

“How to Onboard a New Dean”

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This poster presentation provides a categorized list of questions that can be used to guide new academic deans through the onboarding process. New administrators can use these questions to learn about their new role, and organizations can provide this information to help them become acclimated more quickly.

Faculty

It's useful for the dean to get to know faculty on a personal level first. There are going to be difficult conversations about contentious topics in the future, and these conversations can be more effective if there is a personal relationship and a foundation of trust and respect.

During the initial meetings with instructors, deans can ask about an instructor's history with the college, their classes, their committee work, their scholarship, their progress towards tenure and promotion, and anything else they wanted to share. In turn, faculty can help new deans by providing this information.

- How many full-time and part-time instructors are in the division?
- What does each person teach?
- Which disciplines/courses are instructors qualified to teach?
- What is the instructor's tenure status and rank?
- Who is the department chair for each department?
- What is each instructor's teaching schedule and office hours?
- Which committees do they serve on?
- Does anyone have release time?
- Are there any open faculty positions?
- Will anyone be retiring soon?
- Is anyone on a performance improvement plan?
- Is anyone on sabbatical?

Other Faculty Questions

Deans oversee many processes that involve the work of faculty, including faculty tenure and promotion and course schedules. It's very important for the dean to learn about these processes quickly because the dean will be doing this work on a daily basis.

- How are full-time and adjunct instructors hired?
- What's the tenure and promotion process?
- Is there a class observation form?
- Is there an onboarding process or mentorship program for instructors?
- How are instructors assigned courses? (Examples: by area of expertise, by seniority, by rotation)
- How many courses do full-time and part-time faculty teach?
- How many office hours must faculty hold per week?
- Is the schedule for the next semester complete? Can it be changed?
- What should an instructor (and the dean) do if an instructor needs to cancel class due to an illness?
- Is there a faculty union, faculty senate, and/or faculty assembly?
- Is there a faculty contract and/or a faculty handbook?
- Do faculty have a professional development fund, and how do they request funding for conferences?
- Should I read previous evaluations of faculty and staff I supervise?

Academic Programs and Classes

The dean manages a portfolio of academic programs, and it is the dean's role to manage which programs/courses will be offered and to maintain documentation about these programs. The following questions will help the new dean learn about academic programs:

- Which degree, certificate, and program concentrations do we offer? Are any programs at the graduate level?
- What are the student enrollment numbers in each program or major? Are any programs thriving or struggling?
- Are any new programs in the process of being developed? Are any existing programs in the process of being terminated?
- Which programs are offered fully online and which are offered only in person?
- Does the division offer courses in a discipline that does not have a program?
- Are any programs or classes offered in a different format (such as Dual Credit or evening/weekends) or exclusively at an extension center?
- Do any programs or courses have any unique classrooms, labs, studio spaces, or equipment? (For example, is there a theater, a band room, or an art studio?)
- Do any programs have any unusually large expenses?
- Are any programs funded by a grant?
- Do any programs have selective admission standards? (Do students need to apply for admission into the program, or can they declare a major/concentration in that program once they are admitted to the college?)

- How many credit hours towards General Education does each program generate?
- How do you decide to cancel or run course sections with a low enrollment?
- What are the course caps for in-person and online courses?
- What are the various course types (in-person, lecture, online, blended, lab, clinical), and how are they defined?

Extension Sites and Dual Credit/Enrollment

Many colleges offer courses at other campuses and extension sites. Two-year colleges often teach dual credit courses at the high school itself, and many programs also use other sites (at hospitals, medical clinics, schools, and local businesses) for hands-on, experiential learning through clinicals, student teaching practicums, and internships. Many specialized programs such as Welding, Auto Mechanics, Chemistry, Dance, Theater, and Art also have unique learning spaces that have specialized equipment and tools for that discipline.

