

## Mentoring Case Studies

### *Scenario One*

Helen Tratenberg is a brand-new chair of a department with 29 faculty at a research-intensive university. Over the summer, she attended a chair leadership development workshop that emphasized the importance of cultivating a mentoring culture in one's department. The first step she learned was to assess the needs of the faculty in order to discover how mentoring could best be implemented for the benefit of all.

Since she was always well-liked among her peers, she did not have trouble getting people to open up to her. The one-on-one conversations she had with each faculty member illuminated a lot of issues that Helen had not considered as a professor in the department. Some of the assistant professors were surprised that she was even interested in hearing about their experiences acclimating to the department. Apparently, the department had not warmly welcomed its newest faculty members. David Pfiefer, an assistant professor, told Helen that he had been bewildered during his first year. He had hoped that someone would explain the ropes to him and hesitated asking for help for fear of seeming clueless. He spent hours preparing for each lecture and had, well into his second year, finally learned from a colleague in another department tips on how to minimize course prep. Even the social climate was chilly he said. A number of colleagues on his floor would head out on Thursdays to the faculty club and no one asked him to join them. He explained his perception of the department's attitude towards junior faculty as "a sink-or-swim" mentality.

As one of only a handful of women in the department, Fiona Jackson, a 2<sup>nd</sup> year assistant professor, told Helen of feeling isolated and marginalized. When she arrived on her first day, she found her office was not set-up and was still filled with the last occupant's junk. The former chair had welcomed her by telling her he was glad she was here and that he hoped they "got to keep her." Apparently, he assumed that women leave academia to have children. Students in her introductory class asked if she had a PhD and a couple of male students mumbled to each other that the class was easier than high school.

Enrique Vasquez, a newly tenured associate professor, told Helen how lonely he felt his first few years in the department. "I had just come from graduate school where my colleagues and I looked out for one another. Coming here was a shock. No one asked me about my work or my life. The only time a senior member reached out to me was to gather support for a vote at a faculty meeting. All I heard about were people's complaints and grievances." Enrique also shared a painful experience regarding his first published paper. He was very proud of it and hoped it would bring him one step closer to tenure. When it was published however, a colleague congratulated him on the work and then said that next time he should think about writing about a "demographic" outside of his own culture so that he will not seem so biased and will be taken "more seriously."

### Questions

1. List the issues that this case study raises and discuss what the possible root causes may be.
2. Given what Helen has discovered, make a list of the strategies you recommend she implement to improve the climate for assistant faculty in her department.
3. Prioritize these strategies, listing the most effective, efficient methods first.
4. What strategies would you recommend to peers who were mentoring each of these faculty members?

## Mentoring Case Studies

### *Scenario Two*

Robert Steele is a brand-new chair of a department with 29 faculty at a research-intensive university. Over the summer, he attended a chair leadership development workshop that emphasized the importance of cultivating a mentoring culture in one's department. The first step he learned was to assess the needs of the faculty in order to discover how mentoring could best be implemented for the benefit of all.

Since he was always well-liked among his peers, he did not have trouble getting people to open up. The one-on-one conversations he had with each faculty member illuminated a lot of issues that Robert had not considered as a professor in the department. He discovered that the department had several Associate-level professors who had not been promoted to full professor. These professors had been granted tenure based on a great potential that had not yet manifested.

For example, Evan Shilaley, an associate professor in his early fifties, told Robert that his field has changed over the last twenty years and his area of expertise is no longer valued amongst his colleagues. He enjoys teaching and shared with Robert how he has developed new techniques for engaging and inspiring students. However, because of the lack of support and the perceived irrelevance of his research, he has been avoiding further pursuit of research. Because he feels unappreciated and thus insecure, he struggles to convey his ideas and projects to others.

Shirley Bonham is a beloved colleague who had been in the department for almost 10 years. Over the past few years, she had become unreliable, missing appointments with students and making only rare appearances at faculty meetings. She told Robert that she had been struggling with personal issues for some time. She was caring for an elderly parent, a partner with heart problems and had recently been diagnosed with depression. Robert found that her once-stellar teaching evaluations were now below-average and one of her PhD students was growing increasingly frustrated with Shirley's missed appointments and lack of support. Her peer reviews in her last annual evaluation noted some problems but seemed to stop short of criticizing her.

Finally, Joseph Katz, a faculty member who had been a highly sought-after and hired as an associate professor from another university, had grown increasingly more difficult to work with. He has been known to disrupt faculty meetings with diatribes against others and spread gossip about other faculty to students. He had stopped participating in department committees and most of his service commitments were related to faculty senate. He was very candid with Robert about the reasons for his disengagement and hoped that, in his new position as chair, Robert could turn the climate around in the department. He feels that the last chair promoted a culture of individualism which made him long for the collaborative culture at his last institution. "I think that is why my funding has dried up" he said. "I'm used to generating ideas with colleagues and that seems impossible in this "ME" culture." He told Robert he was open to new ideas to help him connect with his peers and get further funding.

### Questions

1. List the issues that this case study raises and discuss what the possible root causes may be.
2. Given what Robert has discovered, make a list of the strategies you recommend he implement to improve the climate for associate faculty in her department.
3. Prioritize these strategies, listing the most effective, efficient methods first.
4. What strategies would you recommend to peers who were mentoring each of these faculty members?