

**Issues and Concerns for New Faculty: Case Studies from Research with
Early-Career Faculty at UNC Institutions
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For the University of North Carolina system, as for other higher education institutions and systems, the recruitment and retention of faculty are major concerns. Analyses conducted in 2000 projected that UNC's sixteen campuses will need to hire approximately 10,000 faculty members by 2010 to replace retiring faculty and meet projected enrollment growth. The facilitators have undertaken a research project, supported by the TIAA-CREF Institute and the University of North Carolina system, to explore the expectations, perceptions, and concerns of early and mid-career faculty related to faculty recruitment and retention. The aim is to identify the broad range of factors perceived as supportive of, or as barriers to, the recruitment and retention of faculty at the 16 UNC campuses and to use this information to guide the development of University policies and a legislative agenda.

The research project was designed to highlight the needs and perceptions of early and mid-career faculty and included interviews with recently hired and recently tenured faculty members. Approximately 50 interviews were conducted with faculty from a range of institutional types, including faculty from historically black universities in the system. Interview questions addressed the following issues:

- Reasons for choosing an academic career and for choosing a position at the faculty member's current institution
- The institution's interest in and support for teaching, research, and public service
- Required time-commitment to meet expectations
- Quality of institutional support
- Role of colleagues and senior administrators
- Tenure and promotion processes
- Compensation (salaries and benefits)
- Quality of life, job location, and family support
- Observations on diversity and the importance of diversity to education

In addition to the interviews, the project includes participation in a national survey of tenure-track faculty being conducted by the Coalition for Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

* This project is described in more detail in Carroll-Ann Trotman and Betsy E. Brown, "Faculty Recruitment and Retention: Concerns of Early and Mid-Career Faculty," *TIAA-CREF Institute Research Dialogue*, Volume 84 (December 2005), and Gretchen M. Bataille and Betsy E. Brown, *Faculty Career Paths: Multiple Routes to Academic Success and Satisfaction*, Westport, CN: Greenwood Publishing, ACE/Praeger Higher Education Series, 2006.

Analysis of interview transcripts is on-going, but the researchers have found that UNC faculty in the early stages of their careers share many of the experiences and concerns expressed by faculty included in *Heeding New Voices: Academic Careers for a New Generation* (Rice, Sorcinelli, and Austin, Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education, 2000). The authors identify three “core, consistent, and interwoven concerns on the minds of early-career faculty”: lack of a comprehensible tenure system, lack of community, and lack of an integrated life.

In addition to opinions about salaries, benefits, support for professional development, and the quality of life provided by their communities, faculty responses indicated both dissatisfaction and satisfaction in such areas as information and assistance in balancing work and personal responsibilities, relationships with department chairs and senior colleagues, and the tenure and promotion process. The responses of tenure-track and tenured faculty revealed similar patterns of experience, although the experiences of both groups appear to vary dramatically based on their institutions and, in particular, their departments. The excerpts below (edited for clarity) provide insight into the range of experiences described in their own words by tenure-track and tenured faculty members in a variety of disciplines and departments at different institutions.

Excerpts from Interviews with Early-Career Faculty

I. Campus Community and Balancing Work and Family

Although UNC faculty members were generally satisfied with their campus location and environment, many reported that they needed more information about the area and services to help them balance work and family responsibilities.

Examples of Dissatisfaction

1. Lack of Information on Campus Community

[Tenure track] We have this one-day orientation. But that orientation is on the dumbest of things, like how to not have a filing cabinet fall over on you. But they don't talk to you at all about potential in the community.

[Tenure track] That's totally played down [university community information] and you have to try and find stuff, and this is my fourth year and I still don't know anything about anything. I was not even told when graduation was or where the ceremony was.

2. Ability to Balance Work and Family Life

[Tenure track] In principle I think that would be possible [i.e., to balance work and family life], but if you think about the fact that I'm on the tenure track and that you need to satisfy certain requirements which are not very well defined, there could be some uncertainty as to, well am I doing enough? Am I going to make it? That makes it hard to make those decisions.

[Tenure track] [Finding a job for a spouse] was done on an informal level. I contacted a faculty member here and, knowing the local [professional] scene, he suggested firms and so we got in touch with them.

[Tenured] I'm divorced and so I always thought I'd be married again by now, but I never had time to date.

3. Lack of Information or Confusion about University Policies

[Tenure track] Family Medical Leave...that's something the university just responds to, doesn't initiate. The university certainly isn't proactive on that.

[Tenure track] To be honest I don't think I know enough about university policies and I think it would be useful. The orientation for new faculty, at least when I went through it, really went through things like retirement plan options very, very quickly and I don't think any of us really knew what our options were.

