

Tips for New Faculty

Charles Kuralt provided a sense of the Carolina aura when he said:

What is it that binds us to this place as to no other? It is not the well or the bell or the stone walls. Or the crisp October nights or the memory of dogwoods blooming. Our loyalty is not only to William Richardson Davie, though we are proud of what he did 200 years ago today. Nor even to Dean Smith, though we are proud of what he did last March. No, our love for this place is based on the fact that it is, as it was meant to be, the University of the people.

UNC Bicentennial, 1993

While Kuralt was speaking about UNC's relationship to the people of North Carolina, his words also hold true for the people who make up the campus community in relation to one another.

People on this campus care about one another, their departments and schools, the campus as a whole. Students matter. Colleagues matter. As a faculty member new to Carolina, you matter. When current faculty members were asked what advice they would give faculty new to Carolina, they were quick to respond and eloquent in their responses. This essay brings together their ideas, addressing key areas of faculty life.

As the tips were received, they were categorized into the following areas, teaching, research, mentoring/relationships/connections, becoming part of the community, and balancing competing demands.

Teaching

A significant part of most new faculty members' time will be spent in the classroom. Teaching is an important part of the mission of UNC and provides students the opportunity to interact with and learn from some of the top scholars in the world. Likewise, faculty members at Carolina have the pleasure of working with some of the best and brightest students anywhere.

Tip 1: Get to know your students

It is not surprising that in the advice faculty submitted, one tip — get to know your students — was echoed over and over. Here are some specific suggestions:

- Connect personally with students.
- I think it is extremely important to know your students' names and, if at all possible, to know something about each student. This is true for even large lecture classes.
- Make yourself available to talk with students both about their questions AND academic issues they might be having other than the ones they are having in the classes they are taking with you.
- Remember that most of your students have not yet lived for a quarter century.
- Think carefully about what model you would like to use with your graduate students (e.g., open door policy, formal lab meetings, individual meetings).

Tip 2: Prepare, plan, evaluate your classes

Making the most of your interactions with students, both in and outside of class, requires preparation, planning and continual evaluation. Among the suggestions your new colleagues provided are:

- Create syllabi that provide students with all the information they need, including the grading

scale, what constitutes plagiarism and how to cite sources in papers.

- Check out the classrooms you will be using in advance and use your classroom space effectively.
- Be very clear about how you will evaluate student work, how students should cite sources in papers and what constitutes plagiarism.
- Seek frequent feedback on your teaching and course management from your students.

Research

UNC is a research-intensive university, and most faculty members are expected to engage in significant research or creative activity. Your new colleagues offered lots of tips to help you stay on track for tenure and/or promotion.

Tip 3: Schedule a set time for research/writing every week and stick to it

Almost every faculty member mentioned the need to manage your time wisely. It's just too easy to put off research and writing in the face of other demands on your time.

- Carve out specific time slots and schedule yourself to do research during those time slots. Consider these times as appointments or “research meetings” with yourself that you cannot cancel.
- Making sure to write between 30 and 60 minutes everyday — schedule it on your calendar, guard the time and make sure it is your “best time” (i.e., the time when you are highest functioning).
- Make sure that you are spending your time consciously. What were you hired to do? If X% research, review your week and make sure you are spending X% of your time doing research. There are many more pressing obligations that have clear immediate deadlines on a daily basis (teaching a class; clinical responsibilities; committee work) that can soak up the time you are supposed to be doing research. Corral these activities to the time that should be allotted to them.
- You'll have a teaching schedule. Make your research schedule as “set” as you can. Don't just assume that at the end of the week, after you've run to all the meetings and met with all of the students, you'll have time for research. Put it in your schedule. I remember when I first got to Carolina a senior colleague told me not to feel guilty about sometimes NOT meeting with students on my “research” day. I told him I wanted to help the students and was feeling guilty. He said I'd help the students most not only by being a good teacher who cared about what they experienced in the classroom (the short term) but who thought about what I needed to do to get tenure (long term) so I could stay around and continue to help the students.
- Stack teaching and clinical obligations on one or two days if that is not what the majority of your time should be spent doing. Creativity needs some space to bloom.

Tip 4: Develop your research agenda

Your research agenda defines you as a scholar. It will form the backbone of the research statement you will submit for promotion and/or tenure. Here is an array of tips for developing your scholarly identity.

- Be clear about your short-, mid- and long-range goals for scholarly products (papers, grants, etc.). Write them down with a plan of action, clear doable steps/tasks that are tied to a timeline. Review each month to make sure you are on track; check your progress and plan for the next month.
- Focus on an area of research and become an expert in that area. Publish continuously in your area of expertise and make yourself available for state, national and international presentations (within reason).
- Create a niche for yourself that dovetails well with existing activities. Linking with others intra- and interdepartmentally is important.

