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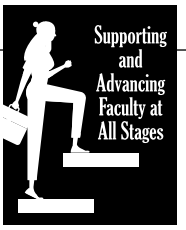


Thriving in Academia: A Model of Faculty Development for Successful, Diverse, Engaged Faculty across Career Stages

By Danielle L. Fettes, Virginia M. Hazen, Vivian Reznik, Deborah Wingard, & JoAnn Trejo

Faculty development across the academic career is essential to support successful, diverse, engaged faculty and institutional excellence. This article presents a comprehensive model of faculty development across all career stages, centering equity for women and historically underrepresented faculty. Four intersecting cornerstones comprise the model: professional development, multifaceted mentorship, institutional commitment, and community building. Specific examples of program implementation, resulting in numerous positive outcomes, are highlighted. The holistic faculty development approach is replicable, universally applicable, and can be flexibly applied. Keys to implementation include (1) build infrastructure, (2) secure funding, (3) engage institutional leadership, (4) establish and leverage trusted relationships, and (5) rigorous evaluation.

Introduction

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SUPPORTS the well-being of faculty navigating the collaborative, complex, competing demands of higher education. Successful, engaged faculty experience professional advancement with a sense of purpose, skill and knowledge development, and connectedness to the institution, promoting innovation and excellence. Nonetheless, challenges abound across the career pathway. For example, junior faculty may experience lack of understanding of institutional culture and pathways to advancement, mid-career faculty grapple with increasing responsibility for personnel, stable funding, and service responsibilities, and senior faculty balance multiple roles and increased administrative responsibility, among others. Faculty development is at a critical juncture in higher education—demanding time and reflecting the varied career stages of individuals (Castillo-Montoya et al., 2023; Steinert, 2012). Faculty development is also essential for equity. Abundant evidence indicates a diverse workforce results in better faculty and student success and increased innovation (Forbes, 2011; Page, 2008; Roberts et al., 2014; Smedley et al., 2004). A diverse academic community unifies scholars with varied perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences, leading to better science by promoting creativity, inclusivity, and innovation.

Faculty development workshops and programs (i.e., for professional support, mentorship, teaching) are abundant, yet integration of effective faculty development approaches is nascent. Faculty development has often focused on mentorship (Choi et al., 2019; Deanna et al., 2022; Fountain & Newcomer, 2016), which is demonstrated to have a critical role in career advancement and success for faculty across all career stages. High-quality mentorship and developing mentoring networks rather than traditional, hierarchical mentoring dyads improves individual success and impacts the university by improving faculty retention, satisfaction, and institutional engagement (Dandar et al., 2017; Pololi et al., 2015). Multi-pronged approaches to mentorship are particularly relevant to women and underrepresented faculty who often experience unwelcoming institutional cultures and a lack of sense of belonging (Pololi et al., 2013; Price et al., 2009; Trejo et al., 2021). Yet, mentorship is just one essential component to faculty development, which should be cohesive and comprehensive across the academic career.

Challenges with faculty development implementation, which ideally and most effectively embeds programs in the context of the everyday demands of scholarship, result in a fragmented approach. A seamless support network is essential for all stages of academic

advancement, from junior to senior faculty. Faculty development should be rooted in a framework (Steinert, 2012) and include programs predicated in robust evaluation. A holistic model integrates person-level elements of faculty success and well-being (e.g., professional advancement, sense of belonging) with institutional excellence (e.g., promotion and retention, innovation), demonstrating how resources directed toward career development, mentoring, and leadership promote faculty development across career stages.

Comprehensive Faculty Development Model

Considerable effort has been made toward improved support for faculty development across faculty career stages. Here, we integrate essential components to offer a singular, comprehensive model of faculty development for successful, diverse, engaged faculty and institutional excellence (Figure 1).

Multiple components comprise each domain of the model (Table 1). Notably, while components are embedded within domains to illustrate essential features, the overlapping nature of impact is vital—the model collectively demonstrates outcomes for faculty success across career stages.

Successful Implementation of the Comprehensive Model for Faculty Development

The UC San Diego Health Sciences Office of Faculty Affairs' (OFA) comprehensive model of faculty development is operationalized through a centralized andestablished office with a robust, interconnected series of faculty development programs promoting the well-being and success of diverse faculty and subsequently driving improved institutional culture and climate. OFA expansion was predicated on a vigilant and steady approach to the faculty development model implementation, accompanied by the application of data-driven, evidence-based strategies, with the core undertaking of both supporting faculty across the academic career span to promote institutional (e.g., recruitment and retention of underrepresented and women faculty) and individual faculty success (e.g., cultivating a sense of community, advancement, leadership development).

