JUNIOR FACULTY: JOB STRESSES AND HOW TO COPE WITH THEM

Pointers for Majority and Non-Majority Faculty and Administrators

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This paper aims to describe the typical job stresses that junior faculty encounter and to set forth proven ways to handle them. Also discussed later in the paper are the additional stresses that non-traditional new faculty—such as white women and members of minority groups—may face when they work in academic settings where they are significantly outnumbered by men from the white majority culture. Strategies for coping with these extra stresses receive attention near the end of this article.

While adjusting to a new position and maximizing one’s enjoyment of it are usually not easy, the process can and should be demystified so that newcomers can better understand and visualize the challenges they must meet. If no one has “told the truth” and clued in the newcomers to the cross-currents they must cope with, they are likely to waste psychic energy being bewildered. When they are clued in, they can often make better use of their personal and professional resources, the most important probably being a sturdy sense of humor.

To encourage constructive action by senior faculty, provosts, department chairs, deans, and campus presidents is the second purpose of this paper. What steps can be taken by these holders of power and resources to help insure that junior faculty, especially non-traditional new faculty, thrive and become productive members of the academic community? This article seeks to partly answer that question, as does my companion paper specifically directed to those power-holders. Often senior officials are unsure why and how they should reach out more often to junior faculty, especially those whose gender, class, race, or ethnic background may be different from their own. The why is answered by the extra stresses and demands that such non-traditional newcomers usually encounter in majority settings.

This paper and especially the last paper in this monograph focus on how—that is, what pro-active steps have proven appropriate and fruitful for senior faculty and administrators to initiate on behalf of typical and atypical new hires. When senior colleagues hesitate to take pro-active steps, they are committing a form of omission that frequently generates unintentionally harmful consequences. A hands-off approach can keep non-traditional junior faculty, in particular, at a distinct disadvantage and blunt their contributions to and satisfaction with their profession and campus. Pro-active steps by senior colleagues are essential—together with comprehensive self-help initiatives undertaken by the newcomers themselves.

The following discussion draws on my own experience as a college professor (remember the epigram: “Experience is what we call our mistakes”?). The paper also arises not only from my interactions and consulting work since 1988 with hundreds of faculty, both majority and minority, but also from an abundance of insights presented in three main references: Mary Deane Sorcinelli, “New and Junior Faculty Stress: Research and Responses”; secondly, Robert Boice, The New Faculty Member; and thirdly, Bernice R. Sandler, “Success and Survival Strategies for Women Faculty Members.”

TYPICAL STRESSES—AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT THEM

1. NOT ENOUGH TIME. This stressor, according to Sorcinelli and a score of other researchers, afflicts junior faculty not only in their first
year but in all their years leading up to tenure. (At some campuses, the tenure decision comes in the third year; at others, in the sixth or seventh.) Preparation for classes can’t be put off, so what usually suffers is attention to other tasks like research and writing that may be important to the new faculty members and/or their new departments. Teaching can overwhelm a workweek because junior faculty have almost never received careful supervision of their teaching as well as coaching in the “tricks of the trade.” If they had received these in graduate school, they would begin their careers as more effective, efficient, and comfortable teachers. Because they are usually unprepared as they take their first job, they can feel intense anxiety about their duties in the classroom. As their research and writing are put off, their anxiety intensifies.

What can you, as a new faculty member, do? Talk, talk, talk in concrete ways to other junior faculty and to senior faculty inside and outside your department—about how to teach more efficiently and effectively as well as about the details of the scholarly projects you’re working on or wish to work on. Such concrete talking is the opposite of sweeping generalizations and “horror stories” about how awful life is in academia or at a particular campus or department. Concrete talking will probably yield insights that enable you to adopt new time-management and time-saving habits and to feel more in control of your workweek. Additionally, concrete talk will help you reach out and build new relationships with colleagues; these will provide you with social and psychological support and reduce your loneliness and isolation. As a result, your morale will be bolstered.

Here’s another step to take: set up a task-management and time-management regimen for yourself that maintains balance among your teaching, research and writing, and building of professional networks. A sense of balance will usually dampen anxiety and stress. (For details about task-management regimens, see my paper entitled “Visualizing Yourself as a Successful College Teacher, Writer, and Colleague.”) Another way to keep stress under control: sign up for a relaxation and/or exercise program and stick with it. Your physical and mental health demand it. Never forget to reserve time for the things you enjoy and treasure. If you sacrifice these to a frenetic workweek, you will likely spin out of control and feel that precious parts of yourself are being lost.

Finally, even though you have a multitude of tasks to execute, you must resist becoming a workaholic. This is a serious danger for new faculty, according to Boice who has interviewed and coached hundreds of junior and senior faculty at various campuses. If you keep your head down, frantically work every waking moment, sacrifice your private life, fail to cultivate new friendships and mentoring relationships, neglect your intellectual networking with colleagues near and far, then you are positioning yourself to be counter-productive. With such an approach, you can typically count on becoming exhausted and feeling that you are losing rather than gaining in your struggle with the clock.

