THE CASE FOR EXCELLENCE IN DIVERSITY

LESSONS FROM AN ASSESSMENT OF AN EARLY CAREER FACULTY PROGRAM

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Many colleges and universities have come to understand the added educational value of having a more diverse faculty, and some have created specific programs to enhance recruitment, development, and retention of underrepresented faculty. How do these programs help underrepresented faculty start a successful career? How can they help a diverse faculty build thriving, long-term careers in academia? This chapter addresses these questions by sharing the findings and lessons learned from an internal and external assessment of the Excellence in Diversity Fellows Program at the University of Virginia.

Research on new faculty has been conducted across a variety of disciplines and institutional types, using a range of methodological approaches. Findings consistently indicate that many new faculty members, especially women and those of color, encounter roadblocks that can negatively affect their productivity and career advancement: getting oriented to

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a new departmental and institutional culture, excelling at research and teaching, navigating the tenure track, building substantive professional networks, and balancing work and life (Boice, 1991; Fink, 1984; Menges, 1999; Olsen & Crawford, 1998; Olsen & Sorcinelli, 1992; Reynolds, 1992; Rice, Sorcinelli, & Austin, 2000; Solem & Foote, 2004; Sorcinelli, 1988; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996; Yun & Sorcinelli, 2008).

Newcomers who also are underrepresented faculty may face additional challenges. The literature suggests that nonmajority faculty encounter added stresses such as isolation, lack of mentors, marginalization of identity-based scholarship and ethnic epistemologies, narrow definitions of merit in tenure and promotion, “cultural taxation” in teaching such as having to teach nontraditional courses or deal with higher student scrutiny because of their diversity, heavier student advising and service obligations, and conflict between cultural and institutional values (Boice, 1993a, 1993b; Maher & Thompson Tetreault, 2007; Moody, 2004; Stanley, 2006).

Like many institutions of higher education, the University of Virginia actively recruits underrepresented faculty with the goals of increasing diversity, invigorating the intellectual climate, and enhancing the educational experience of students. The institution has been aware, however, that the success of new and diverse faculty depends largely on the level of support they receive from the university. To better support these new hires, the Teaching Resource Center (TRC) designed and piloted an Excellence in Diversity Fellows Program (EDF) with funding from the provost and the deans of the Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. This chapter describes what the coauthors, who also served as the EDF program coordinator and the leader of an external review team, learned from a multilayered assessment of the three-year pilot phase of this program (2003–2006). It also identifies action steps the university has taken throughout 2006–2008 in response to the assessment’s recommendations.

Background of the Excellence in Diversity Fellows Program

The EDF program assists new and diverse faculty in navigating the challenges of being pretenure, reaching their potential as teachers and researchers, and building thriving, long-term careers at the university. These are the goals of the program:

- Offering new, diverse faculty early and direct insights into how to succeed in the academic world, including engaging them in defining their teaching and research agendas.

- Promoting a peer-level support network and serious intellectual discourse among a diverse group of faculty members.
- Initiating and supporting productive interactions between Fellows and the senior faculty (senior consultants) who serve as knowledgeable, generous mentors, thus deepening and broadening connections to colleagues and to the institution.
- Fostering improved communication among junior and senior faculty members and academic administrators.
- Establishing and maintaining an environment in which junior faculty—particularly those from diverse backgrounds—develop a sense of belonging to a community, not only within individual academic units but also to the university as a whole.

To realize these goals, the EDF program offers a yearlong fellowship to a group of eight to fifteen first-year, tenure-track faculty who are interested in connecting to a diverse peer network. The fellowship includes an opening daylong retreat; a match with one or two senior colleagues who serve as teaching coaches, research counsels, and university confidants; and concrete professional assistance through ongoing professional development workshops, panel discussions, and meetings grounded in the concerns of the Fellows (Bach, Barnett, Fuentes & Frey, 2005; University of Virginia, 2007).

An Internal Assessment

There are only a small number of faculty development programs for new, underrepresented faculty, and little evaluation data on their effectiveness (Alire, 2002; Kosoko-Lasaki, Sonnino, & Voytko, 2006; Phillips, 2002; Piercy et al., 2005). Careful assessment of the three-year EDF program pilot, therefore, was important for identifying the initiative's early successes and areas of concern, determining and communicating the long-term direction of the program, and sustaining faculty and administrative support.

