
Original Paper

An Examination of First Year and International Faculty and a New Faculty Enrichment Program

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Abstract

New faculty at colleges and universities face considerable professional and emotional challenges as they transition from graduate training into full-time academic roles while pursuing tenure. This mixed-methods study examined the experiences of American and international first-year faculty participating in a year-long New Faculty Investment Program (NFIP) designed to support onboarding, mentoring, and institutional integration. Quantitative data were collected through a Qualtrics survey, and qualitative responses provided contextual insight. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained before data collection. Results indicated that both faculty groups generally viewed NFIP as beneficial; however, international faculty reported higher participation rates, greater utilization of mentoring, and more detailed feedback regarding program effectiveness. Mentoring was more consistently perceived as helpful among international faculty, whereas American faculty reported more variable engagement and recall. Qualitative findings highlighted appreciation for structured orientation and community building, alongside concerns about relevance, time demands, and inconsistent mentoring across departments. Emotional support emerged as a significant theme, particularly for international faculty, who emphasized belonging, cultural understanding, and inclusion.

Literature Review

New faculty at colleges and universities face significant challenges as they transition from graduate students or postdoctoral scholars into full-time faculty roles while simultaneously beginning their professional careers and pursuing tenure. This transitional period often involves navigating new institutional cultures, managing expanded responsibilities, and balancing teaching, research, service, and personal well-being. Although some new faculty receive mentoring or participate in formal orientation programs (Shaughnessy, 2013), support structures and their effectiveness vary widely across institutions.

Despite the importance of this transition, relatively limited research has examined the lived experiences of early-career faculty in a comprehensive manner. Recent work has begun to highlight the complexity of challenges faced by new faculty, including time constraints, workload management, and the pressures associated with professional advancement. Early-career faculty commonly face competing demands related to teaching preparation, research productivity, service commitments, and administrative responsibilities (Boice, 1992).

Building upon these identified challenges, Hall and Grapin (2024) offered practical recommendations to assist new faculty in managing time, priorities, and expectations. These recommendations included clarifying institutional priorities for faculty roles, maintaining scholarly productivity while establishing long-term research agendas, intentionally developing research infrastructure, pursuing collaborative relationships, carefully selecting service commitments, and identifying optimal times for productivity. They also emphasized that achieving work-life balance is an intentional and ongoing process rather than an immediate outcome.

Olmstead (1993) provided comprehensive guidance for department chairs on how to support and mentor newly hired faculty members, particularly assistant professors to ensure their success and long-term contributions to the department. It highlights the challenges new faculty face such as adjusting to new responsibilities, navigating departmental expectations, securing resources and managing personal upheavals. Olmstead provides the following advice which is categorized into four key areas.

- 1) Expectations and criteria for promotion: Clearly communicate the official and unofficial requirements for tenure, including research, teaching, service, funding, and deadlines. Provide guidelines, checklists and organize discussions about the specific tenure process.
- 2) Facilitation of resource acquisition: Ensure new faculty have access to necessary resources such as equipment, mentoring, teaching support and networking opportunities. Advocate for their success by nominating them for awards, invited talks and introducing them to helpful colleagues.
- 3) Frequent and accurate feedback: Conduct regular evaluations to provide constructive feedback, align goals and address any concerns. Formal meetings and written summaries should be used to ensure clarity and support.
- 4) Reduced Impediments. Protect new faculty from excessive demands, exploitation or tokenism. Address dual career issues, maternity and parental leave policies and provide support for non-academic needs like housing and child care. Olmstead (1993) emphasizes the importance of clear communication, resource facilitation, mentorship and protection from unnecessary obstacles to help new faculty thrive. It concludes by highlighting the mutual benefits of successful faculty development for both the individual and the department.

Supporting these findings, earlier research has demonstrated that structured guidance and reflective practice during the first year can contribute to professional growth and increased confidence. Fink's (1984) study of 100 beginning college instructors found that many new faculty experienced enhanced self-awareness, stronger commitments to student learning, and increased professional reflection, though experiences varied considerably among individuals.

Research has also examined the role of professional development experiences and collaborative teaching models in supporting new faculty. Whitaker (2021) documented her experience as a first-year department head during the COVID-19 pandemic, noting that participation in a structured "boot camp" for department heads was particularly beneficial in helping her identify areas of professional growth and resilience.