Figure 1. ***Comprehensive Model of Faculty Development across the Academic Career***

Table 1. ***Components & Outcomes of a Comprehensive Faculty Development Model***

Domains	Professional Development	Multifaceted Mentorship	Institutional Commitment	Community Building
Components	•Knowledge & Skill Development •Purpose/Meaning in Work •Work-Life Integration •Leadership	•Personalized (e.g. Research, Career, Educational, Clinical) •Near-Peer •Program Directors •Sponsors •Inclusive, Culturally Aware	•Institutional Funding •Matching Funding •Cluster Hires •Equity Action Plans •Supportive Climate •Innovation	•Cohort Model Programs •Networking across Disciplines •Engagement Events •Recognition Awards •Collaboration •Best Practices for Inclusivity
Outcomes	•Self-Efficacy •Sense of Belonging •Professional Advancement •Promotion •Retention •Policy & Procedure •Innovation			

Numerous faculty development programs comprise OFA implementation of the faculty development model, supporting professional development, mentorship, institutional commitment, and community building. A program targeted toward junior faculty development, (initially supported by internal seed funding and since by institutional funds) affects change at both the individual and institutional levels—increasing professional skill development and sense of community and resulting in high retention rates, and specifically for historically underrepresented faculty (Daley et al., 2011; Ries et al., 2012). A structured mentorship program for all faculty, with focus on career progression and success, improves overall morale, satisfaction, and supportive environment for all faculty (Trejo et al., 2021; Wingard et al., 2018). By implementing the comprehensive model, the OFA represents an innovative, thorough approach for building a successful and sustainable system of faculty development.

Keys to Success for a Holistic Model of Faculty Development Across the Academic Career

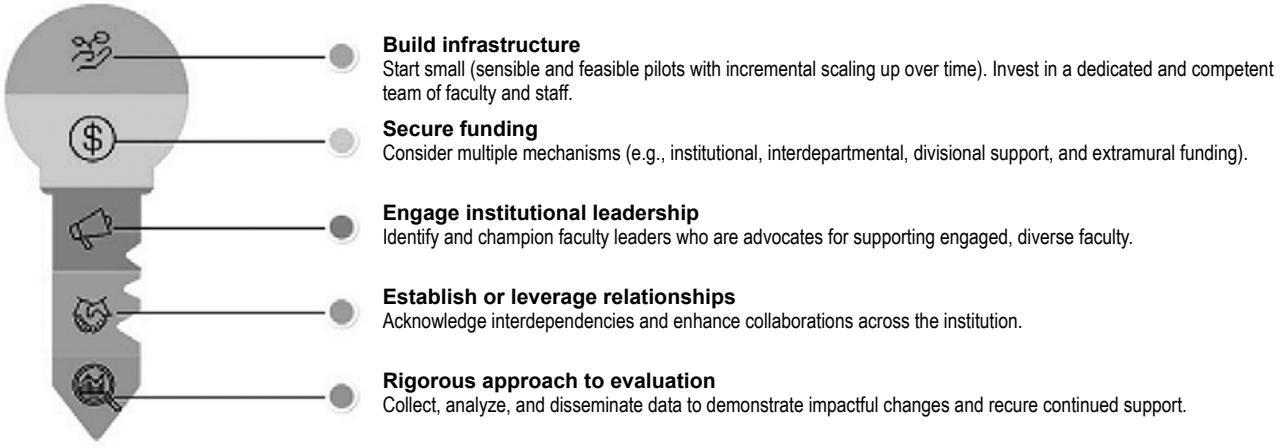
The comprehensive model of faculty development is replicable and universally applicable, while flexible to fit the needs of a particular entity—whether a faculty affairs office, a department, or a college administration. Based on the development and outcomes of OFA, we present keys to sustain faculty development across the academic career (Figure 2).

Set a precedent in "starting small, thinking big" creates a foundation for an archetype entity dedicated to holistic faculty development across the academic career. By building an infrastructure, even one pilot at a time, a unit becomes more competitive on a national scale for recognition awards and extramural funding. Consider multiple funding mechanisms, leaning into creative and innovative funding opportunities (e.g., division support; start-up mechanisms, institutional support as modest seed funding to accumulate, analyze, and report pilot findings). The third and fourth keys leverage and/or cultivate collaboration and relationship building, engaging senior leadership where feasible. The final key is incorporating a rigorous approach to research and evaluation (Brooks et al., 2011). By committing to implementing ongoing evaluation and improvement, a faculty affairs office provides a community of practice and larger networks for faculty success, leading to student and mentee success and institutional excellence.

Conclusion

The UC San Diego Health Sciences OFA model of faculty development can be operationalized through any entity with a commitment to the core components and keys to success. Our OFA has used this model and its successful programs to impact institutional climate, coupled with rigorous evaluation to secure funding to expand programming locally and nationally. Institutions nationwide can achieve the favorable outcomes outlined by adopting this resourceful and intentional model, with minimal investment from the institution. Through the implementation of the conceptual model for faculty development, a unit can form the foundation for professional success in which all faculty can flourish in an environment of institutional excellence, across the academic career.

Figure 2. ***Keys to Drive and Sustain an Approach to Comprehensive Faculty Development***



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