

SUNY University Faculty Senate Guide to Faculty Orientation Programs

Prepared by the Graduate and Research Committee

Approved by the Faculty Senate in April 2002

PURPOSE

Within the SUNY system there is no greater resource than the faculty charged with teaching our students and undertaking the scholarship and research fundamental to the reputation and success of our institutions. The hiring of new faculty represents our future. The success of new faculty is of paramount importance to SUNY. An effective new-faculty orientation program at each of our campuses is a necessary first best step to the success of our future faculty.

In the fall of 2000 the Graduate and Research Committee of the SUNY University Faculty Senate initiated a project to collect information on new-faculty orientation programs at our campuses and to recommend best practices for future orientation activities at SUNY. This project was motivated by the general perception that SUNY was undergoing increased hiring at that time and that efforts to provide the best possible orientation programs for new faculty will improve the success of those individuals and hence SUNY. Our purpose is to enhance the new-faculty orientation efforts at all our campuses. Because we have no interest in evaluating the efforts at any individual campus, all results have been aggregated so no individual campus is identified. Where an especially good example is used, campus permissions have been obtained.

SURVEY

The Graduate and Research Committee developed a survey tool ([contact us](#) for a copy of the survey tool) that included questions on current practice. The short questionnaire, mailed to the Chief Academic Officer for each of the 64 SUNY campuses, was designed to establish the nature of current orientation programs, to learn when those programs were made available, to find out the duration of instruction, and to gather a compendium of resource materials. An additional questionnaire was also mailed to faculty governance leaders to see if they played a role in faculty orientation programs. [Contact us](#) for a copy of the second questionnaire.

RESULTS FROM THE SURVEY

Response to the survey on faculty orientation programs was excellent. All of the research centers, all but one of the four-year colleges, and a good sampling of the other SUNY units provided information for a total of 40 out of 64 possible respondents. All of the SUNY units responding conduct some type of orientation

program. These vary from a one-time short two-hour orientation session (6 SUNY campuses or 15 percent of all respondents) to multi-day intensive training sessions (17 SUNY campuses representing 42.5 percent). The remaining SUNY campuses that responded to the survey currently provide sessions lasting from four hours up to a full day (17 SUNY campuses representing 42.5 percent). Therefore, only a minority of campuses (42.5 percent) of those campuses that responded devotes more than a day to new-faculty orientation. Many expressed great interest in the Faculty Senate's initiative and in using the results to refine their own activities.

The majority of faculty orientation programs (65 percent) are conducted in August either immediately before classes start or during the first week of classes. The remaining programs are conducted at some other time in the fall or throughout the fall semester. Regardless of when the initial orientation is held, the majority of campuses hold workshops (68 percent) throughout the year for the purpose of providing continuing education and new-faculty development.

The content of faculty orientation programs generally reflects the type of campus. All of the forty campuses that responded to the survey provide information on activities that can be classified as personnel activities. Longer programs generally provided sessions on teaching as well as on personnel issues. Approximately half (53 percent) of the campuses surveyed provided sessions on teaching methods or campus instruction policies. The more research-intensive campuses, along with some other colleges (37.5 percent), provided sessions on research expectations and institutional support of research activities.

Many campuses provided faculty handbooks and other useful guides to new faculty. Although not a part of the survey, a few campuses volunteered information concerning mentor programs at their campuses.

A second survey concerned the involvement of faculty governance in new-faculty orientation programs. The few returned surveys indicated minimal contact with new faculty but significant support for improving past performance.

GUIDE TO A POSITIVE ORIENTATION EXPERIENCE

The SUNY University Faculty Senate strongly supports efforts to enhance faculty orientation programs. The ideal program balances the faculty need for information against the time available, understanding the unique personal and professional challenges of a new faculty member. Experience in orientation programs over many years yields stories of faculty traveling great distances on a limited budget, having to deal with many annoying problems of transition, preparing for new classes for an unfamiliar student body, completing projects from their last place of employment or education, at the same time dealing with demands of their time for an orientation program. Sensitivity to such issues

dictates that programs be a series of half-day sessions rather than longer time commitments.