Shell and Moore (2025) found that co-teaching during the first year served as a powerful form of emotional and professional support. Faculty who participated in co-teaching reported strong teamwork, shared responsibility, reduced instructional burden, and increased enthusiasm. This model was particularly effective in reducing isolation and supporting less experienced instructors, especially in online teaching contexts. Overall, the co-teaching approach fostered a more collaborative and reflective teaching environment.

Mentoring has been identified as a critical component in supporting early-career faculty. Shaughnessy (2013) emphasized mentoring as a mechanism for professional socialization, emotional support, and academic success. However, access to mentoring remains inconsistent, and its quality often depends on departmental culture and institutional commitment.

Sands et al (1991) revealed that the research on mentorship shows it to be a multidimensional activity and four key mentor roles emerged as a) friend- offers social support and personal guidance b) career guide-supports research development, networking and visibility c) information source provides insight into expectations, promotional processes and professional norms and lastly intellectual guide-collaborates as an equal offering constructive critique and scholarly partnership.

Austin (2002) investigated the idea of preparing the next generation of faculty and he viewed graduate school as a socialization process that prepared students for their possible careers in higher education.

From a global perspective, Yudkevich, Rumbley, and Altbach (2015) reviewed early-career faculty experiences across multiple countries, including Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Norway, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, and the United States. Their findings demonstrated that faculty across national contexts faced many shared challenges, particularly related to job security expectations, workload demands, and balancing professional and personal responsibilities. These cross-cultural similarities underscore the universal need for effective institutional support during early career stages.

In response to the documented challenges faced by both first-year faculty and specifically international

faculty, a year-long New Faculty Investment Program (NFIP) was developed and implemented at the study institution. The program was designed to provide structured onboarding, professional development, and institutional orientation through the following components:

1. Who We Are: The Institutional Mission
2. Distance Learning
3. Applying the Quality Matters Rubric
4. Research and Scholarly Activity
5. The Faculty Evaluation Process
6. Research and Internal Grants
7. Advising
8. Service and Governance

For each topic area, a specialist or institutional leader delivered a focused overview designed to support faculty understanding of expectations and resources. Additionally, a welcoming dinner was held to foster community and collegial connections among new faculty.

To assess faculty perceptions of the NFIP, a Qualtrics survey was distributed to new American and international faculty participants. The study received approval from the university's Institutional Review Board. Several survey items focused specifically on mentoring, reflecting the first author's extensive scholarly work on mentoring and professional development (Shaughnessy, 2013).

Data and Analysis

First Year Faculty

Quantitative data were analyzed for first-year faculty respondents ($N = 22$), with response rates varying slightly across items. Overall, fewer responses were received from first-year faculty compared to their international counterparts.

Demographic Characteristics

Among respondents, 40% identified as male ($n = 9$), 27% as female ($n = 6$), 13.6% as nonbinary ($n = 3$), and 18% preferred not to disclose their sex ($n = 4$). Participants ranged in age, with the largest proportion being 40 years or older (36.4%, $n = 8$). Those aged 26–30 and 36–40 each represented 18% of the sample ($n = 4$, respectively), while participants aged 20–25 and 31–35 each accounted for 13% ($n = 3$).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of American First-Year Faculty

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	9	40.0
	Female	6	27.0
	Nonbinary	3	13.6
	Prefer not to say	4	18.0
Age	20–25	3	13.0
	26–30	4	18.0
	31–35	3	13.0

	36–40	4	18.0
	40 and above	8	36.4

Note. N = 22.

Table 2. College Affiliation of Respondents

College	n	%
College of Education	3	14.3
College of Fine Arts	3	14.3
College of Liberal Arts	11	52.4
College of Business	4	19.0

Note. N = 21. One respondent declined to answer.

Table 3. Participation in the New Faculty Investment Program (NFIP)

Response	n	%
Yes	7	35.0
No	5	25.0
Parts of the program	6	30.0
Do not recall	2	10.0

Note. N = 21.

Table 4. Perceived Helpfulness of NFIP

Rating	n	%
Extremely helpful	5	25.0
Helpful	9	45.0
Not helpful	3	15.0
Not at all helpful	3	15.0

Note. N = 21.

