Strategies for Navigating Organizations, Departments, and Committees

Fall Quarter Pre-Tenure Workshop
December 7, 2022
Speakers

Anne McCoy, Natt-Lingafelter Professor of Chemistry
Sean Munson, Associate Professor of Human Centered Design & Engineering
Anne McCoy
Natt-Lingafelter Professor of Chemistry
My background

• Taught HS chemistry for one year between undergrad and graduate school – learned a lot about faculty meetings/faculty culture during that year

• Took a faculty position at Ohio State, where I was for 21 years – Worked with 5 chairs – some were better than others

• Moved to UW in 2015 – been very impressed by the institutional culture at all levels!
Navigating a (new) department

• Faculty are like families
  • Conversations/go on for decades. Good to start by listening and observing
  • People can say and do things that are not sensitive – try to let go of these slights even if it can be hard
  • Easy to get into the mindset of the adult who feels like they are still being treated like a child by their parents

• Find allies/mentors who can help you navigate

• The chair/leadership often cannot share all the details of decisions – it’s important to trust leadership/have leadership you can trust

• Learn to work with people who have different work styles
Working with Staff / Navigating Institutional Structures:

• The staff at UW are generally spectacular! But good staff are often as thinly stretched as faculty
• Understanding/empathy go a long way (and much further than frustration) [if you do get frustrated - acknowledge it]
• If your needs are not being met by staff – reach out to the chair/department manager
• Constructive comments go further than complaints!
• Often a short in person conversation is more effective and satisfying than a string of email messages.
Setting your own boundaries (easier to do with time and seniority)

• Working with leaders who set moving targets on committee work
• Expectations to respond to work email after hours
• Finding others outside your unit to talk to and strategize with/communities to interact with learn from each other
• When home unit becomes poor working environment for you, seeking opportunities to focus energy outside the unit can be a good option
• CAUTION: Make sure these activities will enhance your overall career trajectory rather than derail
Sean Munson
Associate Professor of Human Centered Design & Engineering
• Overall approach: ask. Be sensitive that it may not be someone’s job, but maybe they can tell me whose it is.

• Common thought process: am I trying to get an issue to the right committee or person, or do I just need to get something done? Am I looking for a quick fix or a structural, enduring change?

• If I can’t get something done in your department, can I leverage adjunct status in another, or get a collaborator to run something through theirs?
• Still learning! I’ve met people through ADVANCE and various service and noticed who genuinely wants to help, and remembered them.

• The college website can be a resource.

• I ask in my department (especially chair, people who have been on college committees) a lot to try to navigate the college.
• Lots of offices. Some seem very committed to understanding our shared mission and working together (HSD)

• … others seem not to be. I don’t have great advice here, other than trying to understand their incentive structures and constraints.

• Some rules don’t seem to be rules. I wish I pushed back on that more.

• Regular happy hour with faculty field tour friends has been vital.
• Remember we’re at a public university.

• Remember power differentials, especially when making requests of people with less power or job security.

• Even when the right thing to do in a certain situation seems obvious, there may be advantages to slowing down to think about the principles by which it is being decided, as it sets precedent and expectations.

• MOAs and MOUs seem to have very little force. Individual relationships seem much more durable, build and nurture them.

• If you are having trouble with an organization, others probably are too. How can you channel that into constructive change?
Questions?