- Choose and focus on the research project(s) that you are going to use to achieve tenure. That means saying “No” to enticing opportunities that take you away from that focus and seeing through a major project before you allow yourself to start researching/exploring another interest.
- Pursue more than one line of scientific inquiry so that if a field changes, you still have options for funding and research.
- Spend some time talking to faculty in your department to see if there are specific goals or trajectories that are highly valued. Then evaluate your own research portfolio in light of those goals. Some departments may not have that kind of focus, but if yours does, you should know what it is and whether your research fits or could be tailored to fit within a larger agenda.
- Before timing gets tight, identify the people who will help you with the administrative pieces of grants (budget, approvals from the University Office of Sponsored Research). When you are ready to apply for a grant, these people usually need a lead time of about two months so be sure to let them know your grant-writing plans (even if they don’t come through).
- Become familiar with the resources available. If you are a social science researcher, visit the Odum Institute during the first month that you are at Carolina and see what services they offer. Attend one of their workshops to get a sense of what they do. If you are in the humanities, check out the many resources available at Ackland Art Museum and the rare book collection in Wilson Library. Get to know the librarians who specialize in your field.
- Collaborative relationships come from sharing your research with others and letting people (other faculty members, graduate students, undergraduate students) know that you’d love to have the chance to work with them some time.
- Our Institutional Review Board works with investigators when needed. If in doubt about any potentially problematic aspect of research protocol you are preparing, you can call or email the chair to get great advice.

Mentoring/relationships/connections

Tip 5: Find yourself one or more mentors

The literature indicates that successful faculty members have mentors to help them navigate the waters of academe. Your new colleagues agree.

- If your department does not assign mentors, find your own. Ask advice from several people at different stages of their careers.
- Establishing a mentoring relationship with someone is vital to success. This may mean that you have a mentor to guide you or that you are a mentor to others — or both.
- Find a faculty mentor outside your discipline who can help provide insight about your progress.
- Try to identify professionals whom you can trust to discuss and bounce off ideas on your research, teaching, and leadership. Add or subtract from your list as needed. These individuals may be in your field, at the University, and/or in your department. Different people may be more helpful to you at different points during your career.
- Find someone at the University that you can talk to in confidence.
- Reach out to senior faculty in your department/school to learn ways to be successful here.
- Obtain a mentor from the University (Womentoring program, for instance) to help you understand the University beyond your own department/school.
- Connect with experienced faculty members whom you admire. In terms of teaching, this was invaluable for me. When I had questions about how to approach a problem or issue in a class, I always went to a more experienced teacher, who then provided strategies/tips for how to deal

with the issue. There's so much experience at Carolina with teaching specific courses, I really tapped into that expertise when I came here. The same would be true for research.

- Mentoring, mentoring, mentoring from someone in your area of expertise. Women should join Association for Women Faculty and Professionals.

Tip 6: Establish connections and create relationships

In today's intellectual climate, making connections is essential. You want to have departmental connections, campus connections, as well as national and international connections. This means that you want to spend some time in activities and events that will provide connections opportunities. Here's how some of your colleagues put it:

- Don't hesitate to become involved in campus committees that will open doors for your career. (But limit the number to ensure you preserve time for your research.) Starting as a member of Faculty Council is a great way to learn about the University and meet others outside of your "professional world." Another avenue is to become involved with professional organization leadership opportunities, such as holding an office in your organization. You can make contacts that will carry you throughout your career.
- It's good for faculty to think about the ways to connect with UNC, and I would advise recent arrivals to look for ways to meet faculty outside their department. Events at the Institute for the Arts and Humanities, for example, offer great opportunities to meet people, and applying for a fellowship there within the first two or three years of arriving at UNC is a good way to pursue a research project and to enter new interdisciplinary conversations. But there are also other interdisciplinary opportunities at various Centers and Institutes, all of which are usually interested in conferences, visiting speakers, etc. I think these kinds of connections beyond one's home department are the way to begin building new friendships and productive research initiatives.
- I think it is crucial — through reading or writing groups or even just scheduled lunches to talk about teaching — for young faculty to develop intellectual ties to colleagues, especially their other young colleagues. Socializing is great, as is talking department politics and the like, but there is no substitute for having colleagues with whom you can talk about your intellectual interests and passions. And to get to that kind of conversation requires a more formal set-up, with the explicit purpose of intellectual discussion.
- Support your faculty colleagues both in their activities on campus and in wider professional settings. At meetings and conferences always attend presentations by your faculty colleagues, even if their specialties are different from yours.
- Think of your association with the University as a long-term relationship and expect ups and downs.
- Show respect to staff members by saying please and thank you and taking the demands of their jobs into consideration when interacting with them.
- Never disclose information you learn in confidence.
- Remember that you expect (hope) to be working with the people in your department and the rest of the University for many years, including housekeepers, secretaries, etc., and faculty. Try to establish relationships that are respectful and will hold up well with time.
- Be a team player in your department. Pitch in when necessary and be dedicated to the department and University.
- Do not take it personally if a committee that you have worked hard on has little or no impact or produces a report that is rejected or ignored.
- Find excuses to meet faculty collaborators outside of your department or school. Carolina has a well-deserved reputation as a place that fosters true multidisciplinary work. Identify one or two

Centers and Institutes in your interest area and attend an event or meet their faculty. These organizations are designed to cut across disciplinary boundaries.