As a first step, the TRC conducted a self-study of the program. From the outset of the three-year pilot phase, the EDF program coordinator collected consistent and ongoing feedback from participants. Qualitative assessment data from years one through three included evaluations of each professional development session, a brief midyear questionnaire, and a substantial final report submitted by each Fellow and his or her senior consultant(s). The report also asked for quantitative, "global" rating items on two central questions: How would you rate the impact of

this program on your sense of connection to the university community? How would you rate the impact of this program on giving you insights into how to succeed in the academic world?

Overall, the self-study found high satisfaction with the EDF program. The Fellows reported that they valued the strong connections they built with a diverse peer group, appreciated the support of a senior consultant from outside their department, and found the program activities beneficial overall. One Fellow summed up the experience: "The EDF reinforced my sense of being welcomed and valued; it broadened my awareness of the university outside my own and related disciplines; and it put faces to the names of high-up people in the administration."

At the same time, the self-study uncovered declines from year one to year three in Fellows' ratings on the two central questions of program impact: "sense of connection to the university" declined from 4.71 to 3.96, and "insights into academic career success" declined from 4.43 to 3.75 (see Table 18.1). The TRC and the EDF Program Advisory Committee were not entirely sure how to interpret these declines. Were they due to a programmatic change made in response to pressures from constituencies in and outside of the university? After a successful first year, the campus administration had asked that the EDF program be opened to all incoming faculty. As a result, the number of Fellows doubled in years two and three and the percentage of faculty from diverse groups declined. Interestingly, it was some of the majority Fellows in years two and three who suggested a lack of fit with the program. They were more likely to report that they already had insights into academic career success and "knew the ropes" in terms of getting

Table 18.1. EDF Fellows' Ratings on the Overall Program Impact 2003–2006

Year	Number of Returned Reports/Number of Fellows	Overall Program Impact on Sense of Connection to the University Community	Overall Program Impact on Giving Insight into How to Succeed in Academe
2003–04	8/8	4.75	4.13
2004–05	13/14	4.38	3.54
2005–06	13/15	4.04	3.77

Note: Five-point scale: 5 = very significant, 4 = significant, 3 = moderate, 2 = not very significant, 1 = none.

started, finding mentors, and building a professional network. Conversely, nontraditional faculty in years two and three wanted a program that provided more support for discussing concerns specific to minority faculty.

An External Review

To better understand the findings of the self-study and permit a more comprehensive view of program outcomes, the EDF Advisory Committee invited an external review team to the university in fall 2006. In selecting outside reviewers, the Advisory Committee looked for experienced faculty developers with a demonstrated commitment to supporting women faculty and faculty of color. The three reviewers chosen held tenured faculty appointments, were or had been directors of teaching centers, and were well regarded nationally as experienced professionals with expertise in teaching, learning, and faculty development. All three had conducted research on and built multiculturalism into faculty development programs and demonstrated a strong commitment to fostering inclusive campus communities.

The team addressed three broad questions:

1. Is the EDF program achieving its current goals and objectives? How could it better achieve goals and objectives?
2. To what extent does the EDF program meet the needs of participating faculty from underrepresented groups? the needs of participating faculty from majority groups? How could the program better meet all participants' needs?
3. In what ways does the EDF program serve the larger university community? Is the program well aligned with wider university goals? What improvements would benefit both the program and the university?

Methodology

The review team used two primary sources of information on the EDF program. First, before visiting the University of Virginia, the team reviewed written documents: EDF brochures, website, workshop agendas, mentoring plans, and all program evaluations. They also reviewed the self-study that outlined the history, context, activities, and resources of the EDF program. Second, the review team spent two and a half days conducting interviews and focus groups with various constituencies to learn about the program's perceived strengths, areas for improvement, and future directions.

Over the course of the campus visit, twelve individual interviews or focus groups were held with a wide range ($N = 65$) of faculty members, staff, and academic leaders, including faculty in early-, mid-, and late-career stages, instructors in a number of disciplines, and administrators in various institutional roles. The review team met with three focus groups of EDF Fellows from years one, two, and three; two focus groups of EDF senior faculty mentors; four members of the EDF Program Advisory Committee; and a focus group of department chairs and deans. They also interviewed the vice provost for faculty advancement, the vice provost for academic programs, the vice president and provost, and the vice president and chief officer for diversity and equity. The team guided the interview and focus group discussions in a semistructured way, asking participants to share to what extent and how the EDF program had met their own and institutional needs.

