The Associated Colleges of the South Summer Virtual Workshop

**Setting the Stage for Inclusivity:**

**A Scenarios Workshop For Faculty of All Academic Disciplines and Career Levels [[1]](#footnote-0)**

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# Case Study 1: Navigating Academia as a New Faculty Member of Color

Dr. Mona Abdullah is a recent PhD graduate from a prestigious university and has just joined the department as an Assistant Professor at a small, private predominantly white institution (PWI). She is the only faculty member of color in the department.

**New Faculty Member – My First Year as an Assistant Professor at a PWI**

I was so excited to join the department and share my new ideas and perspectives. During department meetings, there was some resistance to my ideas and suggestions as I advocated for change. I also noticed that there were some underlying tensions among some of the senior faculty. Everyone was mostly collegial and friendly. I can’t shake the feeling that I just don’t belong.

I am starting to get the hang of things being a new tenure-track hire in my department but still have so many questions and feel uncertain. I feel like I am imposing when I ask my department chair questions. It often takes him a few days to respond to my emails, and when he does respond I am still not entirely sure of the right answer or how to handle a situation. As a result, I frequently find myself relying on my own resources and ingenuity to navigate and solve problems.

Although the department faculty claim they are supportive and welcoming of hiring faculty of color, I don’t feel like my department understands some of the unique challenges I am facing. For example, a few students bypassed me entirely and went straight to the Dean to complain about my teaching. As a result, I was called to have a meeting with the Dean to discuss the matter. This experience has made it difficult to face the students each day, as I constantly feel judged. It is particularly disheartening when I see my other colleagues in the department engaging in the same teaching practices without facing similar criticisms from students. The advice I was given by colleagues in my department was to spend class time explaining to students why I teach the way I do and work on getting buy-in from the students.

For the spring semester, the department chair scheduled my section of an introductory class on the same day and time as a more senior faculty member who is very popular. During registration, his class was full right away with a waitlist and I had several spots available. On the first day of class, two of my students asked if they could move to my colleague’s section. When I affirmed that both course sections cover the same material, the students went to the department chair to see if they could switch sections saying they have a hard time understanding me. They were moved into the other class.

I am learning to navigate the complexities of academia as a faculty member of color. But these situations only reinforce my feeling of not truly belonging within the department.

I am exhausted and feel so isolated.

**Department Chair – Mentoring a Newly Appointed Faculty Member of Color**

As department chair, I am deeply committed to fostering diversity and inclusion. I am delighted that our newly appointed Assistant Professor, who is the only faculty member of color, has joined our department. It is important to me that she feels welcomed and is positioned for success.

To support her, our department developed a comprehensive mentoring plan as part of the hiring process and we are all eager to help our new colleague. For the introductory courses that we both teach, I shared all my course materials - my syllabi, old exams, and handouts. I have also given her lots of advice on general career advancement like sustaining her scholarship and looking for appropriate venues to publish her work. Additionally, I introduced her to a few book publishers.

I have set up regular meetings with her to touch base and she says that everything is going well. However, there have been some student complaints. In response, I offered to sit in on her class to provide some constructive feedback. I also recommended that she address any poor evaluations in her annual report and her 3rd year review to ensure transparency and proactive improvement.

Despite these efforts, I hope that I am providing the right level of support for her. To be honest, managing my department chair responsibilities while also balancing my role as an advocate/mentor for the new hire has been demanding. I am pushing for systemic changes within the department, but I often face resistance and bureaucratic hurdles. Nonetheless, I remain committed to ensuring that our new Assistant Professor receives the support and opportunities she needs to thrive in our department.

**Roles:**

* Assign a scribe to take notes.
* Assign a share-back presenter to summarize your group's discussion.

**Workshop Activity:**

* In small groups, discuss the scenario. Identify the specific challenges faced by the new faculty member and the department chair. After discussing the scenario, respond to the following questions.
1. Is there anything the new faculty member can do to receive more guidance/help from the department? How can Dr. Abdullah learn the unwritten rules of the department and better navigate new academic spaces? If time permits, discuss what are some of the unwritten rules in your departments/university?
2. Does the department chair address the nuanced realities of being a faculty member of color in a predominantly white department? Why or why not?

What steps can the department chair do to better support the specific challenges of the assistant professor of color beyond general mentoring? For example, could scheduling two sections of the same class at the same time cause any short-term or long-term consequences for Dr. Abdullah?

1. As an academic leader (Dean, Provost, etc), what are some action items that can be done to better encourage a collegial department atmosphere for **all** faculty members and address the chilly climate in the department? Note that there are some underlying tensions in this particular department.

**Reflect:**

* What did your group learn from the scenario?
* What factors contribute to this environment not being welcoming and inclusive?
* What institutional or individual practices could create a welcoming and inclusive environment for the new faculty of color?

# Case Study 2: University Culture and the Unwritten Rules

Dr. Rodriguez, a pre-tenured faculty of color member, faces numerous challenges impacting his professional and personal life.

One significant issue is his long commute, which adds stress to his daily routine. Despite his request to change the meeting, colleagues insist on holding weekly in-person department meetings on his non-teaching days, further adding to the strain. These department meetings have remained unchanged for the past five years and work for everyone else in the department.

Communication within the department is also problematic, significantly affecting Dr. Rodriguez’s ability to work efficiently and feel integrated into the team. Most recently, the department made a decision about when to host campus visits for candidates applying for a department position. The chair, who is also leading the search committee, asked for agreement. Everyone responded within a matter of hours, and a decision was made by the end of the day without Dr. Rodriguez’s input. This has happened several times, including decisions about preferred class schedule timing. Despite raising this concern to the chair, the issue persists.

