

# Learning, Teaching & Innovative Technologies Center



The following information on characteristics of successful new faculty was taken from the University of California Santa Barbara's website, <http://www.oci.id.ucsb.edu/Resources/Teaching/FYFac.html>, and from Robert Boice's book The New Faculty Member. Although the copyright date of Boice's book is dated, the content is not -- it is timeless and worth the read.

## About the Research

The New Faculty Member by Robert Boice presents research results that can be very useful for new faculty, particularly first-year faculty. Boice studied 200 new faculty on two campuses (one comprehensive and one doctoral) over two years, the majority of whom had little preparation for teaching in their graduate experience. He bases his findings on interviews and Likert scale responses of three groups: inexperienced newcomers (less than 2 years since doctorate), returning newcomers (from careers outside academe), and experienced new faculty (including full-time teaching at another campus). For most new faculty in this study, the first year was full of surprises. Collegial support, preparation time, and student ratings held the most surprises and disappointments.

## Critical Success Factors for New Faculty

Boice was able to identify what he terms "quick starters": new faculty who adapted more readily than others. These faculty quickly learned to competently and efficiently carry out their teaching responsibilities and integrate their teaching with their other scholarly activities. Three aspects stood out as critical to the new faculty in Boice's study.

1. **Collegial Support.** Of the three new faculty groups in this study, returning newcomers were most vocal about the lack of collegial support. Perhaps they expected to feel the level of acceptance similar to what they previously experienced as faculty. This would be a difficult expectation to meet and one on which returning faculty might want to reflect.

A majority of inexperienced newcomers interviewed in Boice's study also felt a lack of collegial support. They thought they should have gotten more concrete help from experienced colleagues, particularly with copies of previously used syllabi and perhaps other course material. They characterized chairs and senior faculty as expressing the attitude that the best faculty figure things out on their own. By their second year, many first time faculty turned to one another for support.

Experienced faculty new to campus reported that they received useful advice and encouragement from senior faculty. Experienced faculty in this study reported the least number of difficulties in adapting to their situation.

Inexperienced newcomers who were most satisfied and successful during their first two years (quick starters) expressed interest in learning the creative ways senior colleagues had devised to make learning easier and more interesting to their students. They sought out senior faculty and used them as role models. They were also open to trying out various methods and teaching styles in the classroom.

2. **Teaching.** According to Boice's findings, the majority of faculty in all three newcomer categories defined teaching in ways that viewed students as passive recipients of information.

They tended to seek to improve their teaching, but they did not seek external advice on how to make improvements. The majority reported that their ratings from students were lower than they had expected.

All categories of new faculty in this study described themselves as being well-prepared and knowledgeable; interested in students; good at explaining/ conceptualizing; and good at motivating students. They equated good teaching with clear, knowledgeable, and inspiring lectures. Most described their classroom styles in ways that indicated to the researcher that the vast majority defined teaching at a very simplistic level a level that has been called “facts-and-principles lecturing.”

At the end of the first semester, between 50 and 80 percent of all categories of new faculty received student ratings below the mean rating for the campus. Throughout their second year, student rating of their teaching improved but continued to be lower than desirable. However, by this time these new faculty began attributing the disappointing ratings to their students’ inability to handle challenging material. They rarely sought out advice for ways of translating ratings into alternative styles of teaching. They taught defensively, concentrating on covering the material and getting the facts straight. This “more of the same” approach was not a successful one.

Quick starters took a very different approach to their teaching. They were more relaxed and even though they taught in a facts-and-principles manner, they left time for student participation. They had good rapport with students and encouraged their classroom involvement through verbal and non verbal cues. The quick starters enjoyed their teaching and their students, expressing positive and optimistic attitudes about the undergraduates on their campuses.

3. Preparation Time vs. Research and Writing Time. The biggest mistake most new faculty seem to make is spending too much time on preparing material for lectures. Rather than providing students with the structure for thinking about the material and including only necessary content, many new faculty try to cover too much. Many openly admitted to over preparing lectures, to having too much material to present without hurrying their lectures, and to being perfectionistic beyond the level that could be rewarded in most classes. Knowledge of these errors did not seem to make any difference in their behaviors.

For all faculty in the study, there was a constant anticipation that the next semester would bring about greater balance between their teaching and their scholarly writing or research. As semesters came and went, this balance was not achieved by most. There was an expectation that the summer would provide the time for them to bring about a better balance between teaching, research, and writing. Rarely did this occur; most were not as productive over the summer as they had anticipated. However, the quick starters were able to reduce their teaching preparation time by the first half of their second year. For many new faculty, it is a rather frightening to consider cutting back on preparation time and giving up writing out every detail in advance of the lecture. Boice has found that it takes a “leap of faith” and that colleagues can be helpful in encouraging their new colleagues to focus on particular goals for each class and to keep the details to what is necessary for student level comprehension.

Seven Attributes of Successful New Faculty. The quick starters identified by Boice were those new faculty who, during their first two years, were exemplary teachers according to student ratings, Boice’s own ratings, and faculty’s self-descriptions. In sum, the attributes and behaviors of the quick starters included:

1. positive attitudes about students;
2. relaxed paced lectures with student involvement;
3. low levels of complaining about students, workload etc.;
4. actively seeking advice about teaching;
5. quicker transition to moderate levels of lecture preparation;
6. superior investment in time spent on scholarly and grant writing; and
7. readiness to improve their teaching.

Boice describes the quick starters as resilient, insightful, and positively identified with the campus. They demonstrated resilience by not taking their early feelings of isolation personally but rather sought out senior faculty for support and identified those who could be helpful. They demonstrated their insight as they gath-

ered information about their new role and new environment. They were able to separate gossip and small talk from valuable and reliable information. Perhaps because they quickly identified helpful senior faculty, Boice's quick starters began to feel themselves as part of the campus more readily than other new faculty.

### **Advice to New Faculty**

The most obvious advice is for new faculty is to follow the model set by quick starters. Finding balance in time expenditure is critical. Boice suggests new faculty keep daily records of how they spend their time and decrease classroom preparation to a maximum of one and a half hours per classroom lecture hour. With regard to teaching, Boice directs new faculty to seek advice on how to interpret student ratings, and to improve teaching accordingly. Further, he suggests that new faculty attend to social networking, spend time on scholarly writing each day, and integrate research and scholarly writing interests into lectures.

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URL: <http://www.oic.id.ucsb.edu/Resources/Teaching/FYFac.html>

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