

It's about asking the right questions, learning to pronounce your new colleagues' names and sharing Rockquemore.

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By [Kerry Ann Rockquemore](#)

We've come a long way in this series on how to mentor new faculty members. I kicked off by starting [start, \(https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2013/07/15/essay-starting-mentoring-rela-model-of-mentoring\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2013/07/15/essay-starting-mentoring-rela-model-of-mentoring) [and last week we covered how to reposition yourself as a coach instead of a guru. \(https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2013/07/22/essay-calling-senior-mentoring\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2013/07/22/essay-calling-senior-mentoring) and last week we covered how to reposition yourself as [a coach instead of a guru. \(https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2013/07/29/essay-coaching-style-mentoring\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2013/07/29/essay-coaching-style-mentoring) As important as establishing a positive mentoring relationship, I want to put all of it in a larger context.

Having worked with many faculty transitioning from graduate student to professor, it feels clear that there is a [wide variety of needs](#)

https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/mentoring/debut_of_new_column_on_mentoring_in_higher_education important, there's a hierarchy to those needs. In other words, upon arrival on a new campus, new faculty will have their most basic needs: Where will I live? Where do I shop for food? How soon will my moving truck arrive? Good, bad or ugly, the relocation stage will pass, new faculty will get settled in, faculty orientation will be written, initial mentor meetings will take place, classes will start, and the first year will get underway and that's when many mentors make the mistake of shifting into "hands off," "leave the new person alone" or "let them figure it out." https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/mentoring/essay_on_the_problems_with_the_sink_or_swim_model_of_mentoring

I want to suggest that mentors take the opposite approach. First and foremost, the first semester is the most important for new faculty because once they get settled in, that's precisely the time that all kinds of new needs (information, support, resources) will surface. But, even more important, the first term is exactly when the new person will be seeking acceptance, and a place within the department. In other words, it's a time when a critically important need emerges: *the need for belonging*.

So how can a mentor cultivate a new faculty member's sense of belonging, encourage their ongoing engagement with the department, and socialize the new person into the culture and practices of the campus? To answer this question, I asked a source by asking a group of tenure-track faculty: What makes you feel a sense of belonging in your department? Here are their suggestions (from simple to complex) straight from their feedback:

Know how to say and spell the new person's name. This sounds painfully obvious, but one of the most common pieces of feedback I've heard from faculty about what makes people feel a sense of belonging in their department was to

pronounce their names. One person said: "This sounds simple, but SPELL MY NAME CORRECTLY. P colleague of four years who still doesn't address me appropriately. Ugh!!!!" Mispronouncing, misspelling someone by something other than their actual name communicates a lack of respect. While it's his

INSIDE
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beyond work communicates a sense of care and concern for them as a human being. One faculty member asks questions like "How is your transition to _____ going?" "How is your partner liking the area?" "How are the kids/goats/chickens/cats/iguanas?" You're very likely to do this as an assigned mentor, but it's good for the department to do the same.

Proactively schedule time with the new faculty member. I know everyone is busy, but it only takes a few minutes to say "hi" when a new faculty member's door is open. It only takes 30 minutes to have coffee or take a walk. It only takes a few hours to invite someone over for dinner, it sends a message that you want to get to know your new colleague. "I have lunch," actually follow up to make it happen. It's the informal conversations, coffee dates, and other interactions with new members as an important way that colleagues made them feel welcome.

Celebrate and acknowledge achievements. During the first year, new faculty members are finding their footing and need reassurance while the new person is building confidence and finding a place in the group. It can be as simple as celebrating their achievements (publishing an article, winning a grant) or as simple as acknowledging their new person's contributions to the department such as statements like "I appreciated your comment on _____." "I admire the way you _____."

Tell your new colleague *why* you're glad they have joined the department. Given that the new person is one of hundreds of other candidates, it may feel obvious to you why you're glad they have joined the department. It may not be clear to them. Saying so directly, is simple, quick and powerful. One faculty member said it best: "I feel like part of the community when scholars approached me about collaborative projects and commented about how my research helped fill gaps in research coverage and teaching. In other words, I felt most connected when colleagues came to me and my presence mattered and were specific about how and why my presence mattered."

Take your new colleague seriously. Most new professors' sense of belonging is catalyzed by being treated as a colleague (as opposed to condescension or treating them as children). This can be done by asking for their opinion, incorporating their ideas, offering to read their early-stage work, or sharing their work. One faculty member summarized it by saying: "Approaching junior and new colleagues with the attitude that they have something useful and necessary to the department. Not approaching their presence with the attitude that they are there/have a job or that they are trouble-making radicals threatening to overhaul the department."

Make the unspoken rules explicit. Department cultures vary dramatically on flexibility (from highly flexible to rigid) (from disengaged to enmeshed). New faculty members need to know quickly whether it's "normal" to be socially or whether people come and go with minimal interaction. And they need to know if the group is open to new ideas or if there is rigid adherence to the way things have always been done and new challenges. One of the most powerful ways you can make a new faculty member feel welcome is to make the rules visible and transparent. Having this conversation before or after faculty meetings may be particularly helpful.

I hope that as you're reading this it's becoming clear that the first semester isn't just about adjusting to new colleagues, it's a time of adjusting to a new professional identity. Your mentee will need extra support from graduate student (or post-doc) to professor. New faculty members make this transition most

INSIDE
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Weekly Challenge

This week I challenge you to:

- 1) Remember how you felt during your first semester in your first tenure-track job and how easy (or not) it was to adjust to a new department. Try remembering specifically what types of behaviors helped you to feel welcome in the space.
- 2) Review the list of behaviors that faculty shared with us as nurturing their sense of belonging in their new department and ask yourself: Which of these am I already doing and which ones will require change?
- 3) If you haven't set up your initial mentoring meeting with your new faculty mentee, go ahead and schedule it.
- 4) Consider sharing this column with your colleagues who could use some gentle encouragement and advice on things that foster belonging in new faculty members.

I hope this week brings you a willingness to experiment and openly discuss how your department lets them know how much you value their presence and contributions.

Peace and positive mentoring,

Kerry Ann Rockquemore



<https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2013/08/05/essay-how-make-new-arrivals-academic-department-feel-welcome>
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