Deans often manage the funding, resources, schedules, and staff for these spaces; they also have to consider when/where and which courses/programs are scheduled in which spaces. Multiple campuses, high schools, and clinical sites also mean that the dean has to become familiar with different staff and faculty, student groups, policies and procedures, and many other considerations. In these cases, the dean often has a local coordinator, administrative assistant, or other direct report who helps manage that area. The dean will need to create strategic plans and budgets for each area, find ways share information and stay informed, resolve disputes, and participate in special events such as student and staff awards, graduations, recruitment, and fundraising. Here are a few questions to consider:

- Does the division hold classes at any other campus or extension site? Which programs/courses are scheduled there? Which staff/faculty work there?
- What is the college's and division's strategic plan for the extension site (growth, expansion, transitioning to online, moving to the main campus)?
- At which high schools do we offer dual credit or dual enrollment? Which courses do we offer? Do we send our own faculty, or do we contract with high school teachers? Who are the contact people at these high schools?
- Does the college have a dual credit coordinator or committee? Does the college or division have an internship or clinical coordinator?
- Do we have any other clinical, internship, or service-learning providers off campus? Who are they? For which classes/programs?

Quality Assurance (Assessment, Accreditation, Program Reviews)

The dean ensures academic quality in the division through assessment, program reviews, accreditation, curriculum development, course development checklists, evaluations of online courses, syllabus reviews, faculty teaching observations, and more. Many academic divisions have associate deans, department chairs, program coordinators, lead faculty, assessment coordinators, and/or accreditation coordinators who are largely responsible for completing these documents; many faculty also help to write or take the lead in writing these documents as well.

- Are any programs accredited? What is the program's accreditation timeline? When is the next accreditation renewal?
- What is the college's program review process?
- Where is each program on the program review schedule?
- Does the college evaluate programs internally in another other way? (Colleges can conduct financial and market feasibility studies about academic programs separately, or these studies can be included in the program review.)
- What is the college's process for academic assessment?
- What are the student learning outcomes and assessment plans for each academic program?
- What have previous assessment reports and program reviews demonstrated about the program?
- What is the process for developing and/or revising academic programs and course syllabi?
- Is there a master course outline or syllabus template? Which components of the master course outline or syllabus template can instructors change in their course syllabi? What should the dean look for when reviewing course syllabi?
- How are online programs/courses reviewed?
- What are the graduation and retention rates of each program?
- Do any programs have special admission requirements?
- What are the General Education learning outcomes?
- What are the institutional learning outcomes?

College Committees

Deans often serve on academic and administrative/staff committees; they also often create and lead their own committees. As a result, the dean's schedule is often organized around committee meetings, and major decision-making about academic programs, faculty contracts, and budgets may have to go through a committee review. New deans will need to know which committees they serve on, which ones they lead, which ones they need to consult, and what kind of work each one does.

- Which committees are part of the faculty governance structure, and which committees are college/administrative committees?
- What is the charge (function) of each committee? Which committee do I need to consult for which situation? When does each committee meet?
- Is there a Faculty Assembly or Faculty Senate?
- Which committees will I serve on? What is my role on each committee? Will I chair any committees?
- Do we have division meetings? How can I meet and share information with faculty/staff in my division?
- Am I required to attend Board of Trustee meetings?

Strategic Plans

The strategic plan focuses the college on a set of projects and activities that promise to improve the college and move it towards an effective direction in the future. Many academic goals align to academic

divisions, and the dean is expected to adopt these goals, create additional goals, develop specific strategies for achieving goals, and provide evidence and documentation of the results.

- What is the strategic planning process?
- What is the strategic plan of the college?
- What is the strategic plan for academics?
- What are the current and previous strategic plans of the division? How are these goals connected to the academic and college plans?
- Can I modify the existing strategic plan for my division?
- How will I report results for the strategic plan?

The Budget

Deans often manage budgets for academic programs, their own office, strategic projects, and grants. They create budgets by identifying anticipated expenses, they apply for grants, they organize fundraising. They also approve expenses and track expenses on accounting platforms. Deans are assisted in this work by the Business Office, Accounting, administrative assistants, office managers, fundraisers, grant writers and managers, faculty, and other staff.