2. INADEQUATE FEEDBACK AND RECOGNITION. According to Boice (and his “hero,” Robert J. Sternberg, Yale University), academia at all levels is marked by a conspiracy—almost—of silence: essential knowledge one needs to succeed is kept unspoken and hidden. Not only students but also junior faculty suffer when they are not coached and the academic “game” is not demystified. For junior faculty, mystery enshrouds especially how to get all of one’s demanding work done while keeping some sanity and joy and balance. Mystery especially enshrouds how to secure a favorable evaluation at tenure time. At some campuses, unfortunately, chairs and senior faculty do not volunteer (either formally or informally) to clarify the requirements for the new professors nor give them detailed feedback on how they’re doing and suggest what else they should be doing. Being in such a bewildering fog is guaranteed to create insecurity and stress.

What to do? As new faculty, you should proactively cultivate mentors inside and outside your department. These allies can give you reactions to your teaching or scholarship or networking that will help you improve your performance and enhance your enjoyment. These mentors will also give you different degrees and kinds of social and emotional support and encouragement—essential if you are to thrive. Having mentors outside your department means you don’t have to worry about impressing them all the time, the way you might if your mentor is in your department and potentially on your tenure review committee.

Admittedly, there is an art to cultivating mentors—they just don’t knock on your door and sign up for the job. Here are a few tips. After becoming familiar with some of the scholarship, novels, paintings, or other projects done by prospective mentors, you can engage them in conversation. Who doesn’t like to talk positively about what is important to them? From such a cordial conversation can flow others that may add up to the development of a mentoring relationship. Or, secondly, try becoming extra friendly with one or two colleagues you admire who serve on a campus or departmental committee with you. My overall advice
is this: you must take the extra steps. Don’t be shy—you need mentors so reach out for them.

Securing Feedback
Different strategies should be employed to find out how your work thus far might be evaluated by senior faculty in your department. Boice suggests constructing a catalog (maybe portfolio is a better word) that contains the new faculty member’s completed, ongoing, and planned writing projects as well as the new faculty’s teaching philosophy, plans to improve, and student evaluations. (Samples of teaching portfolios should be available at your campus’s teaching and learning center; they can also be ordered from the American Association for Higher Education, in Washington, D.C.) After having your closest colleagues help you improve your portfolio, show it to your chair and other senior faculty, on an annual basis, and seek their opinions as to whether your work is leading you toward the securing of tenure. Boice says even if your readers decline to give you any useful feedback, you will be demonstrating your commitment to the process and you will be helping yourself keep tabs on your own progress and productivity.

Sandler suggests that you also develop a five-year plan that will guide your progress as a scholar, teacher, and colleague. This is a good idea because the plan can indicate what resources (travel funds, teaching workshop, a semester off, research assistant, clerical help) you will probably need to accomplish your goals. You are then well positioned to seek assistance when you meet with resource allocators such as chairs, deans, and provosts. First, show your draft plan to your old and new mentors, and solicit their assistance with revising and thinking through how to implement the plan. This process will guarantee you systematic feedback and get you thinking early on about how to successfully clear the tenure hurdle. When you’re ready, show your revised plan to your chair and dean.

As always, ask for general feedback about your job performance on an annual basis from the chair and other senior faculty. It is dangerous to assume that no feedback means no problems. Annual reviews of new faculty members are, fortunately, becoming more widespread in departments. When there are negative points in the formal and informal evaluations (and there will be), discuss with the chair and other senior faculty what you need to do to improve. As advanced graduate students begin their academic job search, they should remember to ask whether the interviewing department has in place annual reviews for junior faculty, that will enhance the newcomer’s adjustment to the new department and demystify somewhat the attainment-of-tenure process. If no such systematic reviews are in place, then the interviewee is advised to negotiate for them before accepting a faculty position.

Keeping Records
Finally, keep careful records from day one of your activities and accomplishments as a teacher, writer/researcher, and colleague: these comprise a large part of your tenure file and you don’t want to forget anything. When a significant compliment comes your way about any of these three roles, pleasantly ask the admirer to write you a short letter for this tenure file. If you wait years to ask for these testimonial letters, the details will be sparse and unconvincing. Here is some helpful advice from Becoming a Historian, A Survival Manual for Women and Men: “Keep class grade lists, course outlines, notes, and evaluations, if available. Keep copies of anything written for institutional business, publication, or public presentation, as well as reviews of your work. Inform the chair of the department whenever you apply for or get a grant, have something published, or appear on the program of a professional meeting—in fact, anything that contributes to your professional career” (p. 64). Also keep records on all committees you have served on and all students you have advised.

To document your teaching experiences and effectiveness, make sure you also file your course syllabi, your writing assignments, examples of a variety of student papers from your classes, in-class hand-outs, and any other written work that indicates your competency as a teacher. If you have a problem with a particular course, then you are advised to write an explanation to your department’s personnel file that gives your perspective on the problem and what you are undertaking to prevent its recurrence. Make sure your department chair and personnel committee have an opportunity to discuss the explanation with you during your annual review. What you are doing here is damage-control. In a similar way, you would send an explanation for filing with your credit bureau, to insure that a credit problem or misunderstanding you have experienced will not ruin your credit rating.

