

What Colleges and Universities Want in New Faculty

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RECOMMENDATIONS TO GRADUATE FACULTY

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1. TEACHING

Graduate programs must provide their doctoral students with a variety of teaching experiences and successively more independent teaching in order to prepare them for academic careers. These experiences should begin during the first year of graduate school and continue throughout graduate study.

Students need to be introduced to new pedagogies, becoming involved with and knowledgeable about such areas as active learning, field-based learning, diversity, and technology.

Students need more than just the experience of teaching classes. New teachers also should receive constructive feedback about their performance and participate in group discussions about creative teaching possibilities, problem solving, and advising.

The model used for training graduate students in research could be followed in similarly building graduate students' competence and confidence in teaching and working with students. As a first step, departments or graduate schools could offer seminars on teaching. Later experiences might include supervised teaching, team teaching, summer school teaching, and teaching fellowships, after the more typical experience of teaching assistantships and leading lab or discussion sections.

Faculty identified as outstanding teachers could also mentor individual or small groups of students as part of their teaching load. One particularly underutilized source of expertise in this area is faculty members in other geographically accessible institutions, particularly those who are recognized as successful teachers and who use innovative and engaging approaches to teaching and learning. Many such faculty members do not have the opportunity to work with advanced doctoral students and would welcome the opportunity, if approached in a sensitive way.

2. RESEARCH

Graduate faculty must understand that their students' time and energy in graduate school have been devoted to a task that may not have the same primacy in many new faculty positions. Faculty need to become familiar with the conditions surrounding research activities at different types of institutions. For example, unless graduate students have been hired at a research university, they will not have the same resources available to accomplish their research. Space, money, and assistance may be scarce at their new institution. As new faculty, they may need to consider alternative methods or alternative lines of research.

Faculty should assist their students in preparing for an environment that expects research to be accomplished at the same time that other responsibilities exert more immediate demands (e.g., graduate students could develop projects in their research area that do not require many resources).

Graduate students need an introduction to the growing practice of incorporating undergraduates into their research projects.

Just as new faculty benefit from having previously taught a variety of courses in different settings, they benefit from conducting research under different conditions while still in graduate school. Graduate faculty should consider these needs as they mentor students in developing a research program.

Faculty from a variety of institutions can serve as a valuable resource to doctoral programs by sharing information about the different kinds of research activities at institutions where this responsibility is not the primary focus of faculty.

3. ACADEMIC LIFE

Doctoral training currently focuses almost exclusively on building competence in an academic discipline and the research skills necessary to make significant contributions to the field. This singular focus does not match the career goals of most students who plan to seek academic positions nor the real situation they find at hiring institutions.

Graduate faculty and administrators have an obligation to learn about the reality of academic life in different types of positions at a variety of institutions. Knowledge about the multiple responsibilities of new faculty would enable graduate faculty to design programs that provide additional experiences relevant to the responsibilities their graduate students will face as new faculty. For example, graduate students should be involved in discussions about the benefits and potential pitfalls of participation in faculty governance, the implications of a term position for their career, the potential impact of joining a department as the only female or person of color, etc.

Currently, all graduate students have a research mentor; they may need additional mentors to learn about the various other aspects of academic life. Faculty from a variety of institutions (including research universities) could serve as consultants to graduate programs, presenting sessions on academic life and expectations of faculty at their institutions. Graduate students could "shadow" these faculty at their home institutions for several hours, for a day or even a week, experiencing first hand the myriad responsibilities faced by faculty in non-doctorate awarding institutions.

Optimally, graduate students would visit more than one type of institution so that they could see differences and similarities across campuses.

4. JOB SEARCH

Faculty in graduate programs have a responsibility to assess the employment patterns of their graduates and to evaluate their program's success at preparing their students for the search process. They should annually survey students who have recently completed job searches with the goal of identifying deficits in their knowledge about and preparation for searches. Such information could guide departments in designing revisions or additions to their curriculum. For example, departments may decide to assist students in preparing to teach a sample class in addition to making a research presentation as part of the campus interview process.

On an individual basis, graduate faculty should be aware of the importance of writing letters of recommendation geared to the specific position and the nature of the hiring institution.

Faculty should advise students that their application cover letters be similarly relevant to the position and institution.

Graduate programs may need assistance in preparing their doctoral students for successful job searches since their own faculty's experience typically has been at large research universities.

Junior and senior faculty from various types of institutions could develop a program that presents information about the search process from a variety of perspectives and thus better prepares new doctorate recipients for the rigors of their first job search.

5. ACADEMIC OPTIONS

Faculty in doctoral programs should explore the various career opportunities available for their students, and they should educate themselves about the realities of the current academic job market in their field. Recent graduates may be an excellent resource for this information.

Graduate faculty should consider multiple types of academic careers when mentoring their students, and graduate programs should provide students alternative experiences related to their long-term goals.

If programs offered more preparation in teaching, opportunities to gain expertise in the use of technology as an educational tool in their field, and education about diverse student needs and learning styles, their graduates would be better prepared to meet the faculty expectations at many institutions.

In addition, graduate faculty should be prepared to assist students in considering the pros and cons of accepting part-time or temporary positions. They might help students develop alternative career plans depending on the type of job they find immediately after graduate school.

Information about alternative educational careers in community colleges, virtual universities, corporate universities, and continuing education programs should also be available to graduate students.