Findings: Program Strengths

The external review team concluded that the EDF program was highly regarded among campus participants. Data suggested four key reasons for the EDF program's success, which are described below.

EDF Develops a Peer Network

Collegial networks may not be as accessible to nontraditional new faculty as they are to those from majority groups. The EDF program directly addresses this concern by offering a structure through which new and diverse faculty meet regularly with each other. In meetings, workshops, and panel discussions, they share strategies for how to start their research and teaching, find mentors, navigate departmental politics, balance work and family, and deal with the unique stresses particular to underrepresented faculty. According to one participant, "Most valuable has been the opportunity for peer group discussion in which all of us, women and academics of color, discovered common concerns, shared strategies, and learned from each other."

EDF Cultivates Senior Faculty Consultants

Fellows often mentioned the involvement of senior faculty as a key feature of the EDF program. Senior consultants are selected with two criteria in mind. First, because there are often only a few women and minorities at advanced career levels, senior consultants are recruited not on the basis of shared identities but rather on their specific skill sets or experience.

This selection strategy recognizes that successful mentoring depends on a set of behaviors and practices rather than on gender or cultural identity (Harley, 2005). Second, senior consultants are always selected from outside of the Fellow's department so that they can provide the kind of guidance and feedback that newcomers might be reluctant to seek from departmental colleagues. One new faculty member stated: "My mentor was great. Because he was outside of my department, he was able to help me with some specific issues that would have been awkward to talk about with my departmental colleagues."

EDF Engages Senior Administrators

Early-career faculty need to know the expectations of their institution in order to have access to the resources that will help them succeed and achieve tenure. Fellows cited annual sessions with university leaders as particularly helpful to them in these matters. One Fellow noted, "Meetings with the campus administrators were especially informative and helpful. The meetings also seemed to signal a good-faith effort on the part of administration to retain minority/underrepresented faculty." Participants also appreciated the opportunity to engage with the EDF program's Advisory Committee, whose diverse members have a long-standing commitment to the program.

EDF Offers Resources and Support

During the campus interviews, numerous people expressed strong affirmations of respect and appreciation for the efforts of the administrative units involved in the EDF program, most notably the Teaching Resource Center. Faculty members and academic leaders agreed that development of the EDF program through the TRC was important, substantive, and well executed. In particular, Fellows cited the fall retreat and peer-focused meetings among Fellows as especially well planned and instructive. Fellows also perceived the TRC staff to be welcoming, highly professional, and faculty-focused: "We've all benefited from the ongoing support and resources from the amazingly dedicated professionals/scholars at the TRC."

Findings: Issues of Concern, Recommendations, Action Steps

There was considerable alignment between the internal self-study report and the findings of the external review team. Bringing in national experts to review the program, however, created a forum for the TRC, the EDF Advisory Committee, Fellows, consultants, and administrators to more

deeply explore issues of concern. The external review team's written report also provided specific recommendations to address the assessment's findings, enabling the university to build concrete, data-based action steps. In addition, the EDF program coordinator and lead reviewer developed an ongoing, online mentoring partnership during implementation of the committee's recommendations.

The next section describes four key issues of concern, recommendations arising from the assessments, and action steps taken by various stakeholders to improve both the EDF program and support for all new faculty programs at the university.

Size of the EDF Program

Issue of concern. The review team specifically asked all participants, especially Fellows and senior consultants, for feedback on the decision to open up the program to all new faculty. The responses to this question were mixed, offering no clear consensus. For example, although some clearly saw the potential advantages to extending the program so that all new faculty could benefit from the mentoring, workshops, and social gatherings, others expressed concern that the scaled-up program was not meeting the particular needs of faculty from underrepresented groups. Furthermore, some feared that doubling the cohort of Fellows was directly tied to the decline in the sense of mutual support and camaraderie that was possible in a small group setting.