3. Unrealistic Expectations. Sorensen reports that studies of first-year faculty members show “newcomers feel a great deal of self-imposed pressure to perform well on every front.” She quotes one insightful novice: “It’s been very stressful to try to do everything and do it well. I’m not coping very well and I work every living, breathing moment I’m awake...The problem is that I could live with less than a perfect job as a student but not as a professor.” Boice repeatedly cautions: hard work propelled by perfectionism does not guarantee that a new faculty member will thrive—this is the most typical mistake made by novices. To compound the mistake, some
deans, senior faculty, and department chairs don’t reach out to encourage and help their new faculty adjust to their new jobs and reduce the stress they are enduring. On the contrary, these seniors often expect the newcomers to “hit the ground running”—an unrealistic and even cruel expectation and yet another version of sink or swim.

**How to cope?** First of all, please listen carefully to the “self-talk” going on inside your head. Are you pushing yourself inhumanely? Are you berating yourself and accusing yourself of being an impostor? If so, try to change what’s going on in your head. With the help of friends and mentors, try to construct realistic expectations for yourself. Compliment yourself for methodically working to realize these. Compliment yourself daily for all the talent and hard work you’ve been able to put into your academic profession. Remind yourself how very far you have come.

Stop Feeling Like a Fraud

While many white, male junior and senior academics have admitted to me that they feel at times like imposters in danger of being uncovered, this impostor feeling seems most acute and widespread among non-traditional graduate students and junior faculty in academia (Clark and Corcoran). These “outsiders,” in my experience, have usually had to cope with snide remarks and skepticism about their abilities and their right to be pursuing a doctorate (in physics or English literature or whatever) and relatedly their qualifications and their right to be a faculty member. (This is especially true if the outsiders are entering what has been a bastion of the majority.) Can it be any wonder then that some outsiders come to internalize a little or a lot of this negative thinking? The first order of business is to listen to your self-talk and, if necessary, reprogram it to be positive and fair to your talents and ambitions.

Organization—Not Perfection

Setting priorities for yourself, with the help of your mentors, is a necessary move. Also consult with both mentors and peers about various action plans designed to accomplish these priorities. With their help, construct your “official” game plan and methodically pursue it. Concentrate on important tasks that are a part of your game plan and try to resist being drawn off into the performing of urgent, but frequently trivial tasks. **Procrastination is necessary**—but make sure you procrastinate around the things you can afford to put off.

Perfectionism may be the biggest trap and anxiety-producer. An accomplished practitioner of and writer on mentoring, Professor of Sociology Charles Willie in Harvard’s Graduate School of Education says that learning to be less than perfect in some tasks is a difficult lesson for junior faculty. But if they don’t learn it, they can “tie themselves in knots” (personal conversation). Organizational psychologist Joan Tonn, Associate Professor of Management at the University of Massachusetts-Boston, agrees. In her workshops on stress management, she urges: “Stop punishing yourself for not being a perfect person; instead encourage yourself.” Accept joyfully that “everything worth doing is not necessarily worth doing well—no matter what your grandmother insisted” (personal conversation).

**4. LACK OF COLLEGIALITY.** New faculty typically report that in their new department they enjoy “very little” intellectual companionship with their colleagues. How serious is this? It is a “major” source of stress and frustration, according to Soricenelli, Boice, Seldin, and a half dozen other researchers. Loneliness and intellectual under-stimulation can easily and quickly undermine the newcomer’s enjoyment of the job. New faculty complain that senior faculty don’t reach out to them and offer friendliness, encouragement, and pointers. But researchers hasten to add that most new faculty are very passive and rarely seek out help, advice, and mentoring from within their department or from others on campus.

What to do? New faculty should be pro-active and reach out again and again to both junior and senior faculty, inside and outside their department. Novices should track down accomplished teachers on campus and consult with them. Instead of being shy, newcomers should talk—talk—talk about their research, writing, and teaching with other colleagues on campus and off. New faculty who do thrive and succeed (Boice calls them “quick starters”) typically spend about five hours per week building collegiality for themselves, through face-to-face visits, letters, phone calls, and e-mail with colleagues near and far.

Admittedly, the constant reaching out to new and old colleagues, for the purposes of collaboration and networking, will demand more energy and will power if your personality leans more towards introversion than extroversion. But your extra effort will be worthwhile. It is a fact of life, in academia and elsewhere, that your contacts and connections will bring you invaluable inside information about opportunities opening up or new dangers to be skirted. Your allies will give you essential feedback about your ideas, writing, and teaching that you can incorporate into refinements and expansions. And if you’re lucky, these allies will come to feel like an intellectual community to you.

**Avoid Going It Alone**

In addition, those who thrive keep in close touch
with colleagues whom they met and worked with during their graduate-school years. They ask these colleagues to react to and critique their latest research and writing and to talk with them about teaching problems and successes. Those who thrive are not alone: they practice interdependence. Admittedly, those who thrive had a head start: usually during graduate school they began building a strong and ever-growing professional support network. When they arrive at their new department with allies, mentors, and collaborators already “in their pockets” (I like to say), they enjoy personal power and professional standing. This power and standing make them more attractive, I am certain, in the eyes of their new colleagues. These two things also make them less vulnerable to being deeply hurt by the snub of a senior faculty member, by a low student rating on a course evaluation, or by other disappointing “critical incidents” (Boice) that happen to everyone at times. So get busy constructing a powerful and supportive network for yourself. It’s never too soon or too late to start.

