THE ACADEMIC LIFE

STEM-Oriented Faculty-Development Workshops

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Since 2018, we have been offering free Faculty-Development Workshops designed for those either already in or seeking STEM-oriented careers in academia. While these workshops grew out of an initial focus on gender issues, the broader set of topics now covered provide guidance to all who have a successful academic career as their goal. Topics include promotion and tenure, publication strategies, power dynamics, and dealing with microaggressions and with the "imposter syndrome," self-doubt at difficult times.

The central theme of our workshops is that dramatizations can illustrate and highlight the challenges aspiring academics may face. The most intense of these challenges is the award of tenure, a process that is typically shrouded in secrecy, often resembling a Kafka-esque ritual, and, hence, mysterious and potentially terrifying. Precisely because of that secrecy, we have found it useful to dramatize a highly realistic but completely fictional tenure case as it moves through the promotion process, presented in the form of a radio play (read aloud by workshop leaders and participants). Entitled, *Anatomy of a Tenure Case*, it is based on Professor Senturia's novel, *One Man's Purpose*. The play covers the tenure-decision year for a minority female aspirant, whose case for promotion to tenure is razor-thin. The play ends at the point at which the Department Chairman must make a decision. This leads to a vote by the audience, and a follow-up discussion.

Publication and professional visibility are important components of academic success. We address this issue with a lecture from Professor Senturia entitled "Why (and How to) Get Published." It is based not only on his 36 years as a faculty member at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, but also on his seventeen years of service in editorial roles on two different journals.

Part of the publication process is peer review. In the unit entitled "Power and Plagiarism," we present a scenario in which a junior faculty member is asked to review a paper by a highly senior individual. In the example presented, there is a question of originality of the work. Should the junior reviewer claim that the senior author stole her work? This segment not only illustrates the review process, but also addresses what can happen when questions of power and plagiarism arise.

The academic world is often described as not the friendliest place for developing career success. Collegiality, genuine collegiality, is sometimes wanting. The environment can feel particularly

hostile for women and under-represented minorities, not necessarily by intent of colleagues, but by the inadvertent behavior of individuals who are not sufficiently aware of the impact of their words and actions. Our short dramatization is entitled “On the Receiving End,” in which a female junior faculty member talks both to her mother and to a friend about what could be called a bad day at work. In our workshops, we then invite the workshop facilitators to describe their own experiences with hostile or clueless behavior.

We end by addressing the self-doubt that can plague anyone attempting to do difficult things. Called “The Imposter Syndrome,” it can arise whenever one feels nagging uncertainty about whether one is actually qualified for the position he or she holds. It has, at various times, afflicted every member of our team. Our dramatization, entitled “Am I an Imposter?’ deals with the specific case of a young faculty member who has trouble keeping up with the work of one of her graduate students.

Each of the five units of our workshop includes extensive opportunities for discussion. We have, at various times, used breakout rooms to encourage active participation. While our first three workshops were held in person, the advent of COVID made us switch to Zoom. The advantage is that individuals can attend from anywhere. The disadvantage is that the degree of personal interaction we find so valuable is diminished when online. We have two more in-person workshops on the agenda, the first in July, 2023, in Albuquerque, NM, embedded as a Short Course within the USNCCM Conference, and the second in September, 2023, at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, NY.

The Academic Life Faculty-Development workshops are supported in part by the National Science Foundation under NSF Grant 1844528