



12 May 2015

TO: Sarah Mangelsdorf, Provost

FROM: Michael Bernard-Donals, Vice Provost for Faculty and Staff

RE: Mid-Career working group report and recommendations

Faculty at mid-career are the university's developing leaders and emerging research stars. It is these members of the faculty who are most likely to chart exciting new directions for research, teaching, and service across the campus. Some will take up cutting-edge interdisciplinary research; others will experiment with new methods of teaching; still others will find their vocation in the work of shared governance. And yet, across the nation, studies show that mid-career faculty members are less happy than their colleagues in earlier and later career phases. Some feel rudderless or overwhelmed, uncertain of the most meaningful career path to take. Others find life-work balance difficult. Women faculty lag behind their male peers in salary and promotion and, studies show, are likely to bear more than their fair share of service. Discontented faculty may well be tempted to consider positions elsewhere at exactly the moment when they could be contributing the most to the University of Wisconsin. Retaining and developing mid-career faculty therefore presents an important and exciting challenge.

To address this challenge, the office of the Vice Provost for Faculty and Staff created a working group to take up the complex set of issues related to the professional development of mid-career faculty, to understand how institutions like (and unlike) the UW-Madison have created systems of support for their own mid-career faculty, and to apply the lessons learned from this research to our own institution and propose resources that will better support our own mid-career faculty as they reach the next stages of their careers as teachers, scholars, and leaders of the institution.

The work group included myself as chair, Irwin Goldman (Professor of Horticulture), Caroline Levine (Professor and chair of English), Robert McMahon (Professor and chair of Chemistry), Claire Wendland (Associate Professor of Anthropology), Mo Bischof and Michaela Aust.

The members of the work group met five times between mid-December 2014 and early May of 2015; between meetings, the group read studies of mid-career faculty work-life and climate, and researched programming offered by a number of universities and colleges meant to support the work of associate professors and mid-career full professors. In addition, the Vice Provost for Faculty and Staff – as part of his work with the Secretary of the Faculty's office – sat with a group of mid-career faculty at a Faculty Networking Lunch in February of 2015 to discuss their experiences in making the transition from assistant to associate professor. The work group also convened a focus group of a dozen or so mid-career faculty (including associate professors and

newly-promoted full professors from across the university's four divisions) to discuss the shift in their working lives as they advanced through the ranks of the professoriate.

Among the findings uncovered in our meetings and in our research:

- Purposeful mentoring of faculty typically ends at the end of the probationary period, and there are often no formal networks of mentoring after a faculty member has achieved tenure;
- “External” benchmarks for advancement, which are present in the probationary period, often disappear after tenure; specifically:
 - criteria for promotion vary in clarity and specificity across units
 - new research often calls for a change in direction without clear pathways
- Service demands increase in most units, in some units dramatically, after probation (in large measure because junior faculty are often “protected” from service/governance), and mid-career faculty are often hard pressed to say no or to easily prioritize demands on their time;
- Mid-career is a time when faculty are asked to take on leadership roles in departments, which takes time away from other intellectual work;
- Mid-career is sometimes associated with increased responsibilities at home and in a faculty member's personal life;
- As a result, WISELI surveys and other national surveys reveal that associate professors are the unhappiest among the three faculty ranks.

It became clear in our discussions that there is a need for programming and services to better support mid-career faculty so that they can successfully navigate the middle stages of their careers to be productive contributors to their units and the university, and so that they can be successfully promoted to full professor.

HOW WE CAN ADDRESS THE ISSUE:

In the preliminary discussions of the working group, based on the information we obtained from mid-career faculty – both on the work group itself and across the university – we began to understand that there are a number of ways we can support the work of faculty members at mid-career. More specifically, there is no “silver bullet” approach, because the issues faced by faculty at mid-career are so complex, and because the experience of mid-career faculty members differs from division to division, and sometimes from department to department. So, for example, one recently-tenured associate professor in the physical sciences told us that the criteria for promotion to full professor were absolutely clear to him: “get more research funding.” Such a criterion would not apply to faculty members in the humanities, for example, because fully funded research is far less common in those disciplines. We also found that because the University of Wisconsin-Madison tends to promote mid-career faculty members to full professor earlier than many of our peer institutions, “languishing” at the associate professor level is less of a concern than that even recently-promoted full professors often find themselves without a clear sense of their next major project and find it difficult to find colleagues with whom they can share their experiences.

In short, the work group understands that there are a number of ways to address the concerns of mid-career faculty, and that they should be understood as an array of resources, rather than an either-or, menu approach. Among the ways we can support mid-career faculty members we can:

- Provide better, more systematic mentoring that meets the needs of individual faculty (no “one-size-fits-all” approach);
- Encourage earlier participation in, and provide better information on the value of, service and shared governance so that it doesn’t seem like “burden” to be borne after tenure;
- Offer better financial and reassigned-time support for mid-career faculty;
- Create or enhance mid-career faculty networks;
- Create and promote professional development programs, on the model of the successful chairs’ chat series, for mid-career faculty and staff;
- Discuss with campus leaders the development of clearer criteria for mid-career faculty work, and for promotion to full professor, in the units (departments/colleges/schools).