5. BALANCING WORK AND LIFE OUTSIDE WORK. New faculty almost always lament that their work lives “negatively spill over” into their personal lives, sometimes severely hurting both their family life and their social and recreational activities (Soricelli; Astin). Unfortunately, many colleges and universities across the nation cannot be characterized as family-friendly employers. They should adopt pro-parenting measures used in large and small corporations that have proven to be enhancers of employee productivity. For example, on-site child-care centers are still the exception rather than the rule on campuses. There are a number of changes (such as generous family leave; slowing down of the tenure clock for parents who request it) that would make academia far less stressful. Academic employees should lobby for these. (See my paper directed to senior officials and campus presidents.)

What to do? Make it a habit to ask admirable people how they are managing to balance their public and private worlds. Associate Professor of Chemical Engineering Gilda Barabino, at Northeastern University, recalls that she had to learn “the hard way” to structure and guarantee herself quality time with her family. “I now make sure my husband and son are always on my calendar. For example, we often eat dinner together, and we exercise and read together. It’s wonderful” (personal conversation). Agreeing with Barabino, Professor of Biological Sciences and Associate Graduate Dean Harold Bibb (University of Rhode Island) has this pointer for balancing career and family: “I find that sharing information about my family and personal interests with my professional colleagues is wise. So, too, is being sure my family has an appreciation for my professional commitments. Such a flow of information leads to an understanding by all that there are times when one set of demands must take precedence over others. The result is far less tension, and I am able to enjoy the various parts of my life” (personal conversation).

What are other self-help tips you can try? Dividing your day into segments and doing trivial but necessary tasks when you’re tired are strategies that work for Carol Espy-Wilson (Associate Professor of Electrical Engineering at the University of Maryland). She and her spouse and three children divide up household chores so they can then spend quality time together and enjoy their church activities. “Getting yourself on a regimen,” Espy-Wilson says, “may help you manage career and family without shortchanging either one” (personal conversation). Professor of Education Aretha Pigford at the University of South Carolina concurs: “I do not desire a one-dimensional existence for myself. Spending time with my family, working in my church and community, and occasionally even going fishing enable me to maintain the balance I crave. If you don’t need such balance, fine. If you do need it, find it without feeling guilty or making apologies” (Pigford, Institute article, 5).

Those academics who want the summer totally free for family responsibilities should keep this in mind when they are job-hunting. Investigate which campuses’ schedules and expectations allow this freedom. Plenty do. For those who find their nuclear family is working them to a frazzle, there are options. If you no longer live near your parents and relatives, you can deliberately create an extended family composed of neighbors, friends, and co-workers. Extended families can provide psychological support; laughter; back-up, emergency child-care when your kid-sitter doesn’t show up; daily or at least frequent inter-generational interaction—which some medical experts believe is beneficial for physical and mental health.

To summarize, pre-tenure faculty sometimes feel as if they are inside a pressure cooker. Such a situation can obviously weaken their morale and health. What intensifies the stress are senior faculty who do not demystify the tenure review process and their expectations and who do not give essential feedback to juniors, in the form of annual job-performance reviews, informal coaching, and more formal mentoring. Even if you as a junior faculty member feel overwhelmed at the prospect of coming
up for a tenure decision, do your best to breathe deeply, calm yourself, and keep control of your professional and personal life. Boice would advise you to resist, above all, the temptation to slip into perfectionism and workaholism. Instead, get yourself on a workweek regimen where you spend roughly equal time on teaching and classroom/lab tasks; on scholarship and writing; and, thirdly, on intellectual interaction and networking with mentors and colleagues, near and far. And of course protect and tend lovingly to your personal life which can sustain you in good and bad times.

SPECIAL STRESSES OFTEN FACED BY NON-MAJORITY FACULTY

The five stresses discussed above are typically experienced to some degree by all new faculty members. But if you are a non-majority person such as a white woman or person of color taking on your first professorial position in a predominantly majority setting, then you may have to cope with one or more of the following stresses. These have been termed cultural, racial, gender, or class “taxes” that are exacted from non-traditional faculty.

CHILLY CLIMATE

While new faculty often feel frustrated and hurt when there is no welcome wagon to ease their adjustment to their new department, non-majority new faculty may feel these even more intensely. Why? Some white, male majority faculty may feel very uncomfortable and standoffish at first with colleagues who are different from them; these senior males are accustomed to being surrounded by white "sons," according to Sandler and other experts. Some senior faculty may even feel hostile and angry because their old male order is losing ground (as a result, they believe, of affirmative action or political correctness or the bizarre decision of the departmental hiring committee or the alignment of the stars or whatever). Another stress is probably in store for non-traditional new hires: they will probably find few if any senior non-majority faculty in the department or elsewhere on campus to cultivate as new mentors (or they may find that these seniors, for their own reasons, are unwilling or unable to befriend them).

