

Building a Department Community: Connecting with Faculty

Coming out of a year or more of remote learning and meetings, building a department community and connecting with faculty is more important than ever.

Strategies used to build a department community will be described including the following:

- 1) Google form survey for faculty members given at the beginning of the year to gather information from faculty, such as food allergies, unique facts, preferences for communication, family information, etc. This list is used throughout the year to connect with faculty at meetings.
- 2) Friday Updates are sent as a weekly email update with information the whole department needs. These updates are organized by Important Dates, Reminders, Informational Items, Congratulations, and a personal final message. This cuts down on the number of emails sent during the week.
- 3) Faculty meeting rituals build routine and a level of comfort. By letting faculty know the objective of the meeting and having a question for discussion given to faculty before the meeting gives them purpose and prepares them for the meeting. Discussing these questions in pairs or small groups leads to a more interactive meeting. Having a Faculty Fun Facts feature (unique facts about each faculty member collected at the beginning of the year) to the meeting helps faculty get to know one another. The end of the year faculty meeting can acknowledge the unique accomplishments of faculty and allow them to celebrate each other with a posterboard of accolades for each faculty member (like signing a yearbook). Gift card give aways and light snacks add an element of community and fun to the meetings.
- 4) Appreciative handwritten thank you notes given to each faculty member throughout the year as well as an end of day positive email sent to a different faculty member are ways to celebrate the unique achievements of faculty and show that their individual work is noticed and matters.
- 5) Mentoring meetings throughout the year to introduce new faculty to procedures and processes are important as new faculty navigate the complexities of annual review, reappointment, promotion, and tenure. These meetings can start with these three prompts: What I like, What I notice, and What I wonder about.
- 6) Prior to annual review conferences with each faculty member, giving faculty sentence stems or question prompts they are to discuss during the conferences allows for a purposeful, guided conversation. These are sentence stems I have used that have worked well:
 - My biggest accomplishment this year...
 - My best memory of this year...
 - My most challenging issue this year...
 - How I supported students this year...
 - How I supported colleagues this year...
 - How I've worked to relieve stress and focus on my own mental health to be an effective faculty member...

- My goals for next year...

Audience members will be encouraged to share experiences and ideas for how they build a department community and connect with faculty, as well as mentoring suggestions.