Tip 7: Become a Tar Heel

Of course you know about Carolina's great sports teams, but there's more to being a Tar Heel that just cheering your team on to another national championship. Here are some ideas:

- Take the time to participate in the cultural and intellectual life of the campus because it will enrich your career at Carolina.
- Make sure to learn Carolina's history and how things have been done here. It is not that things cannot be changed, but suggestions for change will be much better received if the maker of the suggestion first learns about Carolina.
- Learn about the state; take advantage of information that exists on campus and elsewhere about the state's governmental structure (including local governments), demographics, economy, politics, and culture. This is especially true for those who are from out of state.
- Learn about, travel in, and care about the state of North Carolina. This will not only help you understand where many of your students come from, but also give you better contexts for grasping the meaning and potential of engaged scholarship.
- Get to know the state and its people. Unlike many leading universities, public or private, Carolina places a strong emphasis on giving back to the state. Seek out opportunities to learn more about this great state and perhaps you can find intersections with your own work. The state has made great investments in our campus and has been an avid supporter of higher education.

Balancing competing demands

As a faculty member at Carolina, you will be expected to juggle multiple tasks and responsibilities. And, of course, you need to find time for your family, friends and personal life. Many of the tips above provide suggestions for balancing the demands on your time, especially ensuring you allocate time for your scholarly activity, but your colleagues also offered other helpful tips.

Tip 8: Be organized. Write it down.

As a faculty member, you enjoy considerable freedom and flexibility in your work, but you do need to be accountable and must be prepared to report, at least annually, on how you spend your time and what you have accomplished. If you wait till the annual report is due in May, however, chances are you will not remember what you did in September.

- Document everything you do professionally. Beyond the information that you would normally report on your CV, each year you will be asked to provide information to your department and the University about what courses you taught, how many students you taught, what your ratings were, what your teaching philosophy is, whether you did anything particularly unique in your courses, where your research is heading, what grants you applied for, what service you performed in your department, in the University, and at the national/international level. Keep a list and make sure it is current.
- Keep orderly and accessible records. Keep an open-ended curriculum vitae that you update with complete and accurate information every time you have something to add or change.
- Have a running list of mini-tasks that you can do during that 15- or 30-minute break in your schedule to do (e.g., make phone calls, read an article). Nothing like checking things off a to-do list to make the day a little brighter.

Tip 9: Be sure to have a life

Yes, being a successful scholar, teacher, and leader is a lot of work and takes a lot of time. But over and over, in different words and different ways, Carolina faculty members stressed the importance of not losing sight of your personal needs in your rush to the tenure line or next grant or next book or next seminar.

- Succeed at home first.
- Don't forget the importance of family and friends in the rush to the tenure line.
- Friends are another lifeline for new faculty. As you plan your work, include time for relaxing with old friends as well as engaging in events that will help you to make new friends.
- Make time for yourself.
- Get regular exercise.
- Take vacations.

As always, when you ask a group of people to share their ideas for success, there are some ideas that defy easy categorization. These last few suggestions can perhaps best be summarized as:

Tip 10: March to your own drummer — and do it very, very well

- Plot your own course, then follow your own compass.
- Choose work that is motivating to you. We have a lot of flexibility as faculty members in terms of how we approach our research, teaching, and service. Even within assigned areas, there is room for creativity. The work toward reappointment and tenure is significant, but it can be rewarding and even inspiring if we take the time to choose things we're excited about. It's hard to inspire or motivate students and colleagues if we're not inspired and motivated ourselves.
- Don't demand excellence, exhibit it.

The Center for Faculty Excellence has a professional staff with expertise in all of the areas discussed above. If you would like assistance, call or stop by our office in Wilson Library.

This essay has provided you a window into the culture at Carolina. It summarizes faculty reflections on what a new faculty member needs in order to be successful at UNC. These thoughts are like the "light" that Chancellor Thorp described in his Installation Address (2008):

We'll let it shine in our classrooms when we embrace new ideas, describe the human condition, and pursue the truth. We'll let it shine in our hospitals and our laboratories when we care for and cure the people of North Carolina and beyond. We'll let it shine on our coast where rising waters threaten our state. We'll let it shine in the streets of our cities and here in our community. And we'll let it shine in the hearts and minds of the best students, the best faculty, the best staff, and the best alumni in the world. People of Carolina, we are the light . . . on the hill. Let it shine.

You are now part of the "light." Welcome!

This essay, written by Dr. Ruth Walden as the Director of the Center for Faculty Excellence, is a compilation of advice provided by distinguished faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. August 2010.