Recommendations. The review team encouraged administrators to take several immediate steps: to move quickly to explore other campus programs that might serve as successful models for scaling up the EDF program and offering it to all new faculty; to compare the advantages of such models with the advantage of maintaining the EDF program at a size that is recognized as particularly successful for learning communities (eight to twelve faculty); and to consider whether there were elements of the program that could be scaled up and offered to all new faculty (for example, meeting with administrators, tenure preparation seminars) and elements that should be experienced in a small learning community that addresses the specific career development needs of underrepresented faculty.

Action steps. Concerns about the program's scale were quickly addressed. In spring 2007, the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Advancement scaled up a number of the highly rated EDF program events so that they were available to all new faculty. These included a new faculty tour of the Lawn, a Q&A session with the provost's senior administrators on promotion and tenure procedures and policies, a life-work

balance workshop, a workshop on negotiation skills, and an end-of-the-year social for new faculty. In addition, during the same semester the TRC partnered with the vice president for research and graduate studies and the vice provost for faculty advancement to offer the successful EDF grant-writing workshops to all faculty.

As a result, the EDF program was able to refocus on its original goal: to help attract, develop, and retain a diverse faculty. In fall 2007, the program offered fellowships to a smaller cohort of eight to twelve faculty, thus cultivating the intimacy crucial for fostering deep conversation and meaningful relationships. The key to accomplishing this goal was a confirmation, both internally and externally, that the ability to help new and diverse faculty build substantive peer and senior faculty networks was central to the program's success.

Focus of the EDF Program

Issue of concern. During the external review, focus groups debated the meaning of "excellence in diversity." They also debated whether the EDF program should focus on the broad professional development needs of new and diverse faculty, on diversity issues, or both. Most Fellows wanted it all: more formal and timely help in adapting to their new academic and cultural environment in Charlottesville; more one-on-one support for writing for publication and grant writing; more focus on the tenure process and how to prepare the tenure packet; more assistance with teaching skills (as well as more reward for teaching well); and more emphasis on diversity and uniqueness—be it race, gender, motherhood, and the like, and discussion of the links between their research agendas and diversity.

Recommendations. The review team suggested that the EDF program and the broader academic community needed to clarify the focus of the program. Some key questions were raised: Was the primary goal of the program to provide professional development opportunities for new faculty from underrepresented groups? Was it to emphasize diversity issues related to the research, teaching, and service of new and diverse faculty members? Should issues of diversity be infused into all programming or highlighted as stand-alone topics?

Action steps. Once a variety of offices on campus began to expand faculty development opportunities to all new faculty, the TRC and EDF Advisory Committee were empowered to sharpen the mission of the EDF program and tailor its events more specifically to meet the needs of new faculty with an interest in *both* professional development *and* diversity. To be sure, the program still remains open to all incoming assistant professors, but the TRC more specifically communicates its focus on diversity. For example, the

TRC fine-tuned the EDF application form to better identify diverse faculty and faculty committed to diversity who would benefit from and contribute to this unique network. They also revised the EDF website and brochure to further clarify the emphasis on diversity and inform the broader academic community of the program's focus within the teaching and professional development mission of the Teaching Resource Center.

Conversations among the TRC staff and review team suggested that it was generally more productive to infuse issues of diversity into all EDF programming rather than highlight diversity as a stand-alone topic. For example, the opening retreat now features a "uniqueness exercise" that encourages Fellows to share personal stories and raise diversity concerns. The Fellows also wanted to link discussions of their research to diversity. As a result, the EDF year newly includes a series of peer conversations in which Fellows share their often interdisciplinary and culturally diverse scholarship and collectively develop strategies for effectively communicating their work to senior colleagues. In fall 2008, the EDF partnered with the TRC's successful Professors as Writers Program (<http://trc.virginia.edu/Programs/PAW/PAW.htm>) to encourage peer-writing groups among the Fellows.

The program also continues to sponsor at least one or two sessions every year that directly respond to diversity issues raised by the EDF cohort. In 2007–08, the program arranged a specifically tailored, highly rated panel discussion, *Teaching While Female: Negotiating Gender in the Classroom*, as well as a workshop called *Solo Faculty: Work Stresses and How to Deal with Them*. These events were open to all cohorts of EDF Fellows and fostered peer connections and mentoring (for complete list of program activities see <http://trc.virginia.edu/Programs/EDF/EDF.htm>.)