There will probably be undercurrents of racism, classism, and sexism, because these are still alive and well in the larger society and in higher education. Nellie McKay, herself an African-American and a distinguished Professor of English who has held appointments at several Research I universities, explains: “In addition to facing the same difficulties that faculty of Anglo-European racial and cultural heritage face, minority group faculty members in dominant white colleges and universities encounter others caused by racism and classism, and for women in this group, sexism that is different from that which white mainstream women experience” (McKay, 49).

Non-traditional faculty in majority settings often report another distressing phenomenon: they are treated at times as invisible and at other times as super visible. Here is one example: “The paradox of ‘underattention’ versus ‘overattention’ experienced by women in general is often exacerbated in the case of Hispanic women. On the one hand, a Hispana’s comments in classrooms or at staff and faculty meetings may be ignored; on the other, she constantly may be called upon to present the ‘minority view,’ or the ‘Hispanic woman’s view’ rather than her own views” (Nieves-Squires; also see Ibarra). I myself had a similar experience in my first teaching post where I was the first and only white woman in an English department of 33 white men. I was puzzled when I was frequently called on to explain “women’s liberation”—as if this were the only topic on which I might have an opinion.

The Solo Effect

When a member of a “previously excluded group is brought into what has otherwise been a white male work group,” then the newcomer will usually experience the “solo effect.” The token, novel, solo person (the “other”) stands out and is typically judged in a extreme manner. Studies show that the novel person’s behavior “was evaluated more extremely in either a positive or negative direction, compared with the same behavior in a mixed group.” Not surprisingly, the solo person is often “treated as a representative of his or her social group.” This is unfair to the individual and can lead to unfair and unsound conclusions and policies. “For example, if solos are used as a basis for making desegregation decisions and perceptions of a solo are inherently biased, then wrong decisions may be made. Exaggeratedly negative evaluations of a solo may lead to unwarranted termination of a desegregation program. Exaggeratedly positive evaluations can set up false expectations for the behavior of other members of the minority group, expectations which may not be met” (Taylor; see on web “Newman Study Site Tokenism”).

Coping as a Solo

What can a solo do? Mt. Holyoke Professor of Chemistry Sheila E. Browne (often a solo in certain chemistry circles) believes such a novel individual must be mindful of the social dynamic at work and realize that he or she may provoke overreactions from some members of the majority group. Even more importantly, Browne believes senior faculty like herself must discuss the solo effect during faculty meetings and help colleagues check and temper the overreactions they may be tempted to make about the
novel newcomer (personal conversation).

Here is hard-earned advice from another solo, Professor Aretha Pigford. The context is this: Pigford has just spent three years being the first and only faculty member of color in her department and being vastly outnumbered by majority students and faculty on her campus (where in the recent past she could not have enrolled as a student, because of her race). Speaking to other trail-blazing, non-traditional professors, she describes her reality: “1) You will be placed in the spotlight; bask in it. 2) You will have more responsibilities then many of your white colleagues; juggle them as well as you can. 3) Your competence will be questioned; accept that. 4) You will have the opportunity to help other minorities; help them. 5) You may experience external and internal conflict; resolve it. And 6) Some people will expect you to make all problems racial; disappoint them” (Pigford, Black Issues, 76-7). Clearly, a “pioneer” in such a context is paying enormous cultural, racial, and gender taxes and may become exhausted and bankrupt. Happily, Pigford had the personality and chutzpah—plus the instinct to build an ever stronger support system for herself—that enabled her to survive and succeed. Others in similar situations, understandably, will not always be successful. Still others, understandably, will want to reduce or eschew the role of pioneer whenever possible, in order to avoid the over-taxing of their psyches.

Seven years later as a tenured, full professor, Pigford takes stock again and adds the following pointers to her earlier ones. Find mentors. Build relationships with colleagues near and far. Stay focused on meeting the requirements for tenure—postpone some projects until after tenure is attained. Give back to your community and, whenever possible, efficiently connect your writing or research with your community service. Respect and value teaching. Direct your own path and decide what you want to do and don’t want to do. Seek balance and don’t neglect your family, church, community, and hobbies (Pigford, Institute paper).

EXCESSIVE COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

White women and faculty of color will probably feel that at times they’re ignored and treated as invisible—then at other times they will receive overattention because the dean or department chair or someone wants them to serve as the “diversity” member on several campus-wide or departmental committees. This committee overload can seriously cut into the new faculty’s workweek, hamper their teaching and writing performance, and throw them off balance. What to do? Seek the protection of your department chair. Also learn to say “no” pleasantly but very firmly to this dangerous overload (for instance, “I am honored that you have nominated me to serve on Committee X and appreciate your confidence in me. But I must decline because I am already on Committee Y and am committed to finishing Whatever Project in the next year”).

