

Coming to NEIU: Faculty Share Their Experiences

Every year, Northeastern welcomes between 15 and 25 new tenure-track faculty members. We were interested in how these faculty experience their transition to our campus and asked them to answer a few questions that might help us improve this transition. Between 2002 and 2006, ninety-two new faculty joined NEIU. Of those, seventy-one are still with us. Thirty-two of them answered our survey, which consisted of a few multiple-choice and open-ended questions. A selection of those is presented below. The multiple-choice responses are listed with faculty numbers (not percent). Faculty could choose all the response options that applied.

1. What has been most satisfying to you in your work at NEIU during the first year(s) as a faculty member?

- 32 Working with my students (in and/or out of class)
- 21 Getting to know & working with new colleagues
- 21 Growing as a teacher
- 11 Moving into leadership roles
- 7 Pursuing my scholarship initiatives

SELECT COMMENTS:

- I've found that I'm still tight with my cohort [of colleagues starting with me], especially since we spent 3 days together [in orientation], and since we also met a few times in subsequent semesters. Brown-bag mini "reunions" of the cohorts might be a good idea.
- Involving students in research has been THE most satisfying thing.

2. What were you least prepared for when you first came to campus?

- 12 The amount of time spent on committees
- 10 Dealing with the different personalities of my department
- 10 Balancing my professional with my private life
- 6 Developing a research agenda
- 1 Teaching students with such diverse backgrounds

SELECT COMMENTS:

- I was prepared for a heavy teaching load, but the sheer amount of time that one needs to spend on service (including committee work) to achieve anything worthwhile came as a surprise. Every committee I have been on seems to have a large ratio of junior faculty.
- The distrust that existed between faculty and administration. Also, the lack of funding to pursue research even though research is expected to earn tenure.

3. What could have been done to improve your early experience at NEIU?

- 10 More advice or support from chair or dean, etc.
- 9 More exchange across disciplines

- 6 Improved collegiality in the department
- 6 Change of the mentoring program
- 5 More info during the Orientation

SELECT COMMENTS:

- A choice of having a small reduction in the teaching load in the first semester, to be made up in the second semester and/or a class schedule that's more typical of the department would have helped.
- I had one person in my department who reached out to me and met with me every 2 weeks over coffee. This was invaluable as I had someone to talk to and bounce ideas. Also, I somehow began working on a university-wide committee. While time consuming, it was a great experience as they allowed me to have a voice and it introduced me to many faculty college-wide.
- Needed internal support, e.g., advisor training in FIRST semester - was then advising 40 students with no information! (Colleagues were helpful, however).

4. How would you characterize the pro's and/or con's of having a mentor in or outside of your department?

- 12 I wished I could have had both a mentor from within and outside of my department
- 9 Having a mentor from outside my department allowed me to discuss things more freely
- 8 My departmental mentor was so much more knowledgeable about what I needed to know that no outsider could have been as helpful
- 4 My mentor and I did not get along very well (or did not interact much)
- 3 My mentor could not often provide the help I needed because s/he was unfamiliar with the way things are done in my department

SELECT COMMENTS:

- I had an outside mentor and it was GREAT even though we met only a few times. I knew I had access to her if needed. I was fortunate to have inside "unofficial" mentoring as well, and that has proven invaluable. I think both are important.
- The mentoring program needs more structure and should be integrated into biweekly new faculty meetings that last the entire first semester.

5. Anything else related to your first years as a faculty member at NEIU that you would like to add?

SELECT COMMENTS:

- I think NEIU has a very good program, and does more to introduce new faculty to NEIU than most other universities do. That said, it could be made even better. First, faculty need time to get used to campus (and the unique way NEIU has of doing things). It would be good to have mentors lined up early - and have new faculty have the option of corresponding with mentors early. It would also be excellent to have faculty come in earlier than the first week of class, have access to email, Blackboard etc, well in advance of the start of the semester. It would also be good if it were more widely accepted that academic year teaching assignments (for all, but especially new faculty) be based on faculty expertise and ability rather than seniority and other criteria not relevant to the program.
- Access to a diverse student body provides an opportunity to develop methods that would be effective for educating this population. NEIU has an opportunity to inform the higher education community about educating a diverse population which is not being realized because we spend too much time counting CUs and not enough time working on creative pedagogies, reading literature about what works, what is known and building on it. Too many people act like they are teaching at a community college and do not spend enough time on campus. This is a comprehensive university with many graduate programs. We need to cultivate a culture that supports learning and professional development of our students.