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Faculty Fellows Final Project Report

Project: Establishing a mentorship system for EBIO teaching faculty

Summary

Currently, there is a formal system of mentorship for all new tenure-track faculty in the Ecology and Evolutionary Biology (EBIO) Department. However, there is no such system for the teaching faculty. I proposed that EBIO create a system of mentorship for new, incoming teaching professors. More broadly, I aim to establish a lasting system of support for teaching faculty. Ultimately, I hope this mentorship opportunity helps to narrow the gap between tenure-track faculty and teaching faculty in my home department. Since my proposal received support from departmental leadership, mentoring committees will be formed for each incoming assistant teaching professor starting in Fall 2024.

Challenge Addressed

I identified a gap in support for early career teaching faculty in the EBIO Department. Each new tenure-track hire is assigned a small mentoring committee, but there is no formal system of mentorship and support for teaching faculty. When I was a new instructor, I had to actively seek out mentorship opportunities from other faculty members. Although a few faculty were willing to provide support, their time and efforts were not formally acknowledged (i.e., it was not considered part of their departmental service). The university provides some support for all new faculty, but little of it is specific to teaching professors. To narrow the gap between tenure-track faculty and teaching faculty, incoming teaching faculty should be provided a mentoring committee.

Desired Result

I wish to increase equity between tenure-track faculty and teaching faculty in EBIO by providing all future incoming teaching faculty with a mentoring committee. Each member of the mentoring committee will be committed to providing support and counsel to new incoming teaching professors. For example, the mentor can be a resource for best teaching practices and help their mentee navigate reappointment and promotion. Additionally, mentoring would be a formal part of a faculty mentor's departmental service load.

Project Description

I met with the current EBIO Chair, Andrew McAdam, in spring 2024 to discuss my written proposal for creating a teaching faculty mentoring system. With support from departmental leadership, this program will launch in fall 2024 and will largely parallel the existing mentoring system for incoming tenure-track faculty. Specifically, a small committee of two faculty members will be assigned to mentor an incoming teaching professor.

Outcome

Departmental leadership was enthusiastic about my proposal and agreed to provide support for early career teaching faculty. As such, mentoring committees will be formed for all new teaching professors beginning in fall 2024. There are two new teaching professors joining the department this coming academic year. They will be the first EBIO teaching faculty to work with a pre-assigned mentoring committee – each consisting of two faculty members. Lastly, faculty mentors will be acknowledged for their efforts as this work will count toward their departmental service load. I will personally be serving on one teaching faculty mentoring committee starting this fall.

Reflection

I'm grateful for the opportunity to join the Faculty Fellows. Without this program, I may never have pursued this project. It's truly gratifying to know that I am capable of contributing to my department on a larger scale. I also enjoyed meeting a diverse group of faculty from other departments and learning more about their projects. It was exciting to hear about the work happening in other departments. I especially look forward to hearing updates from the collaborative AI-focused project. Further, I found many of the readings valuable as I am always trying to evolve and improve as an educator. The Faculty Fellows program helped me delve into topics that I would be unlikely to explore on my own. The discussions around ungrading and inclusive pedagogy were particularly thought-provoking. Finally, I appreciate that Amanda and the other program facilitators polled the participants on their topics of interest and were receptive to our feedback.