EXCESSIVE STUDENT DEMANDS

Women and minority faculty may find that their intellectual authority is questioned more often by majority students. This questioning can result in lower-than-deserved student evaluations of their teaching. They may notice that they are doing more advising of students than their colleagues, perhaps because there is sometimes an unspoken protocol of the department that assumes all non-majority students should be sent to them. Frequently, of their own volition, traditional and non-traditional students will gravitate to non-traditional faculty, presumably sensing they will be more sympathetic to student problems. Unwittingly, then, as well as very rapidly, students can and do overwhelm non-majority faculty. To prevent incurring this risk and stress to your career and psyche, appeal to your department chair for help and, secondly, say “no” pleasantly and firmly and briefly explain your reasons.

ACUTE STING OF NEGATIVE INCIDENTS

Because out-of-the-mainstream newcomers are often isolated and overtaxed (because of their gender, race, class, cultural background, etc.), they will often feel intensely the offense of a senior faculty member’s negative remark about their scholarship; a junior colleague’s lack of response to an overture of friendship; a student’s barbed comment on a teaching evaluation. My observation is this: such negative moments hurt everyone but probably hurt more acutely a person who is already overstressed and overtaxed. If the newcomer has a support system at hand or on the Internet, then the “critical incident” (Boice) can be discussed with allies and put in smaller perspective. But if there is no ready-made support system at hand for emotional ventilation, then the new faculty’s hurt, in my experience, can dig deeper and deeper into the psyche.

INTERNALIZING FAILURE

Several studies have suggested that women students often internalize failure. When they do badly, they think “It’s my fault because I’m not intelligent enough.” On the other hand, women often externalize success: “I got lucky and really don’t deserve this.” Male students often do the reverse (“Academic Science”). Is this because women are taught by society that they are inferior to men? Whatever the reason, non-traditional faculty members should listen carefully to their own self-talk to see how they typically interpret their failure and success. A realignment may be necessary. A sage once said: “Failures should be regarded as opportunities for growth and nothing more than that.”
UNDERVALUING OF SCHOLARSHIP ON MINORITY ISSUES

Some senior faculty in mainstream departments, particularly in humanities and social sciences, exhibit resistance and intellectual undervaluing of scholarly attention to minority issues. At times, too, they devalue studies undertaken by minorities and women on subjects pertaining to minorities and women. In some academic departments, this is called a “taboo against ‘brown-on-brown’ research” (Johnsrud, 9). In 1983 two scholars observed: “Higher education has been dominated by white males; consequently their definitions of learning and of scholarship prevail” (Menges and Exum, 134). American Indian scholars still find that some journal editors suspect their work and believe it is “impossible” for Indians to do objective scientific research on their own people (Stein). As another example, university presses are still “lily white” and have yet to diversify and broaden their editorial ranks and their perspectives regarding what is important to publish (Shin).

Fortunately, narrow definitions of scholarship continue to be stretched to accommodate different scholars’ voices, subject matters, and research methodologies. Nevertheless, choosing to do ethnic or gender scholarship may still be a hard road to follow. You will have to do high-quality work and simultaneously justify the worthiness of the topic. But some would argue that all scholarship—not only ethnic and gender studies—is political in one way or another. Just make sure you focus on what fascinates you; this is another version of “Do what you love, the money [and recognition] will follow.” A recent study of several hundred minorities who received Ford Foundation doctoral and post-doctoral fellowships revealed that those with competency in ethnic or gender studies and/or the competency to teach at least one course in these areas are faring well in the humanities and social sciences job market (Smith, Achieving Faculty Diversity—Debunking the Myths).

BEING UNDERVALUED AS AN AFFIRMATIVE-ACTION HIRE

Non-traditional newcomers will often have to deal with yet another complex and demoralizing social dynamic: some members of the traditional group may belittle them, implicitly or explicitly, as political additions who were hired for what they represent rather than for their abilities and credentials. In a similar way, a conservative, old-guard scholarly circle or society may be unwilling to allow into its group a patently competent non-majority new member. Why? The old guard’s stereotypical mind-set tells them that the mere presence of this person will “corrupt” their scholarly work and fraternity. Such petty, anti-intellectual elitism, according to Smith, Boice, and many others, is rampant in academia.

Because it will be hard not to internalize some of this belittling attitude, be sure to check periodically your self-talk and eradicate vestiges that you detect. Remind yourself again and again that you have a right to be in academia and that you have probably had to work harder and smarter and blend through labyrinthine social and cultural situations in order to get as far as you have. Remember that those of privilege who have succeeded usually feel proud—even though they have been pampered with a very large number of cultural “cumulative advantages,” such as superior and prestigious schooling; highly stimulating environments; expectations that they will succeed; constructive coaching, enrichment activities, and helpful interventions by parents, grandparents, and many others in their wide circle of allies (see last section of bibliography).

Give yourself credit for the cultural “cumulative disadvantages” you have probably had to deal with. Take pride in your accomplishments to date and in those gifts and perspectives you bring to the professoriate.

HOW TO MANAGE THESE SPECIAL STRESSES?

The special burdens and taxes imposed on you non-traditional faculty will necessitate your expending extra psychic energy. It would be unfair to me and your mentors not to underscore this. But there are proven and methodical ways to cope while keeping your sanity and enjoyment of your profession. Here’s a recap.