Table 5. Mentoring Availability and Utilization

Item	Response	n	%
Mentoring offered	Yes	12	60.0
	No	7	35.0
	Do not recall	1	5.0
Mentoring utilized	Yes	9	45.0
	No	3	15.0
	Do not recall	8	40.0

Note. Mentoring offered: N = 20; Mentoring utilized: N = 20.

Table 6. Percieved Helpfulness of Mentoring

Response	n	%
Helpful	8	40.0
Not helpful	4	20.0
Do not recall	8	40.0

Note. N = 20.

Faculty representation varied by college (N = 21), with most respondents affiliated with the College of Liberal Arts (52.4%, n = 11). Smaller proportions were from the College of Business (19.0%, n = 4), the College of Education (14.3%, n = 3), and the College of Fine Arts (14.3%, n = 3).

Participation in the New Faculty Investment Program (NFIP)

Regarding participation in the New Faculty Investment Program (NFIP), 35% of respondents (n = 7) reported attending, while 25% (n = 5) did not. An additional 30% indicated they attended parts of the program (n = 6), and 10% did not recall their participation (n = 2; N = 21).

When asked about the perceived helpfulness of NFIP (N = 21), the majority rated the program positively: 45% found it helpful (n = 9) and 25% rated it extremely helpful (n = 5). Conversely, 15% reported the program was not helpful (n = 3), and another 15% indicated it was not helpful at all (n = 3).

First Year Faculty Mentoring Experiences

Mentoring was reported as having been offered to 60% of respondents (n = 12), while 35% indicated mentoring was not offered (n = 7), and 5% did not recall (n = 1; N = 20). Among those who indicated mentoring was offered, 45% reported they utilized mentoring services (n = 9), whereas 15% did not (n = 3); 40% did not recall whether they participated (n = 8).

Perceptions of mentoring helpfulness were mixed. Of those responding (N = 20), 40% indicated that mentoring was helpful (n = 8), 20% reported it was not helpful (n = 4), and 40% did not recall its effectiveness (n = 8).

Several wished for a dedicated, engaged mentor who actively guides them through departmental and university expectations. One faculty member noted that being comfortable asking for help made their transition easier, but recognized that others might struggle without structured support. Some mentorship

experiences felt superficial, with mentors who appeared uninterested or too busy for regular meetings.

Overall experiences with the program were positive. Many found the sessions (NFIP) helpful and appreciated the chance to meet other new faculty. Some felt that certain meetings were repetitive and would have preferred more practical, hands-on application rather than lecture-style sessions. Attending NFIP in person helped clarify mistakes made during a remote-first semester, making processes feel much easier afterward. When moving from out of state, participants valued the opportunity to build friendships and connections. Several were pleasantly surprised that the program was more engaging, enjoyable, and beneficial than expected.

First Year International Faculty Data

Table 7. College Affiliation of International First-Year Faculty

College	n
College of Business	2
College of Liberal Arts	8
College of Fine Arts	2
College of Education	8

Note. N = 20.

Table 8. Participation in New First-Year Faculty Orientation

Response	n
Yes	19
Parts of the program	1
No	3

Note. N = 23.

Table 9. Perceived Helpfulness of New Faculty Orientation

Rating	n
Extremely helpful	7
Helpful	8
Neutral	2
Not helpful	3
Not at all helpful	0

Note. N = 20.

Table 10. Mentoring or Emotional Support Offered

Response	n
Yes	8
No	7
Do not recall	5

Note. N = 20.

Table 11. Mentoring Utilization and Helpfulness

Item	Response	n
Mentoring utilized	Yes	12
	No	3
	Do not recall	6
Mentoring helpful	Yes	14
	No	2
	Do not recall	6

Note. N = 21.

Respondents represented multiple academic units, with the largest proportions from the College of Liberal Arts (n = 8) and the College of Education (n = 8), followed by the College of Business (n = 2) and the College of Fine Arts (n = 2). Data related to sex and age were collected but are reported descriptively due to incomplete numeric totals.