Although each campus must tailor its own orientation program to its own needs, the important elements of an effective orientation program can be summarized as shown below. To aid campuses in delivery of these elements, a brief summary is provided here. [Contact us](#) for additional resource material. Many of the resource materials include PowerPoint presentations that can be edited for individual campus needs.

Each of the elements provided below should be included in a comprehensive faculty orientation program. The amount of time dedicated to each element will depend on the character of each campus and the resources available to undertake the program.

WELCOME

Nothing is as important as a first impression. If at all possible you should have your campus President or Provost be the first to speak to new faculty. The message is that new faculty members are important to this institution. Although it is often difficult enough to get the right officials to such an event, advanced planning and coordination is important. The welcome should include a discussion of expectations, i.e., expectations of both the campus and the new faculty members. [Contact us](#) for a Welcome guide.

ONE-STOP SHOPPING

All new employees face a gauntlet of annoying activities during their first few weeks on campus. The welcome session provides an opportunity to address these requirements in one place at one time. Efforts must be made by the campus to have the appropriate services come to this session to address, at a minimum, the following issues:

- Campus ID card
- Computer accounts
- Photographs to be archived
- Needed personnel forms
- Parking permit
- Other campus-specific requirements

CAMPUS OVERVIEWS

Information that current faculty and staff take for granted is often critical to new faculty. If possible, a tour of the campus should be organized. A general history of your campus, including traditions and legends, should be included, as well as a description of the current organizational structure of the institution and its key

administrators. Each new faculty member should be given a map and a keepsake. The keepsake can be inexpensive, such as a campus pin.

CAMPUS RESOURCES

The productivity of the new faculty members will depend in part on how effectively they utilize the resources of the campus. A description of those resources should include presentations on the Library, Computer Services, Classroom Technology, Media Relations, the Research Office (if not a separate item, as described below), and Registrar.

HUMAN RESOURCES ISSUES

All campuses are currently handling this element of the orientation in some manner. Many campuses recognize that an overview of general policies and fringe benefits to a group of faculty members is more effective than providing fragmented information over and over to individuals on an individual basis. [Contact us](#) for a PowerPoint presentation that provides a comprehensive overview and guide to SUNY programs and policies. This presentation must be reviewed and edited by your campus Human Resource office, because human resource policies, issues, and specific rates differ at each campus, among different regions of the state, and are also updated frequently

FACULTY GOVERNANCE

Most campuses are not systematically providing faculty governance information to new faculty members. A few campuses have luncheons hosted by the UUP, but no campus identified special outreach programs specifically designed for entering faculty. More effort should be made to contact new faculty and inform them of their local Faculty Senate (or equivalent faculty governance group). It is recommended that the local Campus Governance Leader and the SUNY senator(s) be involved in the orientation. The best way to insure this involvement is to have faculty governance leaders involved in the planning of any orientation program for new faculty members.

FACULTY REPRESENTATION

The UUP should host a session explaining its organization and services to its members.

TEACHING

All campuses have teaching as a major element for incoming faculty members. Most campuses that provide a significant orientation program attempt to provide orientation for teaching. An examination of the orientation efforts can be broken

down into three elements: campus-centered logistics, campus-specific teaching insights, and general continuing education on teaching methods and theory.

Every campus should provide new faculty members with basic orientation on how to set up for teaching at that particular campus. This includes critical information on how to reserve classrooms, order books, work with the library reserve room, purchase needed supplies (if this is done in a centralized way), post grades, and general institutional policies on drop/add, etc. The issue of academic dishonesty and plagiarism should also be discussed.

Campus-specific teaching insight should include an overview of the student body. Student expectations, strengths, and weaknesses can be described. The campus's Institutional Research Office can provide a general overview of the student body. Such an overview is useful in preparing for instruction of the student body and for preparing teaching plans

Information on teaching methods and theory is provided at a few of our campuses. This is also the topic normally reserved for continuing-education seminars provided throughout the fall semester. On some campuses, help with teaching methods and theory is available to all faculty members on a continuing basis.