Remember to keep strong the support system that you perhaps began building in graduate school. But at the same time, reach out again and again to colleagues in your new setting, because sooner or later you will succeed at cultivating new allies and perhaps new mentors on campus. Ventilate your hurt and confusions to friends, and laugh away the hurt and bewilderment that you may feel at times. It’s important to laugh a lot, no matter what evokes it. “Laughing keeps you sane. If you don’t have people around you who make you laugh, get some new people!” This wise-owl quip comes from Professor Tonn at the University of Massachusetts in Boston (personal conversation). Don’t be shy about bringing to the attention of your department chair and maybe your dean any excessive student demands or committee assignments you are facing. How do you deal with hurtful sexist and racist remarks, either intended or unintended? Based on more than 20 years of experience in academia, McKay gives this unvarnished and indispensable advice. “Bigotry is unnerving and degrading to those to whom it is directed, although in actuality, it makes a greater comment on its perpetrators. We fare best when our dignity appears untouched. Try to remain outwardly calm. The more the minority group person is able to separate the self from immersion in self-consuming rage and a need for righteous vindication, the less is the personal distress and the
greater the chances of self-defined success. Avoid the company of those whom you know or suspect to hold antagonistic feelings toward you or the work you are doing. Aside from the waste of psychic energy these involve, in most instances confrontation will prove unproductive. **Choose open struggles carefully and selectively** (p.53).

Using “I” Messages

At times you will choose to quickly confront or to slowly and methodically confront. How can you do it? Many practitioners have found this strategy very effective: use “I” messages instead of “you” messages when you are problem-solving or arguing with a colleague or student or whomever. Here are examples: “I’m uncomfortable when you call me sweetie”; “I feel puzzled by your behavior or remark or silence today when you ------.” **Avoid inflammatory messages** such as “You are a jerk”; “You are always late”; “You have never liked and respected me”; “You are an obstructionist and a sexist.” You messages are guaranteed to escalate the argument into a swearing contest where no one is listening and no one can learn anything. On the other hand, messages beginning with “I” which express the feeling of the speaker have a good chance of being heard and giving the other person room to apologize, clarify, backpedal, remedy the hurt and offense, turn red with embarrassment, acknowledge that a light bulb has gone on in their head, rephrase the comment, reconfigure the situation, or do something else.

An I message will usually provide valuable lag time and psychological room for the two people to discuss and **negotiate** rather than to immediately start pounding on one another (“Vital Info”). Here’s another useful line to use when someone has said or done something to you that is way out of line: “Wait a minute. [pause] Wait a minute. [pause] I hear you saying ------.” Again, the strategy is to slow down the interaction and give the other person the chance to turn on their manners or their brain. (Check Roger Fisher and Bill Ury, Getting to Yes, for fascinating win-win approaches to problem-solving.)

There are other ways, of course, to confront. Here’s another illustration. Currently Professor of Science at Roxbury Community College in Boston, Kyrsis Rodriguez felt shock when she moved from the University of Puerto Rico, where she received her bachelor’s degree, to a university in the Midwest where she would earn a doctorate in botany. Rodriguez learned to deal humorously with the hurtful comments elicited by her cultural difference in that context. “Where in the Pacific is Puerto Rico?” was answered by her this way: “Didn’t you hear? We moved!” She mused: “Many people say offensive things out of ignorance—they just don’t know. I use their comments as an opportunity to educate them while I stay calm and secure in knowing what I stand for. It works almost all the time” (“Vital Info,” 16).

To guarantee yourself professional support and stimulation, get into a career-advancement **discussion group or a writing group.** If this proves too difficult to find or organize, then ask the provost or faculty development program officer on your new campus to help you find or start up such a group. The rewards of these are great, according to several dozen junior faculty from majority and minority groups whom I have interviewd.

Remember to protect the most sacred parts of your self. While you’re learning to be competent and pro-active in the academic world, you must be sure to **protect the most central parts of your self.** Cherokee leader and educator Eric Jolly explains: “I really think it’s important for people to stay in close contact with that part of their history that gives them their passion. By history I mean their life path, their family, their religion, their culture” (personal conversation). In addition, stay in close contact with whatever brings you joy, whether it’s community service, art work, athletics, yoga, doing zany comic riffs (my personal favorite), pole-vaulting, fishing, bowling, cultivating a new hobby every two years, or whatever.

Keep positive and constructive the **self-talk** you do with yourself inside your own head. Keeping faith with yourself and giving yourself credit for the trail-blazing you are doing—these are key. Remind yourself that the professorial line of work can be splendidly rewarding and that academia and the students need you. If you don’t already feel entitled to be in academia, then work on cultivating this feeling. You belong there.

**Fight against isolation and succumbing to non-stop hard work.** To succeed and to keep enjoyment in what you’re doing, pro-actively network with others and learn how to be **interdependent** rather than solo and independent. Boice says again and again that majority and especially minority faculty thrive early in their careers if they have strong social networks, mentoring, and collaborative projects underway with colleagues near or far. The same point is valid for women scientists: “those women who had networks, peer groups, or mentors were more likely to persevere than those women who were isolated” (“Academic Science”).

