32 Colleges Are Named Most Friendly to Junior Faculty

By Travis Kaya

Recruiting junior faculty members can come at a hefty price for already cash-strapped colleges—especially if unsatisfied recruits become alienated employees, or decide to cut and run.

But 32 colleges and universities have been successful at making junior faculty feel welcome on campus, and their approaches were highlighted Monday in a new report from the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education, a 160-member consortium based at Harvard's Graduate School of Education. The last such report was issued in 2007.

Beginning tenure-track faculty "are the future of the academy, yet they are the most at-risk population," said Kiernan Mathews, the collaborative's director. "They're not always treated with the care and developmental attitude that they deserve." Brown University, for instance, had junior faculty who were displeased with the institution's programs for families with young children, and it has used information from these reports to improve day-care services.

The report draws from a survey of 15,000 junior faculty at 127 of the collaborative's member colleges nationwide, on work-life criteria like tenure practices, clarity of expectations for tenure, and work and home balance. The 32 outstanding institutions scored at the top of three peer groups—undergraduate, master's, and doctoral/research institutions—in at least one of eight work-life categories.

This year, the University of Iowa was rated "exceptional" in five categories. Brown and Duke Universities and the City University of New York's Herbert H. Lehman and Queens Colleges were each ranked exceptional in four categories. (The complete list appears at below.)

How to Make Faculty Happy

Rather than just listing the best places to work, the report is meant to highlight best practices and let struggling institutions know about other colleges they can turn to for advice. Detailed cross-institutional data can help administrators adjust faculty programs to make newer recruits feel a bit more comfortable, Mr. Mathews said.

At Brown, survey data a few years ago revealed that junior faculty thought the university did not offer sufficient support for professors with children, said Elizabeth Doherty, senior associate dean of the faculty. In response, the administration made an effort to ramp up and publicize child-care services. Brown also started a mentorship program in its physical-science and mathematics departments after data revealed that faculty there felt somewhat lost.

The latest surveys show those small adjustments have already made a big impact on junior-faculty members' perceptions of work-life at Brown. Ms. Doherty said the survey information had been especially useful in light of a continuing faculty expansion effort at Brown—which was, in part, why they agreed to join the collaborative. "When you change an institution rather rapidly, I think it's important to know whether you're doing a good job," she said.

Hendrix College—an Arkansas liberal-arts college that ranked as exemplary in two of the eight categories—also decided to join the collaborative after adding a number of new faculty members. "We felt that we needed to get
some kind of read," said Robert L. Entzminger, Hendrix's provost and dean of the college. "We thought we could learn something from what COACHE does."

**Good Communication**

According to Mr. Entzminger, nearly 40 percent of the Hendrix faculty was hired in the past six years. And while being named an exemplary institution means Hendrix has been receptive to new faculty members' needs, Mr. Entzminger said, its ranking also tells administrators that the college has been just as effective at communicating expectations about the its academic culture.

"At institutions like Hendrix where the relationships between faculty and students are so close, the ownership and investment in the institution is just very important," he said. "Our motives are to make sure that the kind of cultural values that our institution represents are communicated to new faculty."

There is another plus for the 32 model institutions: Easier recruiting. Robin Graboyes, director of faculty affairs at California State University at Fullerton, which was named as outstanding for its tenure practices and clarity of institutional expectations for tenure, said, "You want to attract the best and brightest scholars that you possibly can, and this helps us to become the employer of choice."

The collaborative now plans to expand its scope to include tenured professors. During the next year, it intends to survey 4,000 tenured faculty at seven research universities. If junior faculty are the future of academe, Mr. Mathews said, "tenured faculty are the gatekeepers of institutional culture."

The collaborative is also considering research into nontenured faculty. According to Mr. Mathews, 65 percent of American faculty members are not on the tenure track, and studying their job satisfaction could help researchers "expand our work and our success to address faculty of all stripes."

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