This semester, Dr. Rodriguez has a heavy teaching load and is trying to protect his research schedule. However, the department culture seems to expect immediate email responses, even outside of work hours or on weekends. While Dr. Rodriguez adheres to the 24-hour email response policy, this unwritten expectation of immediate replies creates tension as he tries to set boundaries and achieve better life-work harmony. Being the youngest woman of color in the department, with no children, adds to his feeling of isolation.

Additionally, the department noted that Dr. Rodriguez was inaccessible by students and other faculty in his annual performance review. Apparently, the department has an open-door policy, which requires faculty to keep their office doors open from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM. This policy makes it difficult for Dr. Rodriguez to balance work tasks with personal responsibilities and hinders his ability to focus and manage his workload effectively.

**Roles:**

* Assign a scribe to take notes.
* Assign a share-back presenter to summarize your group's discussion.

**Workshop Activity:**

* In small groups, discuss the scenario. What are the specific challenges Dr. Rodriguez faces in terms of commuting, communication, and departmental policies? After discussing the scenario, respond to the following questions.
1. Dr. Rodriguez has already tried to communicate with his department chair about his commuting situation and his need to have dedicated time for advancing his scholarship which is needed for tenure. What additional steps can Dr. Rodriguez take to make his life more manageable in regards to department communications, meeting times, and the unwritten open-door policy?
2. How can the department chair support Dr. Rodriguez in addressing these challenges in a manner that is fair and inclusive for all faculty members? What policy changes or adjustments can the department chair implement to improve the work-life balance and departmental dynamics for Dr. Rodriguez and other faculty?
3. How can the university leader (Provost, Dean, etc) support the department chair and Dr. Rodriguez in balancing their professional and personal responsibilities? What broader institutional policies or resources can the Dean advocate for to support junior faculty of color?
* Create a scenario based on events from your own schools.

**Reflect:**

* What did your group learn from the scenario?
* What factors contribute to this environment not being welcoming and inclusive?
* What institutional or individual practices could create a welcoming and inclusive environment for the pre-tenured faculty of color?

# Case Study 3: Inclusive pedagogy in STEM

Dr. Chang, an early-career faculty member at a small liberal arts institution, who teaches lecture and lab courses in the natural sciences, was thrilled to begin their teaching journey. Determined to weave inclusive pedagogy into their courses, Dr. Chang carefully crafted a syllabus that would not only educate on the basics needed for future science courses or the MCAT – but also challenge students to think critically about racial disparities in healthcare.

In the first week of class, Dr. Chang decided to hold off on the more traditional way of explaining necessary scientific terminology that students would need to master soon. Instead, they used a detailed and related story in class – that tied all things together for many enrolled. This story was about why and how disparities in access to healthcare and preventive services between Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders and Non-Hispanic whites exist. The professor also immediately assigned students to research three scientists of color who had significantly impacted their discipline and created another assignment to investigate three ways science had affected racial groups often underrepresented or underserved.

While the vast majority of the students enjoy the course, there have been a few issues: In the discussion about racial disparities, a quick and heated debate occurred between US-born and International students. The professor handled it well, encouraged this type of debate, offered resources for further research, and moved on to finish his lesson. Some students were also dissatisfied with the early assignments that focused on race only, as opposed to gender or sexuality, or social class, or religion. Two students even complained that these tangential activities should not be a part of the opening of the course (and also not weaved in throughout the term) because they take away from content that is more important to the discipline. This was not the type of storytelling for which they signed up – even if it did help them get a fuller understanding of the scientific processes and terminology they needed to master. Furthermore, during the lectures, some exasperated looks on the faces of a group of students offended others who appreciated the content.

The Department Chair, who has not observed Dr. Chang’s teaching (nor has he initiated conversations on their course up to that point) continually asks a select few students about Dr. Chang’s classes: They always complain about the courses. The Department Chair informs Dr. Chang that a few students requested to change to another class section, which he approved.

Senior department faculty express their concerns to Dr. Chang that important content might be glossed over... content that is needed for the MCAT or for other courses for which this one is a prerequisite. They want to help and so provide the following suggestions:

* Mention his stories outside of class or more briefly in class at particular times - like during MLK Week or Latin History Month moments or Women's History Month or Pride Week
* “Diversity” assignments should not be done for credit/points but instead only “opt in” or “extra credit”
* Discuss these topics outside of the course during office hours - placing materials on the door to invite students to discuss “that kind of stuff”
* Create a separate one-credit hour elective course on these topics (in addition to teaching the required courses).

Based on this feedback from the Chair and senior faculty, Dr. Chang feels discouraged. They express frustration when talking with their trusted colleagues outside of the department.

**Roles:**

* Assign a scribe to take notes.
* Assign a share-back presenter to summarize your group's discussion.

**Workshop Activity:**

* In small groups, discuss the scenario. Identify the specific challenges faced by Dr. Chang. After discussing the scenario, respond to the following questions.
1. What strategies can Dr. Chang employ to manage and mitigate classroom tensions arising from discussions on systemic racism?
2. How should Dr. Chang respond to the department chair’s feedback and the student’s desire to switch sections?
3. What support mechanisms can the institution put in place to assist early-career faculty like Dr. Chang in implementing inclusive pedagogy?
* Create a scenario based on events from your own schools.

**Reflect:**

* What did your group learn from the scenario?
* What factors contribute to this environment not being welcoming and inclusive?
* What institutional or individual practices could create a welcoming and inclusive environment for the pre-tenured faculty of color who has new interdisciplinary/pedagogical ideas?
1. These scenarios were created by an Associated Colleges of the South working group and are part of a summer virtual

workshop. Please acknowledge credit accordingly if you share this handout in part or in its entirety. . [↑](#footnote-ref-0)