**Conclusion**

Without social, intellectual, and psychological support, new faculty can flounder on their own, fall prey to anxiety and workaholism, and lose verve and enthusiasm for their profession. Several researchers have documented that in the past a tragically large proportion of white women and faculty of color have left academia even by their second or third semesters—because they feel disgusted with the chilly climate they feel, with the overwhelming amount of work they feel they must do, and with the stress-related
health problems they have developed. This is a
great personal and professional loss for them: they have
talent and have worked hard and sacrificed. As professors,
they probably have found intellectual work that enthralls
them. Being a professor has clear benefits: “Academia is a
route to social and political power; it brings automatic
prestige, access to the media, access to political structures,
and access to promising young minds who will shape
society’s future” (Bronstein et al., 28). In addition, academia
acutely needs diverse faculty and students and the
contributions they make to the intellectual and moral life of
colleges and universities. Effective efforts to retain
junior faculty, then, are essential.

Two overall retention strategies have been
recommended in this paper. First, clue in new faculty to
what they need to do to thrive and succeed, and help
them stick to their action plans. (For more action-oriented
details, see the companion paper, “Visualizing Yourself
as a Successful College Teacher, Writer, and Colleague.”) Second, clue in department chairs and
senior colleagues to what they must do differently—to
improve working conditions and to help new faculty,
especially non-traditional faculty, come to feel they are
appreciated and belong. (See the companion paper
addressed to chairs, senior faculty, and other officials.)

In short, demystify the process of being a junior
faculty member and give coaching especially to out-
of-the-mainstream newcomers about how to enhance
their satisfaction and success. In addition, make sure
senior faculty and campus officials are undertaking
new initiatives—that will insure a hospitable and
collegial welcome for new faculty and will promote
their thriving on their new campuses.

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For discussions of cumulative cultural advantages enjoyed by some and cumulative cultural disadvantages borne by others, see:


Blau, Robert (1972). Racial Oppression in America. New York: Harper and Row. (Chapter 2 of this book, "Colonized and Immigrant Minorities" has been widely anthologized. Blau convincingly shows that colonized minority groups—namely, African Americans, Puerto Rican Americans, Mexican Americans, American Indians, and Native Hawaiians—have to deal with the stigma of being historically conquered peoples and that this stigma lingers, generation after generation. By contrast, immigrants here by choice, not by force escape such stigma.)


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Stanton-Salazar, Ricardo D. (1997). A Social Capital Framework for Understanding the Socialization of Racial Minority Children and Youths. Harvard Educational Review. Vol. 67, No.1. Spring 1997. [The title of this compelling article seems too limited to me. The author shows how social class and racial and ethnic background affect a person's possession of cumulative advantages, like social capital and supportive networks. Stanton-Salazar outlines the six forms of institutional support that elementary and high schools (and I think graduate schools and hiring departments and campuses) should provide to disadvantaged students (and, I think, disadvantaged faculty)---to help them demystify and "decode" the academic system and increase the likelihood of their success and satisfaction.]


DEMystifying THE PRowession: HELPING JUNIOR FACULTY SUCCEED

VISUALIZING YOURSELF AS A SUCCESSFUL COLLEGE TEACHER, WRITER, AND COLLEAGUE
Pointers for College and University Faculty

JUNIOR FACULTY: JOB STRESSES AND HOW TO COPE WITH THEM
Pointers for Majority and Non-Majority Faculty and Administrators

HELPING JUNIOR FACULTY, ESPECIALLY NON-MAJORITY NEWCOMERS, THRIVE
An Action List for Department Chairs, Senior Faculty, Deans, Provosts, and Campus Presidents

JOANN MOODY, PhD, JD
National Diversity Consultant
Director, Northeast Consortium for Faculty Diversity

Author's Foreword

Taken together, these three papers present numerous insights and "tricks of the [professorial] trade" derived from: my programmatic work since 1988 with hundreds of junior and senior faculty, graduate students, and administrators; my reliance on several key studies by national experts; and my own experience as a college professor. I have attempted to present all of this succinctly and clearly (having given up on wittily).

The aims of the papers are:

* **Demystify** certain parts of academic careers that typically bewilder or confuse junior faculty as well as graduate students considering such careers.

* **Coach** junior and future faculty in concrete ways so they can increase their likelihood of success and enjoyment of the profession.

* **Spotlight** and tell the truth about the special burdens and "taxes" imposed on non-majority faculty in majority settings (the burdens and taxes are usually related to perceived differences because of the non-majority person's gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual preference, and/or social class).

I strongly believe vigorous self-help actions—by those new to the faculty ranks—are necessary but certainly not sufficient. Also essential are magnanimous and pro-active steps from senior power-holders on colleges and universities. The happy result of these efforts could be an increase in newcomers' satisfaction and success—as well as, overall, a more productive and stimulating intellectual community for students, faculty at all ranks, and staff.

**Table of Contents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visualizing Yourself as a Successful College Teacher, Writer, and Colleague</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior Faculty: Job Stresses and How to Cope with Them</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping Junior Faculty, Especially Non-Majority Newcomers, Thrive</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Info about Dr. Moody's book, Faculty Diversity: Problems and Solutions; her consulting; & her other publications can be found at: www.DiversityOnCampus.com