Participation in the New Faculty Orientation was high among international faculty. Most respondents (n = 19) reported attending the orientation in full, while one participant attended parts of the program and three reported not attending. Perceived usefulness of the orientation was largely positive, with the majority of respondents rating it as either extremely helpful (n = 7) or helpful (n = 8). A smaller number of participants rated the orientation as neutral (n = 2) or not helpful (n = 3), and none rated it as not helpful at all.

International Mentoring Experiences

Mentoring and emotional support experiences varied. Mentoring or emotional support was reported as having been offered to eight participants, whereas seven indicated it was not offered and five did not recall. Despite this variability, a majority of respondents indicated they availed themselves of mentoring when available (n = 12). Fewer respondents reported not using mentoring (n = 3) or being unable to recall whether they did so (n = 6).

Qualitative responses provided richer insight into faculty experiences with institutional support, mentoring, and emotional well-being. Overall, responses reflected both appreciation for, and frustration with, the New Faculty Investment Program (NFIP). Many participants valued the program's comprehensive overview, introduction to institutional structures, and opportunities for building community. Conversely, some participants criticized aspects of the program as insufficiently relevant to their specific roles, overly time-consuming, or lacking targeted support for international faculty needs.

Mentoring emerged as a central theme across responses. While many faculty expressed openness to structured mentoring, there was a clear preference for flexibility rather than rigid weekly meetings. Faculty emphasized that trust, mentor relevance, and mentor quality strongly influenced their willingness to engage in mentoring relationships. Several respondents indicated that mentoring was most effective when mentors possessed strong institutional knowledge, or shared cultural or professional backgrounds.

Emotional support was identified as a significant factor influencing faculty well-being. Faculty who experienced open communication, encouragement, and collegial support reported increased confidence, sense of belonging, and overall well-being. However, some respondents described feelings of isolation, reporting that they felt ignored or unsupported within their departments. These experiences contributed to reluctance to seek help and heightened professional and emotional isolation.

Institutional and departmental cultures played an important role in shaping faculty experiences. Participants noted that norms surrounding help-seeking varied widely across departments, with some environments perceived as inclusive and supportive and others as less welcoming. Structural constraints, such as high workloads and limited faculty availability, were cited as barriers to consistent mentoring and emotional support, even within generally supportive settings.

International faculty expressed a strong desire for mentoring that was specifically tailored to their unique needs, including assistance with visa processes, cultural adjustment, teaching expectations, advising responsibilities, and campus navigation. Respondents also highlighted the importance of structured, ongoing mentoring rather than one-time interactions. Departmental and peer communities were frequently identified as particularly meaningful sources of support.

Summary and Conclusion

The literature and this research investigation consistently demonstrates that early-career faculty face complex professional, emotional, and institutional challenges during their transition into academic roles (Boice, 1992). Prior research highlights the value of structured onboarding, mentoring, collaborative practices, and reflective professional development (Fink, 1984; Shell & Moore, 2025; Shaughnessy, 2013). However, gaps remain in understanding how these supports are experienced by different faculty populations, particularly when comparing American and international first-year faculty within the same institutional context.

Moreover, while previous studies emphasize productivity, time management, and formal mentoring structures (Hall & Grapin, 2024), emotional support and cultural adjustment have often been discussed indirectly or treated as secondary concerns. International perspectives further suggest that early-career faculty across national contexts face shared pressures related to workload, job security, and work-life balance, underscoring the universal relevance of institutional support (Yudkevich et al., 2015). The present study builds on this body of literature by empirically examining faculty perceptions of a year-long, structured New Faculty Investment Program (NFIP), with specific attention to mentoring, emotional support, and cultural responsiveness.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. Findings are based on self-reported survey data, which may be influenced by recall bias, particularly regarding participation in onboarding and mentoring activities. The modest sample drawn from a single institution limits generalizability, as faculty experiences are shaped by institution-specific cultures and departmental practices. Additionally, qualitative data were collected through open-ended survey responses rather than in-depth interviews, limiting the depth of insight. Future research should employ multi-institutional and longitudinal designs to examine the sustained impact of mentoring, onboarding, and emotional support on faculty retention, well-being, and career progression. Further investigation into disciplinary differences and culturally responsive mentoring models, particularly for international faculty, would enhance understanding of effective faculty support practices.

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