RESEARCH

Although orientation programs aimed at research are currently provided at only 38 percent of our campuses, it is important that every faculty member in SUNY be informed on critical research issues. To aid in this effort, online is information on the organization and functions of The Research Foundation of SUNY at (<https://portal.rfsuny.org/>). The website also contains information to help faculty understand compliance policies that govern the conduct of sponsored programs, including research using human subjects. Effective Grant-Writing Techniques can be found at (https://portal.rfsuny.org/pls/portal/url/page/government_relations/how_to_obtain_funding), while intellectual property management (technology transfer) is available at (<https://portal.rfsuny.org/>).

PROMOTION AND TENURE

New tenure-track faculty members should be provided with a session that outlines the promotion and tenure policies and procedures of the institution.

ADVISING

An important element in any faculty member's job is the role of student advisor. General guidance on this role and responsibility plus a description of the college resources dedicated to this important activity should be provided. This topic is

well suited for discussion at a later date in the semester during a continuing-education session

JUST FUN

Most campuses sponsor some type of reception for new faculty members. Most often this is an evening reception, but in a few cases, campuses host afternoon picnics that involve the faculty member's entire family. Many campuses also have a general new-employee reception later in the fall semester. These events are not frivolous, but rather form the impressions of your institution that last a lifetime.

PRACTICES AT CAMPUSES

As described in the survey results, there are many different practices within the system reflecting broadly the diversity of our institutions and the magnitude of hiring carried out throughout the SUNY system. Generally, the University Centers provided more comprehensive programs that included an orientation to utilizing the research infrastructure at their campuses. However, many four-year campuses provided similar programs, and a few Community Colleges provided programs to rival those provided at the University Centers.

BEST PRACTICES

The existence of a new-faculty orientation program should be part of your recruitment and interview process. The fact that your campus had the forethought to create such a program is a very positive indicator to any prospective faculty member. The agenda for the new-faculty orientation program should be provided and discussed at the time of the interview.

Each campus must provide a program that best meets its needs. At a minimum that program should include three half-day sessions that are held the week in advance of the fall semester. Preferably these sessions would run on consecutive mornings, leaving the afternoons free for faculty members to take care of other issues. The sessions include:

Day One- General Welcome and Orientation Session

Day Two- Personnel and New-Employee Issues

Day Three- Teaching and Research

A more comprehensive program separates the last day into two separate days dedicated to teaching and research.

UNIQUE ACTIVITIES OF GENERAL INTEREST

As an incentive to ensure that new faculty members make a special effort to attend these more extensive orientation programs, at least one SUNY campus pays a small stipend to each new faculty member attending the orientation. In addition to paying for work time in advance of the faculty time of obligation, this payment is very useful to individuals coming from graduate school or a post-doctoral assignment, and who are short of cash. Considering the expenses of relocation coupled with the limit on SUNY reimbursement for travel expenses and the lag payroll for new employees, this payment is greatly appreciated. The lag payroll is a significant hardship for many new SUNY employees

CONTINUING EDUCATION

Most campuses offer seminars or other sessions for new and continuing faculty members to assist in faculty skills. Such seminars aimed directly at new-faculty issues are extremely effective.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Surveys of faculty needs for orientation programs and expressions of the most useful parts of a program consistently result in the following concerns:

- Information about all benefits programs
- An alert to SUNY's delayed pay practice (lag pay)
- Where relevant, start-up funding or other institutional support for faculty scholarship
- Historical information about the campus
- A sense of the "culture" of the campus and of SUNY
- Expectations regarding performance, including research, teaching, etc.
- Whom to turn to for what--both within HR and within departments.

Therefore, an effective faculty orientation program should address, at a minimum, the concerns outlined above.

All campuses should make an effort to consolidate new-employee requirements. An effort should be made have such requirements brought to the orientation session rather than to force the new faculty member to search out where to get an ID card or get a new computer account established. This process is often referred to as "one-stop shopping." Such efforts are often more efficient for everyone involved.

Most campuses have a faculty handbook available to provide necessary information on policy and procedures. This handbook should be available on the campus Web site and easily accessible. A search for faculty handbooks for each

SUNY campus found that many were not located easily even by someone very adept at cruising the Internet.