Finally, the TRC also sharpened its focus on helping new faculty develop a level of comfort in the classroom by offering faculty multiple entry points to explore how best to teach diverse students and design effective courses. For example, in 2007–08, half of the current EDF Fellows requested individual teaching consultations, and six former Fellows applied for the university Teaching Fellows Program, a campuswide program that supports course design projects through one-year Fellowships. As part of its standard programming, the TRC also offered workshops and consultations on teaching and learning in the diverse classroom to all new faculty.

Mentoring in the EDF Program

Issue of concern. Fellows and senior consultants alike suggested that their mentoring partnerships might be strengthened with more explicit guidelines. Some Fellows felt that their senior consultants did not provide enough

research support, give guidance about the tenure process, or help with political or relationship tensions in the new faculty members' departments. Other Fellows suggested more contact—in and out of meetings—with past EDF Fellows so that these “near-peers” could furnish additional mentoring on issues faced by women and faculty of color.

Recommendations. The review team suggested that the EDF program would be well served to explore other mentoring initiatives that have broadened the notion of who can mentor—peers, near-peers, recently tenured faculty, and administrators as well as senior consultants (Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007; Yun & Sorcinelli, 2008). In addition, the program should be more explicit about “naming” the variety of mentoring networks that have already been developed (for instance, the peer mentoring among the Fellows, mentoring by senior consultants and administrators, and so on). Finally, they recommended intentionally connecting current Fellows with earlier EDF cohorts as a way to broaden the network of underrepresented faculty on campus.

Action steps. The TRC initially decided to retain its “traditional model” of mentoring between a new faculty and senior consultant for two reasons. First, overall the matches have been highly successful. Second, as a matter of policy, the TRC avoids asking early-career faculty to give time to activities that do not directly help them gain tenure. However, in 2007–08, the Advisory Committee made two changes. First, they matched a new Fellow with a junior colleague whose personal and research interests were especially closely aligned—and their relationship flourished. Also, the program now highlights the fact that it offers not only a senior consultant mentoring network but also peer and near-peer networks of current and former EDF Fellows. A panel discussion, *Planning Ahead to the Tenure Review*, was reorganized in 2007 to draw on the experience of former Fellows who have gone through third-year and tenure reviews. This event is now open to all EDF cohorts and has become a highly rated forum for exchange (the event also complements a campuswide session with senior administrators on promotion and tenure). In light of these positive experiences, the EDF program will continue to expand its reliance on a broader range of mentoring partnerships while continuing to derive the considerable benefits of having senior colleagues serve as mentors.

Recognition and Reward for Involvement in the EDF Program

Issue of concern. Participants of both the internal and external assessments expressed concern about how participation in the program was valued by the university at large. Some Fellows reported that their chairs

thought the program was remedial and “for poor teachers” or “only focused on teaching.” Relatedly, some of the senior consultants reported that although they were honored to be selected as mentors, the mentoring role was purely voluntary; in general it was not acknowledged or rewarded in annual faculty reports or symbolically in academic departments (recognition by department chairs).

Recommendation. There was widespread agreement that the university should recognize and reward both participation in the EDF program and mentoring by senior consultants. This may require that the program build more connections with department chairs and school and college deans. Application materials and descriptions of the program should emphasize that it is a rich professional development opportunity for new and underrepresented faculty. Chairs should be encouraged to match the EDF stipend to recognize and reward newcomers who are proactively developing their career. Senior consultants might be recognized in annual faculty reviews and by modest remuneration. Finally, Fellows and consultants could be encouraged to share the goals and outcomes of the program in departmental meetings and the director of TRC, or members of the Advisory Committee, might be asked to speak about the program at a dean’s or provost’s council.

Action steps. From the beginning, the EDF program was promoted as an award for new faculty members; now revised promotional materials and a webpage more explicitly advertise the program as an award. In addition, individual schools such as the Schools of Education, Engineering, and Medicine now recognize Fellows on their websites and in their newsletters. To further highlight the award character of the program, the provost inaugurated an annual reception in honor of the Fellows to which former Fellows, senior consultants, chairs, and deans are invited. At this end-of-year celebration, three or four Fellows speak about the value of the program and the program coordinator invites department chairs to encourage the incoming cohort of new faculty to apply for the fellowship.