4. Availability of Daycare Facilities and Respect for Family Responsibilities

[Tenure track] There is absolutely no infrastructure at all for anything like daycare or any kind of release time or even anybody to point you in the right direction.

[Tenured] I know the daycare directors are very careful but you really need to be on it the day you get proof of a pregnancy. And everyone who's here knows that. So you go from the doctor to the childcare place with the letter from the doctor. But if you were new to campus or you didn't realize how it works... it's very, very expensive and it's not subsidized.

Examples of Satisfaction

1. Flexible Work Schedules Alleviating Work-Family Issues

[Tenure track] Obviously the academic schedule is a very nice one because of the flexibility day-to-day as well as summer blocks. There is the potential for interface with the children.

[Tenure track] As long as you're getting your stuff done, you don't actually have to be anywhere at any time. So that's fairly flexible.

2. Improving Work-Family Policies

[Tenured] I had two children before tenure, and one of the things that was a major concern for me was the lack of maternity policy here when I started. There is one in place now that's being applied and so my junior colleagues who are coming through who are looking at having kids before tenure at least know the rules. That's something that's only been in place for a couple of years here.

3. Availability of Daycare Facilities

[Tenure track] I feel pretty good about all of the daycare/childcare/preschool and now after-school care that I've been able to have. I have paid pretty top dollar for it.

II. Importance of Support from Department Chairs and Senior Colleagues

Interviews with UNC faculty document the importance of department chairs and senior colleagues, for better or worse, in new faculty members' confidence about their ability to succeed.

Examples of Dissatisfaction

1. Internal Politics and Competition among Faculty

[Tenure track] My reappointment was made into a very political issue about senior faculty. Debates that they've had amongst one another for 30 years of "I don't like you and I see you aligning with X and I worry that even if you retire, he'll just replace you and so I'm going to politically vote against this person." And it was actually kind of messy in that the dean got so frustrated and upset with all our faculty because they were playing these kinds of games. But at the same time, you can't for sure know if somebody is making it because the faculty really believe somebody is capable, or if they're doing it for another reason.

[Tenured] There are some problems among faculty and how people tend to treat and view each other. It's not as competitive as other places I've been, but there is some need for better dialogue and better ways of addressing potential competition among faculty.

[Tenured] I was given very clear expectations and positive reinforcement. A very clear sense of deadlines, but as an undercurrent [there's] always a little bit of anxiety. I felt a lot of that was counterproductive and I think it comes mainly from other faculty. The administration doing nothing to dispel the sense of competition and anxiety, sort of letting it sit, can be counterproductive. I think some administrations will do that because they know it'll make people work harder.

Examples of Satisfaction

1. Importance of Informed Colleagues

[Tenure track] A senior faculty member was an advocate for me as much as he could. He came in the last two years of my time here, just before I went up for tenure. But the fact that he knows how to evaluate my work in line with our area is helpful. There were senior people in the department who were looking at my work suspiciously saying, "You know, this isn't like my work at all."

2. Protection and Guidance by the Department Chair

[Tenure track] One of the things is having the chair protecting you more because he was keenly aware of what I needed to do and made sure I had the time.

[Tenure track] I actually laid out a 5-year plan and brought it to him [the chair] and asked him "How does this look?" and he actually said I had more than I needed for tenure.

[Tenured] I think it was a smooth process, and I will give my department head tons of credit in that regard. Because she, from the get-go, was very up front. Our annual evaluations were extremely helpful in telling us where we were, what we needed to do, encouraging us to do the things that we needed to do. She set up a mentor program in the department where we would be mentored by tenured faculty who would help us along the process as well.

III. The Tenure and Promotion Process

Many faculty reported being unclear about guidelines and expectations for tenure, felt the need for support and more follow-up on their progress, and felt tenure expectations were a "moving target."

Examples of Dissatisfaction

1. Unclear and Ambiguous Guidelines for Tenure

[Tenure track] I asked when I came what exactly are the metrics or the criteria for promotion and tenure. That was almost five years ago, and I'm still waiting for an answer and I haven't seen any clear criteria for promotion and tenure.

[Tenure track] How teaching factors into it is a little unclear to me, and certainly number of publications, where you fall on the author list, whether it's primary, has never been discussed.

[Tenure track] Generally on this campus there's been a hesitancy to say your teaching evaluations must have this particular number or it's not good enough. Or you have to have X number of publications, or you have to do this much service.

[Tenure track] There's also a feeling around the university that there's not a lot of coordination between departments, so some departments have a much easier research and writing requirement than my department does.

