Random Thoughts . . .

THE NEW FACULTY MEMBER

REBECCA BRENT, RICHARD FELDER
North Carolina State University • Raleigh, NC 27695

Think back to your experience as a new faculty member. If you conjure up mainly memories of a happy time of exciting new opportunities suddenly open to you—new colleagueships, new intellectual challenges, etc.—it's probably been quite a while since you were a new faculty member.

If you think a little more about it, you may start to recall the hurdles you had to jump over to start a research program—writing proposals and trying to get them funded, attracting and learning how to deal with graduate students, and having to churn out a large number of refereed papers while you were still trying to figure out how to do research. You may remember the incredibly time-consuming labor of planning and teaching new courses and the headaches of dealing with bored classes and poor student performance and possibly cheating and poor ratings and a host of other problems you never thought about when you were a student. And you may recall sitting through endless departmental faculty and committee meetings, wondering how you could manage to squeeze in some time for your family and yourself on top of everything else you had to do. Learning to cope with all those conflicting demands on your time and energy was probably not a fun-filled experience for you. Few faculty members ever receive guidance on how to be a faculty member, and it can take years to figure it out by trial-and-error.

Entry into the profession is if anything harder now than it used to be. Even institutions that historically emphasized undergraduate education are pushing their new faculty members to build strong funding and publication records in their first three years, and most institutions still do little or nothing to help the newcomers make the transition from graduate student to assistant professor. The stress on the new faculty members can be debilitating, and those who survive often do so at a severe cost to their personal relationships and/or health.

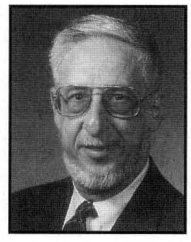
Robert Boice, head of a faculty teaching center at SUNY–Stony Brook, has spent many years studying faculty members in their first 3-4 years and has summarized his observations in *The New Faculty Member.*[1] This column outlines some of his main points.

Common characteristics of the typical new faculty members Boice observed are that they

- *spent far less time on scholarly writing (proposals and papers) than was needed to meet promotion and tenure criteria for their institutions*
- *admitted to going to class overprepared (with more material than they could reasonably cover in the allotted time) and rushing to complete everything, often at the expense of active student participation. Many spent nearly 30 hours per week on class preparation*
- *equated good teaching with good content*
- *taught defensively, doing whatever they could to avoid student complaints. They were primarily concerned that students would complain about*

Rebecca Brent *is Associate Professor of Education at East Carolina University. She received her BA from Millsaps College, her MEd from Mississippi State University, and her EdD from Auburn University. Her research interests include applications of simulation in teacher education and writing across the curriculum. Before joining the faculty at ECU, she taught at elementary schools in Jackson, Mississippi, and Mobile, Alabama. She received the 1994 East Carolina University Outstanding Teacher Award.*

Richard M. Felder *is Hoechst Celanese Professor of Chemical Engineering at North Carolina State University. He received his BChE from City College of CUNY and his PhD from Princeton. He has presented courses on chemical engineering principles, reactor design, process optimization, and effective teaching to various American and foreign industries and institutions. He is coauthor of the text* Elementary Principles of Chemical Processes *(Wiley, 1986).*



content errors

- *received student evaluations that fell well below their expectations and blamed the results on external factors (invalid rating systems, poor students, unfavorable class times and sizes)*
- *experienced a sense of loneliness and lack of collegial acceptance, and had difficulty establishing productive contacts with colleagues who could provide guidance and support*

Not all new faculty members fit this description. Boice identified 5–9% of new faculty as "quick starters," who in their first 2-3 years turned out enough proposals and papers to put them in fine shape for promotion and tenure. They also scored in the top quartile of peer and student ratings of teaching and self-ratings of their enjoyment and comfort levels as teachers. Unlike the majority of their colleagues, the quick starters

- *spent three hours or more per week on scholarly writing*
- *integrated their research into their undergraduate classes*
- *did not spend major amounts of time on course preparation (after their first semester, they averaged 1–1.5 hours of preparation per lecture hour)*
- *lectured at a pace that allowed for active student participation*
- *regularly sought advice from colleagues, averaging four hours a week on discussions of research and teaching*

The main differences between typical new faculty and quick starters are the latter group's abilities to balance conflicting demands on their time and to quickly establish productive networking with colleagues. Boice has developed a "balance program" to help new faculty members do those things. Participants in the program commit to these guidelines:

1. *Limit classroom preparation to a maximum of two hours per hour of lecture.*

   This target is extremely difficult for many professors, but those who manage to reach it find that they can still cover what they want to cover, appear more relaxed to their students, and are better able to maintain a pace that encourages active student involvement in class.

2. *Spend 30-60 minutes a day on scholarly writing.*

   New faculty often feel they must have long unbroken stretches of time to write, but the demands of an academic career seldom allow this luxury. Writing for a set time daily leads to steady productivity and fewer feelings of anxiety over failure to meet scholarly productivity expectations.

3. *Spend at least 2 hours a week on discussions with colleagues focused on teaching and research.*

   (Periodic meetings over lunch are convenient for such networking.) It is difficult for most new faculty members to meet this commitment, but doing so pays big dividends. Good contacts provide ideas and sometimes tangible assistance in getting a research program off the ground and/or improving teaching success.

4. *Keep daily records of work time expenditure.*

   Recording helps new faculty self-monitor how well they are meeting Commitments 1–3.

5. *Integrate research interests into lectures.*

   Doing so leads to greater enthusiasm for teaching as well as recruitment of students as research assistants.

Boice found that faculty going through this program initially resisted its requirements, particularly the one about limiting lecture preparation time, but after five weeks they began to look and feel more like quick starters. Regular meetings with a facilitator or mentor were instrumental in helping them stay with the program. Once they attained the standards set out in the plan, they reported greater efficiency and a higher level of comfort in their teaching.

The New Faculty Member offers a variety of useful suggestions for supporting new faculty. We recommend it to administrators, mentors, faculty developers, and anyone else concerned with helping new faculty members attain the levels of research productivity and teaching skill for which their potential was recognized when they were hired.

References

1. Robert Boice, *The New Faculty Member,* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass (1992). For additional discussions of problems faced by new faculty members and ways their departments can support them, see the Random Thoughts columns "Teaching Teachers to Teach: The Case for Mentoring," *Chem. Engr. Education 27*(3), 176-177 (1993) and "Things I Wish They Had Told Me," *Chem. Engr. Education, 28*(2), 108-109 (1994). ❐

All of the *Random Thoughts* columns are now available on the World Wide Web at http://www2.ncsu.edu/effective_teaching/ and at http://che.ufl.edu/~cee/