Finally, since 1990 the TRC has taken a lead in establishing sustained formal mentoring programs through the university Teaching Fellows Program and the EDF program, and it was well positioned to advocate for faculty who give generously of their time to mentor a pretenure colleague. The advocacy of the director of the center as well as the review committee’s conversations with the senior leadership both contributed to the creation of an all-campus mentoring award. In 2007, the campus launched an Excellence in Faculty Mentoring Award (<http://trc.virginia.edu/Awards/Faculty/FMA.htm>), with a \$5,000 prize.

Discussion and Conclusion

Overall, the internal and external assessments confirmed that the EDF program “is highly regarded among campus participants.” Both reviews found that the program fostered strong mentoring and peer-support networks, access to faculty development resources, and direct interaction with senior administrators. Findings confirmed the importance of the “learning community” size of the program, while offering new insights to help guide campus efforts to better realize the program’s original mission and focus and recognize the faculty members engaged in its activities. Additionally, the reviews offered an additional impetus to make more faculty development available to all new faculty members.

The program’s outcomes for the two years following the multifaceted assessment suggest that efforts to refocus the program have been successful. Between 2005–06 and 2007–08, the global ratings of the impact of the program showed statistically significant increases. The Fellows’ sense of connections rose 0.82 points on a five-point scale, and ratings of the program’s impact on Fellows insights into how to succeed in the academic world rose 0.93 points (see Table 18.2 and Figure 18.1.)

These outcomes are particularly noteworthy given expanding departmental mentoring initiatives and additional programs for all early-career faculty. We attribute the continuing high levels of participation and perceived impact of EDF to the program’s ability to build strong and sustained peer-support networks and to support the professional development needs of underrepresented faculty and faculty interested in diversity through specifically tailored program activities.

**Table 18.2. EDF Fellows’ Ratings on the Overall Program
Impact 2006–2008**

Year	Number of Returned Reports/Number of Fellows	Overall Program Impact on Sense of Connection to the University Community	Overall Program Impact on Giving Insight into How to Succeed in Academe
2006–07	13/14	4.54/5	4.15/5
2007–08	11/12	4.82/5	4.60/5

Notes: Five-point scale: 5 = very significant, 4 = significant, 3 = moderate, 2 = not very significant, 1 = none.

We excluded one set of ratings from a Fellow who attended fewer than one-third of the meetings.

Figure 18.1. Overall Program Ratings by Year

The results of the assessment also have important implications for developing and evaluating programs to support new and early-career faculty, especially those from underrepresented groups. The findings remind us, once again, that all new and early-career faculty benefit from programs that promote access to orientation, mentoring, grants, fellowships, and other resources to develop as teachers and scholars. Organizational factors can also promote the success of new faculty, especially the support of department chairs, senior colleagues, and other academic leaders with responsibilities for faculty development.

Second, the literature indicates that researchers and practitioners are still struggling to determine which faculty development models and practices best support women and faculty of color (Sorcinielli & Yun, 2006). Our results suggest that flexibility and attention to campus context is the key in determining best programs and practices. Some universities benefit from developing special opportunities for new and underrepresented faculty to participate in focused peer and mentoring networks such as the University of Virginia's EDF program or Purdue University's mentoring program for women faculty (Washburn, 2007). Other programs, such as the University of Massachusetts Amherst's Mutual Mentoring Initiative (Yun & Sorcinielli, 2008), are designed to encourage all new faculty, especially women and those of color, to build the professional networks that best support their career development. In all of these cases, however, it is clear that peers, near-peers, senior colleagues, and chairs need not be the same race or gender as the new faculty or even be from the same department as long as their definitions of mentoring align.

Finally, the benefits of continuous assessment cannot be overstated. An internal assessment can yield an ongoing database of a program's strengths and challenges, as well as elicit continuous feedback from participating faculty members. At the same time, an outside review by national experts can add value by bringing the voices of junior faculty, senior colleagues, and senior administrators into dialogue with one another, across identities such as gender, race, and ethnicity, and a variety of departmental and college contexts. It can bring conflicting interests to light and engage a much larger community in finding creative solutions. It can encourage multiple stakeholders to imagine the "ideal" features of a faculty development program and work together as institutional partners to establish and maintain an environment in which all new faculty can find professional success and personal well-being in the academic community.

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