2. Tenure as a Moving Target

[Tenure track] I had a vague general sense, but I have to tell you that if I would go up for tenure next year, I'm still not sure what the expectations are because they're in flux. And no one seems to really know. The department's expectations are different from the school's; the

school's are different from the college's; the college's are different from the university's. So nobody knows, no one knows what the expectations are. I would say that there are probably three targets for tenure, department, school, and university. I think the targets are fixed in place. I think the expectation of which target you are expected to hit has changed. I think for a long time my particular department felt that the department was the only one you really had to hit. I always geared my career more towards what the school wanted. And I think that was a really wise choice.

[Tenure track] When I first came here, the notion was that you had to be a good teacher because that's the emphasis of this school. That had to be not perfect but very good. And then the way I first heard it was that either you had to be very strong in research or service. And it later started sounding like, well you can do as much service as you want and it really won't matter if you don't have any research.

[Tenure track] The requirements have changed with each group of faculty coming in. And so I think there's been a movement to honor or give privilege even to research over service. But then there's been a contrast or a tension on our campus over just what tenure should look like.

[Tenured] Since I've been tenured, there has been a lot of turnover at the university—the dean, provost, and the chancellor. The expectations have gone way up.

3. Reliance on Alternate Sources for Information about the Tenure Process

[Tenure track] The grapevine does a very good job of telling me exactly what's needed. What's written on paper, well, actually we don't have anything written on paper.

[Tenured] I was so confused that I went outside of the North Carolina system to choose a mentor in academia who could start teaching me what it would be like if I decided to stay. It was so confusing.

[Tenured] They hired this woman the second year I was here. And, thank God, she came in the year that I rolled over into tenure track. Because if she had never come, I can assure you I would've never been tenured. So what this lady did, because she needed to recapture her tenure in a year, she set up an education meeting and asked the black faculty that had been on campus for years and years to present to us how we should go about getting tenured. Actually that's where I learned what I needed to do in order to get tenure.

[Tenured] I have a dean who's incredibly autocratic, and everything is under his control, and he tells you when you're going up for tenure. And he told me when I was going up and then next they wanted my package. I had no idea what went in a package so I just informed him he'd have it in a week. I had a friend on the faculty who'd gone up the year before and I said, "Could I see yours?"

4. Lack of Feedback to Faculty on Progress Toward Meeting Tenure Criteria

[Tenure track] It's very hard for me, although I'm getting very positive feedback and everything, but still I haven't heard that "yes, this is enough" or "when you do this, that would be enough." I haven't heard that, so this is quite worrying for me.

[Tenured] Part of the anxiety around being in a tenure-track position was even though there was a document that outlined the expectation, there's still a lot of unknowns about what really goes on behind the scenes.

[Tenured] Tenure had never been explained to me in terms of how you actually do it; the action of it had never been explained to me.

Examples of Satisfaction

1. Clear Guidelines and a Transparent Tenure Process

[Tenure track] I think in this particular college there's a fairly transparent and supportive administration such that if there are issues that need to be dealt with, they seem to make you aware of them pretty quickly and then provide you the opportunity to find your way around to improve things, or if there are a series of marks that one needs to hit, they're relatively visible from the moment you get here.

[Tenure track] We changed vice chancellors, we had someone leave and a new one come in, and the new person has articulated more clearly a broader definition of what counts as research, which is wonderful.

[Tenure track] The main emphasis that has been given to every single member of the faculty is that it is up to the faculty member to make his or her case for tenure and to explain to the committee what their research means and how that reflects professional activity within his or her own discipline so that the committee is not having to compare apples to oranges across disciplines. It seems fairly clear to me. I will say that virtually no one is denied tenure.

[Tenured] I felt like I was well prepared. There was a discussion of what it takes to get tenure. I've had good chairs since I've been here, everyone was very clear, "You should be looking at this number of publications and external grants."

[Tenured] I felt well prepared. I felt that I knew what the expectations are, I feel like I had a certain amount of support in terms of reaching those expectations. I feel like it was a pretty fair and even process.

2. Benefits of Having a Head Start on the Tenure Process

[Tenure track] If I had come here directly from graduate school and without a little bit of a trajectory already underway, it would have been extremely hard. And I think that's recognized in the hiring. I don't know anyone who has been hired in the last few years who has not been somewhere else first.

[Tenured] I was in another state for five years, so I had myself established in the field, so I can attract some grants and get everything going. I was here as an assistant professor for only one year and the next year I was promoted to associate without tenure, so that's two years ago. So I think I had plenty of time to prepare myself.

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