- What is the budgeting process?
- Which budgets do I oversee?
- Which expenses are in each budget?
- Are any expenses covered by external funds such as donations or grants?
- Do I need to track revenue?
- Am I responsible for fundraising? Do I have a fundraising goal?
- What is the process for attending events/conferences and getting reimbursement?
- Do any planned/budgeted expenses need pre-approval?
- How do I request funding for unplanned expenses?

Students

Much of the dean's decision-making is influenced by student impact. The dean may also interact with students directly through recruitment, presentations, campus events, college committees, complaints, and grade appeals. Some deans may also choose to teach a class. Being aware of student experiences and needs will also help deans make more informed and student-centered decisions in general.

- What are the college's student demographics?
- What are the student performance indicators (usually, enrollment, retention, graduation)?
- What are the student complaint and grade appeal processes?
- Which student organizations should I meet with?
- Do any students serve on any committees I lead?
- Are any student clubs housed in the division?
- How should I communicate with students?
- What are the formal avenues for involving students in decision-making in the division?
- Does the division hire student workers?
- Will I be responsible for recruiting students?

- Will I be meeting with parents?
- How can I meet with students?

Alumni and the Community

Deans are expected to attend community events hosted by the college, such as recruitment and job fairs, theater and music performances, conferences, graduation, and more. In many cases, deans also are invited to serve on community organizations and advisory boards. The dean usually also invites input from community leaders and employers on decisions about academic programs. Deans also seek employers who can offer internships, hire the college's graduates, give grants and donations, sponsor scholarships, and provide feedback about academic programs. Deans often interact with alumni and the community through newsletters, campus events, college and community committees, and fundraising campaigns. The dean can benefit by having a better understanding of the people and organizations that are involved.

- Describe the college's district. Which cities/towns are in the district (or recruiting area)?
- What are the demographics of the community?
- What are the major "feeder schools" of the college (high schools that send the most students)?
- What are the major industries and employers in the community?
- Which community organizations and advisory boards can I serve on?
- Do alumni and community members serve on the advisory board for any academic programs in my division?
- Do alumni and community members serve on any committees I serve on?
- Which college/division events are open to the community?
- How can I communicate with alumni and members of the community? Is there a newsletter, magazine, or email listserve?
- How can I receive input from alumni and community members?

Many Other Questions

As a new employee, you'll have many other questions about the college environment, your employee benefits, your performance expectations and employee evaluation process, your office, the technology and tools you can use, and much more. Here are a few you can consider:

Onboarding/Training:

Is there an onboarding process for me?

Is there an onboarding process for new department chairs, program coordinators, faculty, and staff?

Supervisory Information:

Who do I report to?

Who are the department chairs, program coordinators, and staff that report to me?

Do I supervise any non-academic areas such as a tutoring center or the Library?

Do I need to submit a timesheet or approve timesheets for staff?

How should I interact with the administrative assistant?

Expectations and Performance Evaluations:

What are the top 3 to 5 indicators of my performance?

What is my performance review process?

How do I evaluate department chairs, program coordinators, and staff in my division?

What is the dress code?

What are my work hours?

Can I work remotely?

Can I teach courses as an adjunct?

What is the policy on performing consulting work?

Which reports am I responsible for writing?

Employee Benefits: What are the employee benefits (insurance, tuition reimbursement, vacation/sick days, retirement/pension accounts)?

Technology:

What is the LMS?

Do I have a cascading role in the LMS?

What are my email and phone number?

How do I access my email and voicemail?

Which Network drives do I need to have access to?

Can I access the network off campus (through a VPN)?

Can I have a laptop and can take it home?

Campus Services:

Is there a cafeteria, on-campus dining, or café?

Is there a staff lounge?

Should I bring a coffee maker, microwave, or fridge for my office?