished the three days with a strong sense of accomplishment, eager to review evaluations and feedback in more detail.

Programming for new faculty continued throughout the 2006-2007 academic year, with monthly lunches that provided opportunities to share important information as well as to assess formatively how the first year was progressing for the University's newest faculty members. In addition, we established an email address specifically for our new faculty – newfaculty@umn.edu – to provide a one-stop source of information to address their questions and to help solve problems in a timely and direct manner. Thus, we are able to respond, in real time, to the concerns of our newest faculty members. Feedback from our monthly lunches and emailed questions has allowed us to design future lunches around topics of interest and concern to these faculty. We are using this formative feedback and the questions we are receiving to design a "Frequently Asked Questions" resource that is part of a new web site for new faculty that is currently in development. We hope this online resource for new faculty will also serve as a useful recruitment resource for faculty considering our institution as a place they might want to work

Evaluation and Lessons Learned

The Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs is committed to data-driven programming and decision making. We create, revise, and eliminate faculty development programs based on the continuous collection and rigorous analysis of data about our programs from our faculty. Our inaugural New Faculty Orientation is no exception.

At the close of each day's orientation program, a written evaluation was collected. The evaluation on the third and last day of the program included questions about the overall effectiveness of the three-day program. We evaluated the program based on the outcome goals we had established as well as the topical areas we covered over the course of the three days. Participants were asked to rate each segment of the program on a four-point Likert scale (a fifth choice was "did not attend") ranging from strongly agree or agree to disagree or strongly disagree. Questions focused on the usefulness of various sessions to the participants' start as faculty new to the University. Each day's evaluation also asked faculty to tell us which session or information was most useful and least useful. Finally, faculty were asked each day to give us suggestions for future topics, formats, materials, etc. for faculty development efforts targeted to new and early career faculty.

Overall, faculty participants were very pleased with the content and structure of the three-day orientation. A number commented that while they thought initially that three days would be a bit long, once completed they realized that the time frame fit the goals of the orientation well. Others suggested tightening sessions to reduce the commitment to two or two and a half days. Participants appreciated getting a sense of the physical layout of the University's three-campus foot print and many suggested offering tours as part of future orientations, which we plan to do in this year's program. By far the most positive response was to the session on promotion and tenure, followed closely by the sessions on the University Libraries, on teaching and learning, and the introductory icebreaker activity on the first day. New faculty requested more interactive sessions for smaller groups and fewer informational "talking heads."



As we were distilling the lessons from the evaluations of our inaugural New Faculty Orientation, the results from our participation in the COACHE study arrived. The probationary faculty respondents for the COACHE survey were those who were at the University in fall 2005, prior to our newly designed new faculty orientation. One of our own custom open-ended questions addressed the need for faculty orientation. The data re-confirmed the need for such an orientation program at the University and indicated that we were on the right track with the programming implemented; key among the findings was a lower level of satisfaction in comparison to some of our institutional peers in the COACHE study relative to climate, culture, and collegiality – precisely the issues we aimed to address in our New Faculty Orientation.

To study the impact of our orientation intervention and determine whether we successfully addressed the issues highlighted by the COACHE data, we initiated a new faculty study of those faculty who joined the University in fall 2005 and fall 2006 to determine the impact of our New Faculty Orientation as a key intervention. A random sample of faculty who joined the University between January and December 2005 and another random sample of faculty who joined the University between January and September 2006 were invited to participate in an online survey. This survey, a combination of binary responses and open-ended questions, aimed to understand the experiences of these two cohorts of new faculty. These data are currently being analyzed; however, a preliminary review of the data indicates that faculty in both cohorts are interested in support, both in gaining new skills and in accessing resources around their primary roles as scholar and teacher, and to a lesser extent, as University citizen. Both faculty cohorts express a desire for a collegial, supportive work environment, for assistance in navigating the extensive array of University resources, both online and beyond, and for mentoring (this identical to one of the key outcomes of the COACHE survey). Our long-term goal is to determine the impact of the new orientation program, particularly whether those who participate report higher levels of satisfaction, an easier transition, and more connection to the University community than those who began at the University prior to the initiation of the new program.

Onward and Upward: New Faculty Orientation 2007

These three sources of data – our New Faculty Orientation evaluation data, the COACHE data from our probationary faculty participants, and data from our surveys of faculty who have joined the University in the past two years – are central informants to our organizational learning and to the continuous improvement of our orientation program for August 2007 and beyond as well as to long-term faculty development efforts. The data-driven changes in our New Faculty Orientation that we are making based on these three sources of feedback include:

- Sessions that are more interactive and hands-on; fewer sessions in a lecture format
- Fewer topics offered; a tighter focus on the most critical topics identified by faculty in the orientation evaluations, in the COACHE responses, and in the faculty surveys we conducted
- Increased opportunities for faculty new to the University to interact with senior faculty
- More choices among small break-out sessions instead of few large-group sessions
- Addition of a campus tour the day after the three-day orientation

This year, planning began much earlier; we reserved meeting spaces in the fall when availability was greater, allowing us to upgrade facilities significantly over last year. We again convened the advisory group, including faculty who attended last year's orientation, to discuss feedback and make recommendations for changes to the program. Throughout the year, we worked with our technology and design contacts to create a New Faculty Orientation website (<http://www.academic.umn.edu/newfaculty/>), and brochure that was distributed to all departments. Because many of this year's sessions will be lead by experienced presenters from last year, we have been able to focus on refining their topics and presentations, rather than designing them from scratch. We are also planning lunches and other follow-up programming throughout the 2007-08 academic year, to build on last year's successes and this year's orientation program.



Beyond Orientation: Data-driven Programming Throughout the Faculty Life Course

As we learn more about how to help new faculty be successful we hope to see, over time, an impact in the satisfaction and success of tenured associate professors, ultimately leading to higher rates of successful promotion to full professor. As we continue to respond to the needs of faculty new to the University, however, we also are turning our attention to other aspects of the faculty experience. For example, we are currently addressing another stage of the faculty life course that is often underserved and understudied – that of the mid-career faculty member. In addition, we have begun to work with international faculty, both visiting scholars and those on the tenure track, using COACHE data and information from focus groups to assess the needs of this population and design programming to support them. Ultimately, our goal is to design data-driven interventions to address issues across the faculty life course – from hiring to retiring – and support our diverse faculty with a full array of effective programming that meets their individual needs. Our attention to new faculty issues is the first step in this process. (Word count: 4,832)

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