CURRENT MODELS OF SUPPORT:

There are several programs, resources, and initiatives, some of which are aimed at supporting mid-career faculty members and other which are not but that could be adapted, that could be made more robust or redeployed with minimal additional funding to specifically address the concerns and needs of faculty who have been promoted to associate professor. These include:

- New faculty networks, lunches (which could be expanded to include a cohort or cohorts of mid-career faculty);
- Women’s faculty mentoring program (mainly for assistant professors) which could be extended to the mid-career ranks;
- Romnes and Kellett Awards, which – while valuable – are highly competitive and reach a small number of mid-career faculty members;
- Vilas Early Investigator and Mid-Career awards, which could be adapted to better support mid-career faculty, and which could be expanded – as we expect they will be for 2015-16 – to reach more mid-career faculty and staff;
- The “Entering Mentoring” program (mainly for graduate students and post-docs), which provides some extremely valuable models for mentoring mid-career faculty.

In addition, the working group found a number of colleges and universities that have created programs to support faculty at the middle stages of their careers. Among them are:

- The University of Michigan has what it calls the “Associate Professor Support Fund,” which provides \$30,000 in flexible research funding during associate professorship for nominated faculty;
- The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has begun a “Mid-Career Faculty Release Time Program,” which provides one semester free of teaching during associate professorship for those who are successfully nominated; and the “Mid-Career Faculty Workshop,” a one-day seminar with concurrent sessions on leadership development,

grant development, getting a second major project started and completed, and other relevant topics;

- The University of California at Davis runs a “Mid Career Faculty Workshop,” a menu of two-part courses offered to mid career faculty on issues in faculty leadership and work-life balance;
- Michigan State University has successfully run, for many year, a series of mid-career faculty workshops under the guidance of Deborah DeZure;
- The University of Arkansas at Fayetteville has a well-articulated program, “Advancement for Associate Professors,” that provides a structured one-year program designed to guide associate professors toward promotion.

Links to the websites describing these programs in more detail appear in an appendix.

Most of these programs offer a single approach: either they provide release time, or they provide flex funding, or they provide workshops. The preponderance of programs tend to offer money for research or teaching release (and could be seen as “throwing money at the problem”), while few programs – Arkansas is the most notable – have put into place structured mentoring networks. We heard from our informants that networks and mentoring – formal and informal – are at least as valuable as money and time, because that mentoring will help shape **how** mid-career faculty make best use of funding and the time it affords.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

What follows is a set of general recommendations for putting into place programs and resources for associate professors and mid-career faculty more generally. We recommend general support for all mid-career faculty; some specific support to help kick-start the work for those who may be languishing in rank; and recognition of mid-career faculty accomplishments in scholarship, teaching, outreach, and academic leadership.

- Implement mentoring programs to help mid-career faculty better understand their location along a career trajectory:
 - designed for scholars within disciplines and those working across disciplines or units;
 - designed to encourage faculty to bring second major projects to completion, and provide support and advice on how to do so;
 - designed to encourage faculty to work in new fields.
- Begin a discussion that brings some clarity to the criteria for advancement to full professor (recognizing that these criteria vary across schools, colleges, departments, and disciplines);
- Provide workshops on:
 - navigating service obligations and to support leadership development at mid-career
 - starting a new project
 - using sabbaticals successfully
 - how to establish oneself as a full professor

- developing and cultivating leadership, with particular attention paid to the differences between small and large departments, differences across schools and colleges, and the complexities of university-wide governance and leadership;
- Create structured programs (on the University of Arkansas model) designed to create a cohort or cohorts of mid-career faculty who are prepared to propose and get started on a second major project;
- increase funding opportunities for mid-career faculty:
 - more Vilas mid-career awards
 - more funding for Life Cycle awards
 - money from provost's office for mid-career conferences and symposia

We propose to design and implement some of the above initiatives in the 2015-16 academic year:

- Under the auspices of the office of the Vice Provost for Faculty and Staff, create programming for mid-career faculty, including :
 - Chairs chat-style discussions – scheduled regularly throughout the academic year – on grant writing, making progress on a second major project, making good use of sabbaticals, achieving work-life balance, preparing for leadership positions, etc.
- Together, the office of the Vice Provost for Faculty and Staff and the office of the Secretary of the Faculty will design a pilot consisting of a semi-structured phased program, run over three years, for a cohort of between 7 and 12 mid-career faculty members.
 - In year 1, each member of the cohort would be paired with a senior faculty mentor; in bi-weekly meetings (in-person or skype), the pair would engage in semi-structured mentoring, guided by a script to be developed in consultation with Christine Pfund and the “Entering Mentoring” program.
 - In year 2, the cohort would meet together in semi-structured get-your-project-proposed-and-started workshops, designed to help mid-career faculty understand the research necessary to undertake the project, network with faculty and staff at UW-Madison and elsewhere who can help support the project; create proposals for funding support; and begin the research necessary to undertake it.
 - In year 3, for those members of the cohort who remain with the project, release time and/or flex funding would be provided to cohort members to complete project.
- Together, the office of the Vice Provost for Faculty and Staff and the office of the Secretary of the Faculty will develop a mid-career networking group on the model of the faculty networking lunch series currently available (mainly) to assistant professors.
- The Vice Provost for Faculty and Staff and the Secretary of the Faculty will initiate discussions, in consultation with Deans and Department Chairs/Center Directors, on criteria for promotion to full professor.

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